



SAINT IGNATIUS

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May 1, 2021

Dear Class of 2024,

This summer the English Department is requesting that you spend some time engaged in summer reading in preparation for your AP Seminar course. Please read below for information related to your assigned summer reading title and correlated assessments.

Assigned Title:

Educated: A Memoir by Tara Westover

Born to survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, Tara Westover was 17 the first time she set foot in a classroom. Her family was so isolated from mainstream society that there was no one to ensure the children received an education and no one to intervene when one of Tara's older brothers became violent. When another brother got himself into college, Tara decided to try a new kind of life. Her quest for knowledge transformed her, taking her over oceans and across continents, to Harvard and to Cambridge University. Only then would she wonder if she'd traveled too far, if there was still a way home.

Assessment:

AP Seminar introduces students to the idea of academic conversation, discourse, and community. As such, students taking this course will be expected to participate energetically in seminar discussions of the summer reading text as part of an introduction to the course and, during these discussions, to demonstrate strong understanding of its content and themes. Students will be evaluated on their participation. Students will also complete a small research project inspired by the key themes, questions, and issues raised by the text. In preparation for these activities, students are encouraged to engage in active notetaking and regular reflection as they read. You may find it helpful to consider the reading guide provided below.

*You are not expected to write out any formal responses and none will be collected. However, because these questions will form the basis of our discussions and inform associated research projects, taking your own informal notes and/or reflecting on these questions as you read will help you feel more confident and prepared for the work of the course.

Reading Guide (adapted from Illinois Wesleyan's Summer Reading Program)

1. 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?

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.” How do we as individuals find our own voices? Which forces (societal, institutional, etc.) can have a silencing effect on our voice?
4. Westover 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? How does the novel work to define or redefine “education” in unique ways?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. In what way does Westover’s sense of her own identity (race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) impact her view of the world? Of herself? Does this evolve over the course of the book in any way? Why?
8. 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?

Availability

Copies may be obtained from Dr. Caputo in room 415 before the end of the school year. You are also welcome to purchase your own copy. Please be sure to have a copy of the text with you during the opening weeks of school. E-books are also acceptable.

Active Reading Strategies

The English Department recommends that students keep a reading journal and/or that they annotate their personal copies of their assigned summer reading text. In addition to following the summer reading guide above, an effective active reading process for you may include:

Recording chapter summaries. Take some time at the end of each chapter to write, in your own words, what the chapter was about.

Annotating while reading. Make notes on important events, character developments, symbols, use of literary elements, and your own observations.

Asking critical thinking questions. What questions do you have after reading your book? What are the issues, viewpoints, and themes of the book? How does the content of this book apply to your life or the lives of others?

We hope that the summer break provides you with some time to rest, reflect, and prepare for the new academic year at Saint Ignatius High School.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terra Caputo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'T'.

Dr. Terra Caputo
Chair, English Department