

**Exercise: Open Cloze**

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## **Tara Westover Turns Her Isolated Childhood into the Gripping Memoir *Educated***

*February 23, 2018*

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In the early 2000s, Tara Westover was a preteen living in Idaho with her fundamentalist Mormon family. They were isolated \_\_\_\_\_ other people, even her extended family, except for \_\_\_\_\_ church. Her father didn't believe \_\_\_\_\_ doctors or "government schools," putting the children to work in a family-owned junkyard. Eventually, she and a brother taught \_\_\_\_\_ enough math to attend Brigham Young University. When Westover arrived, she fully believed she would return home eventually, marry, and live in the way her father intended.

Today, Westover lives in a flat in London. She \_\_\_\_\_ doctors, has a doctorate \_\_\_\_\_ Cambridge, and had a fellowship \_\_\_\_\_ Harvard University. How she made that disorienting jump is the subject \_\_\_\_\_ her memoir *Educated*, out now from Random House. Westover's story is as much \_\_\_\_\_ her difficult childhood and what it's like to grow up on fringe beliefs \_\_\_\_\_ it is about seeing the world through the eyes of a singular, intelligent, and observant person.

Westover still has a western twang in her voice, and is prone \_\_\_\_\_ voicing her thoughts out loud, showing her quick mind at work. She sat down with *Vanity Fair* to share some of her story, and her feelings about education and \_\_\_\_\_ your mind.

*Vanity Fair: How did your family members respond to the idea that you were writing a book about them? Did you use pseudonyms because you had to or because you thought it would be more respectful?*

Tara Westover: A lot of them don't have pseudonyms, but I used pseudonyms for the ones I was estranged from. The ones I was in \_\_\_\_\_ with didn't mind. They were really good about reading it, giving me lots of \_\_\_\_\_. I probably called all of them hundreds and hundreds of \_\_\_\_\_, with random questions. I would

\_\_\_\_\_ up the phone and say, “What kind of metal was that? When did we get that machine? Do you remember where this forklift was from?” They were really patient about it.

*You decided to write a book about your upbringing after you finished your Ph.D. Did you feel prepared to write a memoir?*

I knew how to write \_\_\_\_\_ an academic, so I knew how to write academic papers and essays and things. But the things that are great for an essay are unbearable in narrative \_\_\_\_\_. I had no \_\_\_\_\_ how to write a story or a narrative when I \_\_\_\_\_. And I was pretty bad \_\_\_\_\_ it. I have a writing group in London, and they were brutal. They would say to me, “This is really shitty. It’s really bad.”

*How did you go from having something your writing group said was shitty to having a finished book?*

A friend of mine was talking about this thing, the short story. I’d never read a short story before. I’d never even heard of short stories. I didn’t grow up in a family that . . . Well, we had books, but we didn’t have those kinds of books. I thought, ‘Yeah, I need to get a grip \_\_\_\_\_ this thing called narrative arc,’ whatever that is. First I tried Googling it, which was of limited use. I thought, “Well, I’ll just read a \_\_\_\_\_ of stories, and then I’ll get a sense of what that means.” I realized reading books takes a long time. So when I heard of the short story, I thought, “Well, I can read more of those because they’re shorter.”

I read a lot of Mavis Gallant, David Means, other New Yorker writers. I started listening to The New Yorker fiction podcast, with Deborah Treisman, which is just amazing, because you have these writers, they come on, they pick a short story by another writer, they read it, and then they discuss it. They point \_\_\_\_\_ all the little tricks, the writer’s mechanisms that they use to \_\_\_\_\_ things work. Each chapter [in *Educated*] is structured like a \_\_\_\_\_ story, because I was so obsessed \_\_\_\_\_ them.

*This actually happens plenty in the book, where you focus on a certain skill or idea and learn everything you can about it. Why do you think you’re so good at teaching yourself?*

I think it’s a belief that you can learn something. That’s something that I really value \_\_\_\_\_ the upbringing I got. My parents would say to me all the time: you can \_\_\_\_\_ yourself anything better than someone else can teach it to you. Which I really think is true. I hate the word “disempower,” because it seems kind of cliché, but I do think that we

take people's \_\_\_\_\_ to self-teach away by creating this idea that that someone else has to do this for you, that you have to \_\_\_\_\_ a course, you have to do it in some formal way. Any curriculum that you design for yourself is going to be \_\_\_\_\_, even if it's not the \_\_\_\_\_ perfect one. You will follow what you care \_\_\_\_\_.

*Did living in London while you were writing a lot of the book shape the way it came together?*

It made it harder in some ways. I was struggling to get the feeling of Idaho right, because I wasn't there. I went on a retreat, a writing retreat, to southern France, which doesn't really look like Idaho, but it was rural. I was sitting, looking \_\_\_\_\_ of the window and there were horses, and there was a field. After that is when I wrote the introduction, the prologue, and after that it was easier. Sitting \_\_\_\_\_ the city I couldn't actually seem to evoke that.

*You write about how you felt culture shock when you left your family's land and went to college, especially about music and movies. Do you still feel as if you don't know about pop culture?*

Anything that happens now, from the time I was at university forward, I'm reasonably well-versed on. Anything before that is just hit and \_\_\_\_\_. I learned who Queen was at B.Y.U. And I thought they were talking about the Queen.

*Eventually, you did start looking up more of the things you hadn't heard \_\_\_\_\_, and it caused you to really re-evaluate your family's religious and political \_\_\_\_\_. The book is a good \_\_\_\_\_ study for how someone changes her mind. What do you think people don't understand about how someone changes her mind?*

I was surprised \_\_\_\_\_ how muddy it was, in a way. \_\_\_\_\_ my mind I had this very clean trajectory of when my opinions had changed and when I had changed. Writing it and going through the journals, and re-establishing a timeline, really brought home to me how slow that change was.

When I graduated \_\_\_\_\_ B.Y.U., I thought that I had completely renounced my dad's political view \_\_\_\_\_ the world. Then I went to Cambridge and [learned about] positive and negative liberty and Isaiah Berlin; this concept that was new \_\_\_\_\_ me. Some obstacles that \_\_\_\_\_ people from doing things are external, and some obstacles are internal. It can be your own beliefs and ideas \_\_\_\_\_

the world that can keep you \_\_\_\_\_ being able to do something that you want to do. That was a big moment for me, to think about that. Then a friend sent me a Bob Marley song. I didn't know who Bob Marley was, but the friend sent me "Redemption Song," with the lyric "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery/None but ourselves can free our minds." I was thinking about Isaiah Berlin. Eventually, I wound up on Wikipedia, and I was reading about \_\_\_\_\_ he had a cancer on his toe, and that the doctors told him, "We need to amputate the toe." But of course, he was Rastafarian, so he had this belief in a whole body, so he wouldn't \_\_\_\_\_ them to. As a \_\_\_\_\_, he died when he was quite young. It made me realize that it had been many years since I'd stopped believing that doctors were evil. Yet I had never had my vaccinations. There were so many things I had not done.

In Cambridge, I was first exposed \_\_\_\_\_ feminism. I would have thought, when I began writing the book, "Oh, everything would have changed as \_\_\_\_\_ as I started reading [feminist writers]," but it didn't really. My family had violence in it, especially violence \_\_\_\_\_ women. That first Christmas I went home, I witnessed a scene of violence between my brother and his wife, and there was no lecture on feminism. I didn't stand \_\_\_\_\_ and say, "Women's rights are human rights." I did nothing. I just let my father deal with it, because in my mind he was the patriarch, and it would have been \_\_\_\_\_ for me to challenge his \_\_\_\_\_, even though there was this whole wing of my mind that was opening up that thought, "Maybe he was wrong." I think you can change your belief, but sometimes your behavior takes a lot longer.

*Do you still feel like you're catching up on the things you grew up without?*

When people started talking about music or film, I would just be terrified and on edge. Now I think it's something I accept about myself. When people say something, I've stopped \_\_\_\_\_ for not knowing things, and I just give a disclaimer: I'm not going to know anything that you're saying. If you're cool with that, I'm cool with that.

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