

Faye Westover

- Mother of seven; Wife of Gene
- “Rebelled” to marry Gene
- Her role is dictated by Mormon beliefs and Gene’s extremist interpretation of those beliefs
- First job: midwife (Gene saw they needed more income); eventually starts her own business as an herbalist
- Becomes the family bread winner; yet, too invested in the belief system to support Tara/Audrey



Gene Westover

- Patriarch of the Westover family
- Never leaves Buck’s Peak
- Toxic views on masculinity and education
- Religious fanatic; extreme, fundamentalist
- Mental instability; never confirmed diagnosis
 - *lying catatonic in bed for weeks*
 - *lecturing about conspiracy theories for hours*
 - *paranoia regarding doctors and government/education*
 - *working dawn to dusk daily*
 - *excitedly doing dangerous tasks (and having kids do it, too)*
- Exhibits no personal growth
- His behaviors result in mental and physical damage to his family

Audrey Westover

- Third oldest Westover sibling
- “Rebels” in her teen years; succumbs to her family later
- Marries as a teen; has kids
- Contacts Tara about Shawn’s abusiveness
- Refutes her statements about Shawn; self-preservation

Tara Westover

- Protagonist; our lens into the Westover family
- Child and teen - sees the world through Gene’s lens
- Black and white/dogmatism thinking
- Sings; begins to participate in activities
- Close to Tyler, who supports her learning
- Worked for her father; abused by Shawn
- Attended BYU and Cambridge; struggles with belief systems
- Family sees her as dangerous

Tyler Westover

- Forth oldest Westover
- Tara’s ally after she is cut off
- Fully escapes the family’s insular culture and beliefs (besides Tara)
- Quiet/subdued/driven to learn
- First Westover to go to college
- Validates Tara’s memories as well as her present and future

Westover Family

Richard Westover

- Sixth Westover (before Tara)
- Has difficult time after Tara leaves home; Gene believes he is the next Einstein
- Does not perform well on the ACT; delays college
- Eventually leaves Idaho; earns a PhD in Chemistry
- Believes Tara

Tony Westover

- Oldest of the seven kids
- Moved away when Tara was very young barely factoring into her memories
- Education: GED
- Truck driver - had to move home after 2008 recession

Shawn Westover

- Second oldest Westover
- Shawn as a victim/Shawn as a abuser
- Only Westover to challenge his father openly
- Physically and mentally abuses his sisters and female companions
- Conforms to Gene and Faye’s beliefs and values; keeping him an “insider”

Luke Westover

- Fifth Westover
- Worked alongside Tara in the junkyard for Gene
- Suffered several injuries as a result of working for Gene
- Married with children; lives on Buck’s Peak
- Kind to Tara after she was ostracized



Leaving home and finding ones place in the world



Typically, home and the outside world are *compatible*...there are very few conflicts, cultural or ideological, for people who wish to move freely between being who they are at home and being who they are out in the world.

Can you relate to this - why? Do you think the applies to Tara Westover? Why or why not?

Themes to Explore

The challenge of memory and story



- “Memory is messy”
- Tara mentions often that her memories are her own, and not sovereign.
- Do you find her account reliable?
- Gene’s perspective - all realities that do not jive with his are wrong. Thoughts?

The consequences of belief and doubt



- Do our beliefs keep us safe and protect us from evil?
- Do you think Gene and Faye are hypocrites? Why or why not?

Different paths to becoming educated



What does it mean to be educated?

Traditional view of education
vs.
Gene and Fayes’ view of education

Symbols to Ponder

The Apocalypse

- What are your thoughts about Gene's reaction when Y2K did not result in the apocalypse?
- How does Gene's mental instability impact his fear of "the end" of things?

The Mountain

- Never changes - stability
- Tara's "north star" (what is yours?)
- How does Tara's connection to the mountain shift as she changes?
- How was the mountain an anchor for Tara in the early years vs. the later?

The concept of the "whore"

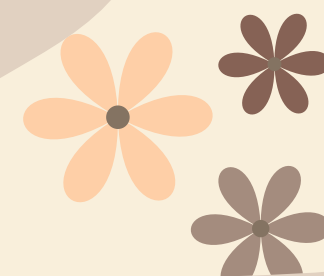
- What impact does Shawn's use of the word have on Tara's behaviors and mindset?
- How does Gene's use of the word "whore" extend beyond appearance?
- Did Tara's concept of "whore" impact her when she first goes to college? How so?

Let's Discuss

What are your thoughts about Faye Westover and the changes in her status over the course of the memoir?

Tara recounts not knowing what the word “holocaust” means when she first attends Brigham Young University. How would you have reacted?

Describe your thoughts/emotions when you discovered Tara’s mother did not support Tara and Audrey regarding Shawn’s abuse.



Let's Discuss

“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?

Why do you think Shawn's violent behavior was allowed?

Share your thoughts on Aubry and her rational to change her story once Gene learned she and Tara exposed Shawn's abusive behaviors.

