

EDUCATED GUIDED READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

To guide your reading of *Educated* by Tara Westover, the following questions* have been compiled for you to answer and reflect upon. You are encouraged to bring your responses and reflections to the small group discussions you will have with your Gateway classmates and University community members (faculty, staff, alumni, and student leaders) during Turning Titan: New Student Orientation 2019.

1. This year the shared intellectual theme at IWU is “Fact or Fiction.” In *Educated*, Westover writes: “Everything I had worked for, all my years of study, had been to purchase for myself this one privilege: to see and experience more truths than those given to me by my father, and to use those truths to construct my own mind. I had come to believe the ability to evaluate many ideas, many histories, many points of view, was at the heart of what it means to self-create.”

How do you know something is true? What is something you once believed was true, that you later learned was not? Are you willing to take someone else’s (a parent, a teacher, a religious leader) words as truth? Why or why not?

2. *Educated* starts with an epigraph from Virginia Woolf: “The past is beautiful because one never realizes an emotion at the time. It expands later, and thus we don’t have complete emotions about the present, only the past.” What do you think Woolf meant by this? Why do you think Tara Westover chose to begin her memoir this way?
3. By Chapter 22, Westover writes that her life was often “narrated for me by others. Their voices were forceful, emphatic, absolute. It had never occurred to me that my voice might be as strong as theirs.” Westover eventually finds her voice and realizes it’s just as powerful as the people who have influenced her life. What is voice, and how important is it that every child be encouraged to find their own?
4. At one point, Tara’s father makes the case that his form of homeschooling couldn’t have been that bad since three of his children went on to receive their PhDs. What do you make of this? Did his children succeed in spite of their education, or were there some inherent lessons about how to learn imparted by this non-traditional form of education?
5. How might Westover’s life been different had she chosen not to leave home and attend college? What risks did she face and what fears did the author have to overcome in order to leave home and pursue her higher education? How did Westover change as a result of her formalized education?
6. Tara has titled her book *Educated* and much of her education takes place in classrooms, lectures, or other university environments. But not all. What other important moments of “education” were there? What friends, acquaintances, or experiences had the most impact on Tara? What does that imply about what an education is?
7. Why is it significant that Westover didn’t know the word “holocaust” and had no knowledge of race issues in the United States? How does her view/awareness of racism evolve throughout the book?
8. What does Westover’s family try to impart about the way they believe a woman ought – or ought not – to be and how do they convey this? How does the author meet or fail to meet these expectations as a young woman herself and how does this influence and shape her sense of self? In what ways does the author challenge her parents’ notions of what a woman should be and how is this received?

*These questions have been copied and modified from the following:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/550168/educated-by-tara-westover/9780399590504/readers-guide/>

http://images.randomhouse.com/teachers_guides/9780399590504.pdf

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/discussion-questions-for-educated>

<https://www.bookbub.com/blog/book-club-questions-for-educated-by-tara-westover>

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9. Westover makes great efforts to ensure the story is as objective as possible, including footnotes where accounts of an event differ, or comparing her diary entries to her memory. As a reader, how important is objectivity in this story, and more largely, in memoirs in general?
10. Many of Tara's father's choices have an obvious impact on Tara's life, but how did her mother's choices influence her? How did that change over time?
11. Over the course of this book, the Westover family deals with a number of accidents: Westover's brother Tyler falling asleep and driving off the road, Westover's brother Luke catching on fire, and later, a very serious accident for their father. How did these accidents shape Tara's experience and relationship with her family?
12. What impact did the author's parents' religious beliefs have on the Westover family? What challenges of faith does the author confront as she moves into her future? How does her schooling help her to confront these issues from a new perspective?
13. At Brigham Young, Tara recounts going to a professor for moral advice, and instead being encouraged to apply for a very competitive study abroad program at Cambridge University, which she'd never imagined she could qualify to do. "He'd seemed to say, 'First find out what you are capable of, then decide who you are,'" she writes. Has anyone ever given you advice to do something beyond what you thought you were capable? Did you follow it?
14. Westover says she believed she could "be remade, my mind recast" at her university. And in the end, she writes that she is a "changed person" from the person she was as her father's daughter, and from her 16-year-old self. "You could call this selfhood many things," she writes. "Transformation. Metamorphosis. Falsity. Betrayal. I call it an education." What do you make of these final lines?

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