1. *Into the Wild* by John Krakauer - Work is Due Friday, June 26th via Google Classroom

A. In the last paragraph of the author’s note of *Into the Wild*, Jon Krakauer writes, “Some readers admired the boy immensely for his courage and noble ideas; others fulminated that he was a reckless idiot, a wacko, a narcissist who perished out of arrogance and stupidity.” Take a stance on this issue in a 200-400-word persuasive essay. Is Chris McCandless an American hero or a foolish narcissist? Support your stance with evidence from the text.

B. Tone Analysis: Choose one chapter of the book and analyze Krakauer’s tone within that chapter. How is his tone established, and how does it shift for effect? Answer this question by charting the tone via a visual representation (graph, chart, or other artistic piece) that expresses these changes. For each tonal shift, note (a) the tone (adjective) (b) an analysis of what causes the shift and (c) textual evidence to support your claim. **This assignment should be handcrafted, not typed.**

C. Read “Chris McCandless from an Alaska Park Ranger’s Perspective.” In 200-400 words, Analyze the literary and rhetorical strategies the author uses to support his claim.

2. *Educated* by Tara Westover - Work is Due Friday, July 17th

A. *Educated* is a non-fiction text that reads like fiction, both due to the author’s compelling prose and her stranger-than-fiction adolescence. Because of these elements, the claims Westover makes in her memoir can be somewhat overshadowed, but they are still implied. In a 200-400-word essay, discuss a claim Westover implicitly makes in *Educated*, offering textual evidence to demonstrate how she supports the claim.

   a. **Example:** In Chapter 1, Westover implicitly claims that false memories can be just as significant and revealing of character as memories of actual events. Her false memory of her home being invaded by federal agents exists because her father had told her a story “in such detail that [she] and her brothers and sisters had each conjured [their] own cinematic version” of a similar terror inflicted on their family (3). This fantasy reveals both her father’s religious fanaticism as well as his propensity towards aggression--a detail proven by her authentic memories of his “thick and leathery” hands that “grasped the Bible firmly,” as well as his continued obsession with stockpiling weapons (4).

B. Collect a set of 10 passages from the book that you deem particularly moving, poetic, or significant. In 1-2 sentences each, analyze the **literary and rhetorical strategies** at work in the passage (consider diction, syntax, metaphor, pathos, ethos, hyperbole, etc.). This work should be typed in an orderly fashion, using a table.
3. *Circe* by Madeline Miller - Work is Due Friday, August 14th

A. In a two-paragraph response, compare *Circe* either to *Educated* or *Into the Wild.* Thematically, how do these works relate? Linguistically, which structures and strategies do they share (or not share)?

B. Read lines 274-570 of *The Odyssey.* Compare Homer’s narrative of Odysseus and Circe with Miller’s narrative. Do not discuss plot (the plot is the same). Rather, examine characterization, tone, and dialogue, as well as any other literary elements of note.

4. Synthesis Packet - Work is Due on the first day of school

In response to our society’s increasing demand for engaging, personalized, sensational media, podcasts, memoirs, and documentaries have thrived. Yet the creation of such content, which is often revealing of its subjects’ complex and personal lives, has drawn criticism from those who believe America’s craving for salacious details should not be satisfied for the creation of art.

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize material from at least three of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-written essay in which you develop your position on whether creative works that reveal the personal affairs of living humans, without their consent, should be formed for the sake of art.

Your argument should be the focus of your essay. Use the sources to develop your argument and explain the reasoning for it. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the descriptions in parentheses.

Source A (Gates)  
Source B (Schutte)  
Source C (Cooke)  
Source D (Bell)  
Source E (Pastan)  
Source F (Ellis)
Both Chris McCandless and I arrived in Alaska in 1992. We both came to Alaska from the area around Washington, D.C. We were both about the same age and had a similar idea in mind; to live a free life in the Alaska wild. Fourteen years later Chris McCandless is dead and I am living the dream I set out to win for myself. What made the difference in these two outcomes?

There was nothing heroic or even mysterious about what Chris McCandless did in April 1992. Like many Alaskans, I read Jon Krakauer’s book “Into the Wild” when it first came out and finished it thinking, “why does this guy rate an entire book?” The fact that Krakauer is a great outdoor writer and philosopher is the bright spot and it makes a great read, but McCandless was not something special.

As a park ranger both at Denali National Park, very near where McCandless died, and now at Gates of the Arctic National Park, even more remote and wild than Denali, I am exposed continually to what I will call the “McCandless Phenomenon.” People, nearly always young men, come to Alaska to challenge themselves against an unforgiving wilderness landscape where convenience of access and possibility of rescue are practically nonexistent. I know the personality type because I was one of those young men.

In fact, Alaska is populated with people who are either running away from something or seeking themselves in America’s last frontier. It is a place very much like the frontier of the Old West where you can come to and reinvent yourself. In reality, most people who make it as far as Alaska never get past the cities of Fairbanks and Anchorage because access is so difficult and expensive (usually by airplane), travel is so hard, the terrain is challenging, the bears are real, and so on.

A very few competent and skillful people make a successful go at living a free life in the wild, build a home in the mountains, raise their children there and eventually come back with good stories and happy endings. A greater number give it a try, realize it is neither easy nor romantic, just damn hard work, and quickly give up and return to town with their tails between their legs, but alive and the wiser for it.

Some like McCandless, show up in Alaska, unprepared, unskilled and unwilling to take the time to learn the skills they need to be successful. These quickly get in trouble and either die by bears, by drowning, by freezing or they are rescued by park rangers or other rescue personnel—but often, not before risking their lives and/or spending a lot of government money on helicopters and overtime.

When you consider McCandless from my perspective, you quickly see that what he did wasn’t even particularly daring, just stupid, tragic and inconsiderate. First off, he spent very little time learning how to actually live in the wild. He arrived at the Stampeded Trail without even a map of the area. If he had a good map he could have walked out of his predicament using one of
several routes that could have been successful. Consider where he died. An abandoned bus. How
did it get there? On a trail. If the bus could get into the place where it died, why couldn’t
McCandless get out of the place where he died? The fact that he had to live in an old bus in the
first place tells you a lot. Why didn’t he have an adequate shelter from the beginning? What
would he have done if he hadn’t found the bus? A bag of rice and a sleeping bag do not
constitute adequate gear and provisions for a long stay in the wilderness.

No experienced backcountry person would travel during the month of April. It is a time
of transition from winter’s frozen rivers and hard packed snow with good traveling conditions
into spring’s quagmire of mud and raging waters where even small creeks become impassible.
Hungry bears come out of their dens with just one thing in mind—eating.

Furthermore, Chris McCandless poached a moose and then wasted it. He killed a
magnificent animal superbly conditioned to survive the rigors of the Alaskan wild then,
inexperienced in how to preserve meat without refrigeration (the Eskimos and Indians do it to
this day), he watched 1500 pounds of meat rot away in front of him. He’s lucky the stench didn’t
bring a grizzly bear to end his suffering earlier. And in the end, the moose died for nothing.

So what made the difference between McCandless and I fourteen years ago? Why am I
alive and he is dead? Essentially, Chris McCandless committed suicide while I apprenticed
myself to a career and a life that I wanted more badly than I can possibly describe in so short an
essay. In the end I believe that the difference between us was that I wanted to live and Chris
McCandless wanted to die (whether he realized it or not). The fact that he died in a compelling
way doesn’t change that outcome. He might have made it work if he had respected the
wilderness he was purported to have loved. But it is my belief that surviving in the wilderness is
not what he had in mind.

I did not start this essay to trash poor Chris McCandless. Not intentionally. It is sad that
the boy had to die. The tragedy is that McCandless more than likely was suffering from mental
illness and didn’t have to end his life the way he did. The fact that he chose Alaska’s wildlands
to do it in speaks more to the fact that it makes a good story than to the fact that McCandless was
heroic or somehow extraordinary. In the end, he was sadly ordinary in his disrespect for the land,
the animals, the history, and the self-sufficiency ethos of Alaska, the Last Frontier.
“So saying, I went up from the ship and the sea. But when, as I went through the sacred glades, I was about to come to the great house of the sorceress, Circe, then Hermes, of the golden wand, met me as I went toward the house, in the likeness of a young man with the first down upon his lip, in whom the charm of youth is fairest. He clasped my hand, and spoke, and addressed me: ‘Whither now again, hapless man, dost thou go alone through the hills, knowing naught of the country? Lo, thy comrades yonder in the house of Circe are penned like swine in close-barred sties. And art thou come to release them? Nay, I tell thee, thou shalt not thyself return, but shalt remain there with the others. But come, I will free thee from harm, and save thee. Here, take this potent herb, and go to the house of Circe, and it shall ward off from thy head the evil day. And I will tell thee all the baneful wiles of Circe. She will mix thee a potion, and cast drugs into the food; but even so she shall not be able to bewitch thee, for the potent herb that I shall give thee will not suffer it. And I will tell thee all. When Circe shall smite thee with her long wand, then do thou draw thy sharp sword from beside thy thigh, and rush upon Circe, as though thou wouldst slay her. And she will be seized with fear, and will bid thee lie with her. Then do not thou thereafter refuse the couch of the goddess, that she may set free thy comrades, and give entertainment to thee. But bid her swear a great oath by the blessed gods, that she will not plot against thee any fresh mischief to thy hurt, lest when she has thee stripped she may render thee a weakling and unmanned.’

“So saying, Argeiphontes gave me the herb, drawing it from the ground, and showed me its nature. At the root it was black, but its flower was like milk. Moly the gods call it, and it is hard for mortal men to dig; but with the gods all things are possible. Hermes then departed to high Olympus through the wooded isle, and I went my way to the house of Circe, and many things did my heart darkly ponder as I went. So I stood at the gates of the fair-tressed goddess. There I stood and called, and the goddess heard my voice. Straightway then she came forth, and opened the bright doors, and bade me in; and I went with her, my heart sore troubled. She brought me in and made me sit on a silver-studded chair, a beautiful chair, richly wrought, and beneath was a foot-stool for the feet. And she prepared me a potion in a golden cup, that I might drink, and put therein a drug, with evil purpose in her heart. But when she had given it me, and I had drunk it off, yet was not bewitched, she smote me with her wand, and spoke, and addressed me: ‘Begone now to the sty, and lie with the rest of thy comrades.’

“So she spoke, but I, drawing my sharp sword from beside my thigh, rushed upon Circe, as though I would slay her. But she, with a loud cry, ran beneath, and clasped my knees, and with wailing she spoke to me winged words: ‘Who art thou among men, and from whence? Where is thy city, and where thy parents? Amazement holds me that thou hast drunk this charm and wast in no wise bewitched. For no man else soever hath withstood this charm, when once he has drunk it, and it has passed the barrier of his teeth. Nay, but the mind in thy breast is one not to be
beguiled. Surely thou art Odysseus, the man of ready device, who Argeiphontes of the golden wand ever said to me would come hither on his way home from Troy with his swift, black ship. Nay, come, put up thy sword in its sheath, and let us two then go up into my bed, that couched together in love we may put trust in each other.’

[336] “So she spoke, but I answered her, and said: ‘Circe, how canst thou bid me be gentle to thee, who hast turned my comrades into swine in thy halls, and now keepest me here, and with guileful purpose biddest me go to thy chamber, and go up into thy bed, that when thou hast me stripped thou mayest render me a weakling and unmanned? Nay, verily, it is not I that shall be fain to go up into thy bed, unless thou, goddess, wilt consent to swear a mighty oath that thou wilt not plot against me any fresh mischief to my hurt.’

[345] “So I spoke, and she straightway swore the oath to do me no harm, as I bade her. But when she had sworn, and made an end of the oath, then I went up to the beautiful bed of Circe. But her handmaids meanwhile were busied in the halls, four maidens who are her serving-women in the house. Children are they of the springs and groves, and of the sacred rivers that flow forth to the sea, and of them one threw upon chairs fair rugs of purple above, and spread beneath them a linen cloth; another drew up before the chairs tables of silver, and set upon them golden baskets; and the third mixed sweet, honey-hearted wine in a bowl of silver, and served out golden cups; and the fourth brought water, and kindled a great fire beneath a large cauldron, and the water grew warm. But when the water boiled in the bright bronze, she set me in a bath, and bathed me with water from out the great cauldron, mixing it to my liking, and pouring it over my head and shoulders, till she took from my limbs soul-consuming weariness. But when she had bathed me, and anointed me richly with oil, and had cast about me a fair cloak and a tunic, she brought me into the hall, and made me sit upon a silver-studded chair—a beautiful chair, richly wrought, and beneath was a foot-stool for the feet. Then a handmaid brought water for the hands in a fair pitcher of gold, and poured it over a silver basin for me to wash, and beside me drew up a polished table. And the grave housewife brought and set before me bread, and therewith meats in abundance, granting freely of her store. Then she bade me eat, but my heart inclined not thereto. Rather, I sat with other thoughts, and my spirit boded ill.

[375] “Now when Circe noted that I sat thus, and did not put forth my hands to the food, but was burdened with sore grief, she came close to me, and spoke winged words: ‘Why, Odysseus, dost thou sit thus like one that is dumb, eating thy heart, and dost not touch food or drink? Dost thou haply forbode some other guile? Nay, thou needest in no wise fear, for already have I sworn a mighty oath to do thee no harm.’

[383] “So she spoke, but I answered her, and said: ‘Circe, what man that is right-minded could bring himself to taste of food or drink, ere yet he had won freedom for his comrades, and beheld
them before his face? But if thou of a ready heart dost bid me eat and drink, set them free, that mine eyes may behold my trusty comrades.'

[388] “So I spoke, and Circe went forth through the hall holding her wand in her hand, and opened the doors of the sty, and drove them out in the form of swine of nine years old. So they stood there before her, and she went through the midst of them, and anointed each man with another charm. Then from their limbs the bristles fell away which the baneful drug that queenly Circe gave them had before made to grow, and they became men again, younger than they were before, and far comelier and taller to look upon. They knew me, and clung to my hands, each man of them, and upon them all came a passionate sobbing, and the house about them rang wondrously, and the goddess herself was moved to pity.

[400] “Then the beautiful goddess drew near me, and said: ‘Son of Laertes, sprung from Zeus, Odysseus of many devices, go now to thy swift ship and to the shore of the sea. First of all do ye draw the ship up on the land, and store your goods and all the tackling in caves. Then come back thyself, and bring thy trusty comrades.’

[406] “So she spoke, and my proud heart consented. I went my way to the swift ship and the shore of the sea, and there I found my trusty comrades by the swift ship, wailing piteously, shedding big tears. And as when calves in a farmstead sport about the droves of cows returning to the yard, when they have had their fill of grazing—all together they frisk before them, and the pens no longer hold them, but with constant lowing they run about their mothers—so those men, when their eyes beheld me, thronged about me weeping, and it seemed to their hearts as though they had got to their native land, and the very city of rugged Ithaca, where they were bred and born. And with wailing they spoke to me winged words: ‘At thy return, O thou fostered of Zeus, we are as glad as though we had returned to Ithaca, our native land. But come, tell the fate of the others, our comrades.’

[422] “So they spoke, and I answered them with gentle words: ‘First of all let us draw the ship up on the land, and store our goods and all the tackling in caves. Then haste you, one and all, to go with me that you may see your comrades in the sacred halls of Circe, drinking and eating, for they have unfailing store.’

[428] “So I spoke, and they quickly hearkened to my words. Eurylochus alone sought to hold back all my comrades, and he spoke, and addressed them with winged words: ‘Ah, wretched men, whither are we going? Why are you so enamoured of these woes, as to go down to the house of Circe, who will change us all to swine, or wolves, or lions, that so we may guard her great house perforce? Even so did the Cyclops, when our comrades went to his fold, and with them went this reckless Odysseus. For it was through this man's folly that they too perished.’

[439] “So he spoke, and I pondered in heart, whether to draw my long sword from beside my stout thigh, and therewith strike off his head, and bring it to the ground, near kinsman of mine by
marriage though he was; but my comrades one after another sought to check me with gentle words: `O thou sprung from Zeus, as for this man, we will leave him, if thou so biddest, to abide here by the ship, and to guard the ship, but as for us, do thou lead us to the sacred house of Circe.’

[446] “So saying, they went up from the ship and the sea. Nor was Eurylochus left beside the hollow ship, but he went with us, for he feared my dread reproof. Meanwhile in her halls Circe bathed the rest of my comrades with kindly care, and anointed them richly with oil, and cast about them fleecy cloaks and tunics; and we found them all feasting bountifully in the halls. But when they saw and recognized one another, face to face, they wept and wailed, and the house rang around. Then the beautiful goddess drew near me, and said: `No longer now do ye rouse this plenteous lamenting. Of myself I know both all the woes you have suffered on the teeming deep, and all the wrong that cruel men have done you on the land. Nay, come, eat food and drink wine, until you once more get spirit in your breasts such as when at the first you left your native land of rugged Ithaca; but now ye are withered and spiritless, ever thinking of your weary wanderings, nor are your hearts ever joyful, for verily ye have suffered much.’

[466] “So she spoke, and our proud hearts consented. So there day after day for a full year we abode, feasting on abundant flesh and sweet wine. But when a year was gone and the seasons turned, as the months waned and the long days were brought in their course, then my trusty comrades called me forth, and said: `Strange man, bethink thee now at last of thy native land, if it is fated for thee to be saved, and to reach thy high-roofed house and thy native land.’

[475] “So they spoke, and my proud heart consented. So then all day long till set of sun we sat feasting on abundant flesh and sweet wine. But when the sun set and darkness came on, they lay down to sleep throughout the shadowy halls, but I went up to the beautiful bed of Circe, and besought her by her knees; and the goddess heard my voice, and I spoke, and addressed her with winged words: `Circe, fulfil for me the promise which thou gavest to send me home; for my spirit is now eager to be gone, and the spirit of my comrades, who make my heart to pine, as they sit about me mourning, whensoever thou haply art not at hand.’

[487] “So I spoke, and the beautiful goddess straightway made answer: `Son of Laertes, sprung from Zeus, Odysseus of many devices, abide ye now no longer in my house against your will; but you must first complete another journey, and come to the house of Hades and dread Persephone, to seek soothsaying of the spirit of Theban Teiresias, the blind seer, whose mind abides steadfast. To him even in death Persephone has granted reason, that he alone should have understanding; but the others flit about as shadows.’

[496] “So she spoke, and my spirit was broken within me, and I wept as I sat on the bed, nor had my heart any longer desire to live and behold the light of the sun. But when I had my fill of
weeping and writhing, then I made answer, and addressed her, saying: 'O Circe, who will guide
us on this journey? To Hades no man ever yet went in a black ship.'

[503] “So I spoke, and the beautiful goddess straightway made answer: 'Son of Laertes, sprung
from Zeus, Odysseus of many devices, let there be in thy mind no concern for a pilot to guide thy
ship, but set up thy mast, and spread the white sail, and sit thee down; and the breath of the North
Wind will bear her onward. But when in thy ship thou hast now crossed the stream of Oceanus,
where is a level shore and the groves of Persephone —tall poplars, and willows that shed their
fruit—there do thou beach thy ship by the deep eddying Oceanus, but go thyself to the dank
house of Hades. There into Acheron flow Periphlegethon and Cocytus, which is a branch of the
water of the Styx; and there is a rock, and the meeting place of the two roaring rivers. Thither,
prince, do thou draw nigh, as I bid thee, and dig a pit of a cubit's length this way and that, and
around it pour a libation to all the dead, first with milk and honey, thereafter with sweet wine,
and in the third place with water, and sprinkle thereon white barley meal. And do thou earnestly
entreat the powerless heads of the dead, vowing that when thou comest to Ithaca thou wilt
sacrifice in thy halls a barren heifer, the best thou hast, and wilt fill the altar with rich gifts; and
that to Teiresias alone thou wilt sacrifice separately a ram, wholly black, the goodliest of thy
flock. But when with prayers thou hast made supplication to the glorious tribes of the dead, then
sacrifice a ram and a black ewe, turning their heads toward Erebus but thyself turning backward,
and setting thy face towards the streams of the river. Then many ghosts of men that are dead will
come forth. But do thou thereafter call to thy comrades, and bid them flay and burn the sheep
that lie there, slain by the pitiless bronze, and make prayer to the gods, to mighty Hades and to
dread Persephone. And do thou thyself draw thy sharp sword from beside thy thigh, and sit there,
not suffering the powerless heads of the dead to draw near to the blood, till thou hast enquired of
Teiresias. Then the seer will presently come to thee, leader of men, and he will tell thee thy way
and the measures of thy path, and of thy return, how thou mayest go over the teeming deep.’

[541] “So she spoke, and straightway came golden-throned Dawn. Round about me then she cast
a cloak and tunic as raiment, and the nymph clothed herself in a long white robe, finely-woven
and beautiful, and about her waist she cast a fair girdle of gold, and upon her head she put a veil.
But I went through the halls, and roused my men with gentle words, coming up to each man in
turn. 'No longer now sleep ye, and drowse in sweet slumber, but let us go; lo! queenly Circe has
told me all.’

[550] “So I spoke, and their proud hearts consented. But not even from thence could I lead my
men unscathed. There was one, Elpenor, the youngest of all, not over valiant in war nor sound of
understanding, who had laid him down apart from his comrades in the sacred house of Circe,
seeking the cool air, for he was heavy with wine. He heard the noise and the bustle of his
comrades as they moved about, and suddenly sprang up, and forgot to go to the long ladder that
he might come down again, but fell headlong from the roof, and his neck was broken away from
the spine, and his spirit went down to the house of Hades.

[561] “But as my men were going on their way I spoke among them, saying: ‘Ye think, forsooth,
that ye are going to your dear native land; but Circe has pointed out for us another journey, even
to the house of Hades and dread Persephone, to consult the spirit of Theban Teiresias.’

[566] “So I spoke, and their spirit was broken within them, and sitting down right where they
were, they wept and tore their hair. But no good came of their lamenting. But when we were on
our way to the swift ship and the shore of the sea, sorrowing and shedding big tears, meanwhile
Circe had gone forth and made fast beside the black ship a ram and a black ewe, for easily had
she passed us by. Who with his eyes could behold a god against his will, whether going to or fro?
Synthesis Packet

Use the six sources presented to answer Question 4.

Source A

“Educated Is Even Better Than You’ve Heard” by Bill Gates

I’ve always prided myself on my ability to teach myself things. Whenever I don’t know a lot about something, I’ll read a textbook or watch an online course until I do.

I thought I was pretty good at teaching myself—until I read Tara Westover’s memoir Educated. Her ability to learn on her own blows mine right out of the water. I was thrilled to sit down with her recently to talk about the book.

Tara was raised in a Mormon survivalist home in rural Idaho. Her dad had very non-mainstream views about the government. He believed doomsday was coming, and that the family should interact with the health and education systems as little as possible. As a result, she didn’t step foot in a classroom until she was 17, and major medical crises went untreated (her mother suffered a brain injury in a car accident and never fully recovered).

Because Tara and her six siblings worked at their father’s junkyard from a young age, none of them received any kind of proper homeschooling. She had to teach herself algebra and trigonometry and self-studied for the ACT, which she did well enough on to gain admission to Brigham Young University. Eventually, she earned her doctorate in intellectual history from Cambridge University. (Full disclosure: she was a Gates Scholar, which I didn’t even know until I reached that part of the book.)

Educated is an amazing story, and I get why it’s spent so much time on the top of the New York Times bestseller list. It reminded me in some ways of the Netflix documentary Wild, Wild Country, which I recently watched. Both explore people who remove themselves from society because they have these beliefs and knowledge that they think make them more enlightened. Their belief systems benefit from their separateness, and you’re forced to be either in or out.

But unlike Wild, Wild Country—which revels in the strangeness of its subjects—Educated doesn’t feel voyeuristic. Tara is never cruel, even when she’s writing about some of her father’s most fringe beliefs. It’s clear that her whole family, including her mom and dad, is energetic and talented. Whatever their ideas are, they pursue them.

Of the seven Westover siblings, three of them—including Tara—left home, and all three have earned Ph.D.s. Three doctorates in one family would be remarkable even for a more “conventional” household. I think there must’ve been something about their childhood that gave
them a degree of toughness and helped them persevere. Her dad taught the kids that they could teach themselves anything, and Tara’s success is a testament to that.

I found it fascinating how it took studying philosophy and history in school for Tara to trust her own perception of the world. Because she never went to school, her worldview was entirely shaped by her dad. He believed in conspiracy theories, and so she did, too. It wasn’t until she went to BYU that she realized there were other perspectives on things her dad had presented as fact. For example, she had never heard of the Holocaust until her art history professor mentioned it. She had to research the subject to form her own opinion that was separate from her dad’s.

Her experience is an extreme version of something everyone goes through with their parents. At some point in your childhood, you go from thinking they know everything to seeing them as adults with limitations. I’m sad that Tara is estranged from a lot of her family because of this process, but the path she’s taken and the life she’s built for herself are truly inspiring.

When you meet her, you don’t have any impression of all the turmoil she’s gone through. She’s so articulate about the traumas of her childhood, including the physical abuse she suffered at the hands of one brother. I was impressed by how she talks so candidly about how naïve she once was—most of us find it difficult to talk about our own ignorance.

I was especially interested to hear her take on polarization in America. Although it’s not a political book, *Educated* touches on a number of the divides in our country: red states versus blue states, rural versus urban, college-educated versus not. Since she’s spent her whole life moving between these worlds, I asked Tara what she thought. She told me she was disappointed in what she called the “breaking of charity”—an idea that comes from the Salem witch trials and refers to the moment when two members of the same group break apart and become different tribes.

“I worry that education is becoming a stick that some people use to beat other people into submission or becoming something that people feel arrogant about,” she said. “I think education is really just a process of self-discovery—of developing a sense of self and what you think. I think of [it] as this great mechanism of connecting and equalizing.”

Tara’s process of self-discovery is beautifully captured in *Educated*. It’s the kind of book that I think everyone will enjoy, no matter what genre you usually pick up. She’s a talented writer, and I suspect this book isn’t the last we’ll hear from her. I can’t wait to see what she does next.
“When Memoirs Share Too Much Too Soon” by Sarah Schutte

Telling someone you were raised by survivalists in the middle of rural Idaho is an excellent conversation starter. Tara Westover needs to have a conversation about this, but perhaps not with the millions of people who read her bestselling book, *Educated*.

The memoir can be a problematic genre. When it is used to discuss a broad social issue, the individual perspective of the narrator can bring focus to the topic. However, many memoirs are overly self-focused, relating personal histories in excessive detail. Often, it seems that authors view the memoir as a means of either therapy or self-promotion. Behind the humor, the tangential histories, and the detailed descriptions hides a great deal of pain.

Compounding this tendency is today’s decidedly voyeuristic culture, fueled by tabloid magazines and reality television, in which we are quick to pounce on “juicy” details of other people’s lives, seeking shocking tidbits with which we can thrill listeners at our next cocktail party. The public adores memoir-style books, and they fly off the shelves and up the ranks of must-read lists.

There is much to be shocked by in *Educated*, Westover’s 2019 *New York Times* bestseller. Truth is often stranger than fiction, and Westover’s book proves it; much of her story is frighteningly brutal, featuring horrible accidents, unrelenting cycles of familial abuse, and religious fanaticism.

Westover, the youngest of seven children, was raised by Mormon survivalists and had no formal education in her childhood beyond learning to read. She spent her days helping her mother, a midwife, make herbal remedies and sorting scrap in her father’s junkyard. By teaching herself algebra, Westover was able to score high enough on the ACT to enter Brigham Young University and eventually make her way through Cambridge and Harvard, earning a Ph.D. in history.

*Educated* details Westover’s childhood and her unusual educational journey, but much of the story revolves around dramatic moments involving a violent older brother and painful accidents that filled her youth. It is a riveting book, drawing the reader in as Westover discovers the world outside Buck’s Peak, the rural valley where she grew up, and tries to reconcile her growing knowledge with her loyalty to family she still loves. It is raw, powerful, and moving.

While interviewing Westover at the Aspen Ideas Festival last June, *The Atlantic* editor Jeffery Goldberg said he had been worried, while reading the book, that she wouldn’t make it out alive at the end — even though, of course, he knew she did. I felt the same way, growing nervous each time Westover returned to Buck’s Peak, and I wished she’d stay away.

But she can’t.

The more I read, the more uncomfortable I became. I do not doubt the truth of her story or her personal experiences. She is careful to explain memories, footnoting them to point out which siblings she talked to in order to clarify details. She uses paraphrases of emails to
emphasize moments in the story. Her portrayal of Mormonism, and religion in general, is
evenhanded. But, in the end, the manner in which she wrote — focusing heavily on catastrophes
and abuse — suggests a deeper and more unsettling point.

This is a woman dealing with a very traumatic upbringing, an upbringing that will take
her many years to fully come to terms with. She’s been through more in 33 years than many have
in a lifetime, has graduated from esteemed institutions, and continues her climb in the academic
world — all without ever gaining her high-school diploma. It’s sensational, yes, and heartrending
and painful.

But Westover’s memoir never comes full circle. She never explains the purpose of
sharing these deeply personal details, perhaps because she’s still wrestling with the implications
of her own conclusions and decisions, despite insisting in the end that she’s made her peace with
them. Her book is styled as a way of explaining her unconventional (oh, for a stronger word!) path, but was this the right time for her to tell her story? The book’s jarring tone and lack of
clarity in its end goal suggest perhaps it wasn’t.

If not, then her agent and editors did her a disservice despite the book’s runaway success.
Readers can and should cheer her on as she overcomes obstacles in pursuing education and
independence. But the book’s intense focus on her upbringing and interactions with her family
illustrates a different kind of education than the one she set out to tell readers she obtained. Her
higher-education story is unique, but in the telling of her tale, it takes a backseat to the larger
problem of her struggle to integrate her newfound knowledge with her upbringing, her family’s
lifestyle, and her desire to be accepted and loved by them.

Education is about experiences, but most important, it is about learning how to learn, how
to wrestle with universal ideas and hone critical-thinking skills. Based on the story Westover
tells, her primary education was less about learning facts and ideas than it was about coming to
recognize the ugly cycles of abuse permitted and promoted by her family and her fight to escape
them. This is far more of a reflection on the mental illness that seems to be behind some of her
family members’ actions and beliefs than on education. Educated in heavy manual labor, herbal
healing, and a twisted view of womanhood, she seems to be caught in a personal struggle for
survival as she tries to come to grips with her past.

Dredging up those deep feelings and traumatic experiences for a best-selling book likely
isn’t the best way to heal.
It's baffling to me, the belief that art must be "ethical," as if it were so much fair trade chocolate. It's so much more complicated than that. The laughable idea that it can pass or fail some kind of tick-box test! What was art in March must surely be art in April. You can't un-art art, though Hitler had a go, when he decided that what was modern was also degenerate and set about destroying it and, far worse, those who made it.

We have to give it up, this weird inability of ours to separate art and life. It makes fools of us. People were after Ted Hughes for years – the old misogynist, the monster, the wife killer – and then, in 1998, he published *Birthday Letters* and they had to eat their words. All that love and pain and regret. "Drawing calmed you," he wrote, and suddenly they had it from his side.

But it also robs us, if we give in to it, of so much that is good and beautiful. When Andrew Motion published his biography of Philip Larkin in 1993, and we learned of his casual racism, and the way he behaved with women, they all lined up to have a go at him: Lisa Jardine, Tom Paulin, Alan Bennett. Jardine said, somewhat gleefully: "We don't tend to teach Larkin much now in my department of English. The Little Englandism he celebrates sits uneasily within our revised curriculum." I remember feeling enraged by this. For one thing, Larkin doesn't celebrate anything terribly much – he's not that kind of poet (and when he does, it's mostly love). For another, I could not get over the idea that someone would deny their students the pleasure of discovering Larkin's poetry – so clear, so plangent, so intensely beautiful – because they didn't agree with his politics. It felt criminal to me.

Did Albert Goldman's sordid revelations about Elvis and John Lennon honestly change how we feel about their music? No, and nor should they have done. Did you go off Brighton Rock once you found out, courtesy of his biographer Michael Sheldon, that Graham Greene wanted to commit adultery? If you did, it's your loss, not his.

I could go on and on. With every new biography, there comes fresh outrage.
Excerpts of Bell’s article appear below.

What right does an artist have to use other people in their work—to invade their lives, violate their privacy, or cause them harm? What will we forgive in the name of art?

These are the questions I was asking a decade ago when, for a graduate performance art class taught by Tania Bruguera, I paid a classmate $1 to befriend my best friend Laura and write reports on how she thought Laura was coping after a recent break-up. At our final class, I passed around a folder containing these reports and a photocopy of the $1 check I’d written. The folder reached Laura last. I watched across the table as she read the document of my simultaneous care and betrayal.

I got an A for the class, but lost my friend. It was a horrible thing to do, but I was 21 and obsessed with Sophie Calle and the line between art and life. Since the 1970s, Calle has repeatedly invited us to question whether artists should be held to the same standards as other people. In viewing her work, we must ask whether invading someone’s privacy or betraying their trust is an acceptable emotional cost to art.

In 1979, Calle followed a man she’d met at an art opening in Paris to Venice, where she spent two weeks spying on and photographing him as he went about his business in the city. She presented the images alongside text detailing both her observations and emotions during the period, as Suite Vénitienne. This man, identified only as Henri B., was the first unwitting participant to Calle’s artistic game.

In 1983, she found a lost address book on the street and photocopied the contents before returning it. She then telephoned each of the contacts to question them on the identity of the owner, and published her findings as a series (“The Address Book”) in the French newspaper Libération. The owner, the documentary filmmaker Pierre Baudry, threatened to sue her [and] wrote open letters to Libération.

For The Hotel (1983), Calle worked as a chambermaid, exploring and documenting the private belongings and writings of hotel guests. Observing this piece, we experience both Calle’s curiosity and the unsettling thought that, at every hotel we have ever stayed in, our own possessions might have been subjected to similar scrutiny. What might someone like Calle have learned from our nightgowns and slippers, our diaries and postcards? How might she have misinterpreted us?

A crucial element of these early pieces is Calle’s involvement of the viewer in her transgressions. By inviting us to immerse ourselves in the narratives of her observations, she makes us complicit in her voyeurism—even as we question it. It is not just Calle invading these
strangers’ privacy and observing their lives without consent, but us, too. We may not agree with her methods, but by engaging with the work, we find ourselves tacitly condoning it.

Decades later, though, the question that still hangs over these pieces is whether or not they were ethical. Did Henri B., Pierre Baudry, or those hotel guests have a right to privacy? Can any of us expect to be protected from the artist’s gaze?

In 2013, Arne Svenson caused a Calle-like controversy for using a telephoto lens to take photos of his Manhattan neighbors, later exhibiting the work in a local gallery. Svenson was sued, but won the case based on his First Amendment rights, and “The Neighbors” went on to be exhibited across the country. Though the discussion continues as to whether Svenson’s photographs of families, children, pets, and intimate, private spaces is ethically acceptable, the judge’s ruling makes clear that legally, at least artists have a right to invade aspects of our privacy.

Considered in conjunction with conversations about digital surveillance, data protection, and online privacy—not to mention random strangers who might be live-tweeting intimate exchanges—this ruling might seem rather scary. Belgian artist Dries Depoorter uses digital technology to explore this fear. For Tinder In (2015), Depoorter traced women (and some men) who appeared on his Tinder app to their LinkedIn profiles, then displayed and published their profile pictures from each side by side, pointing out both the ease with which individuals can be traced, and the split-personalities of online identities.

The interesting thing about all of these pieces is that, while their controversy lies in the question of an individual’s right to privacy, the works themselves actually reveal very little about their subjects. In reading the texts accompanying Calle’s work, we learn much more about the stalker than the stalked. It’s easy to understand the sense of invasion felt by Henri B. and Pierre Baudry, as well as Svenson’s neighbors and Depoorter’s Tinder matches, but perhaps the true grievance is that the artists have used these strangers’ images and identities to create works that have nothing to do with them.

[This] forces us to ask if it is okay for an artist to use people. Can the end justify the means?

Calle presents her subjects as simplified versions of themselves, and treats them like fictional characters in a narrative she remains in control of.

It is, I think, this relieving of complications that is most disturbing and, in the end, most painful. Should we find ourselves the subject of an artist’s gaze, most of us would like them to see the whole of us, to render us fairly and try to understand our complexities. Unfortunately, the artist’s motive is often more to do with projecting or reflecting a part of themselves rather than reaching an empathetic understanding of their subjects. What they were looking for, really, is a mirror.

In the play between the private and the public, artists have both the ability and the right to provoke, shock, and disturb. What we often fail to recognize, however, is that by giving them a platform, it is us as viewers who have bestowed this position of power upon them. By consuming
and applauding Calle’s early works, we effectively opened our own curtains to Svenson and gave our profile photos to Depoorter. Perhaps the question is not whether artists have the right to invade our privacy or cause us harm, but why we’ve allowed them to.

I’m not proud of what I did to Laura back in grad school. A decade later, I’m appalled by my callousness and can hardly remember my own justifications. But I do remember the surprise I felt at her anger. I remember expecting her to understand, wanting her to acknowledge my cleverness, to think about the nuances of privacy and trust, and sense as I did the precarious power wielded by the word “art.” I wonder if it is this kind of optimistic thinking that drives Calle and other artists. For those who have devoted their lives to their work, perhaps it doesn’t seem so extraordinary for them to imagine others should be willing to devote theirs, too.
Ethics

In ethics class so many years ago
our teacher asked this question every fall:
if there were a fire in a museum
which would you save, a Rembrandt painting
or an old woman who hadn't many
years left anyhow? Restless on hard chairs
caring little for pictures or old age
we'd opt one year for life, the next for art
and always half-heartedly. Sometimes
the woman borrowed my grandmother's face
leaving her usual kitchen to wander
some drafty, half imagined museum.
One year, feeling clever, I replied
why not let the woman decide herself?
Linda, the teacher would report, eschews
the burdens of responsibility.
This fall in a real museum I stand
before a real Rembrandt, old woman,
or nearly so, myself. The colors
within this frame are darker than autumn,
darker even than winter — the browns of earth,
though earth's most radiant elements burn
through the canvas. I know now that woman
and painting and season are almost one
and all beyond saving by children.
For decades, the fitness guru Richard Simmons was Hollywood’s most accessible celebrity. He was a talk show fixture, a leader of weight loss cruises and an instructor of $12 classes at his Beverly Hills workout studio, Slimmons. He greeted tour buses in front of his mansion and called fans to support their weight loss attempts. Then, three years ago, he abruptly retreated from public life. Dan Taberski, an acquaintance of Mr. Simmons (and a Slimmons regular), wants to know why.

Enter the latest prestige podcast obsession, “Missing Richard Simmons.” Thanks to Mr. Taberski’s blend of pop culture and pulp — think an aerobic “Behind the Music” but with a winking noir plot that proffers theories about Mr. Simmons’s mysterious disappearance — the show is instantly engaging. But soon, the podcast’s draw becomes disturbing. As Mr. Taberski digs deeper into Mr. Simmons’s personal life, the question becomes not “What happened to Richard Simmons?” but “Is it any of our business?”

The podcast has been compared to “Serial,” the real-time murder investigation (and podcasting’s breakout hit). But while “Serial” dug into a serious crime and possible miscarriage of justice, Mr. Taberski instead relentlessly pesters Mr. Simmons and friends for personal details pertaining to his mental and physical health. It’s not quite a public shaming; Mr. Taberski is careful to express respect for Mr. Simmons. Call it a public hounding.

Mr. Simmons, who has declined to participate in the podcast, is not missing. He is living at home, and as the podcast goes on, it’s revealed that he is in close contact with a small circle of family and friends. A while after Mr. Simmons “disappeared,” and tabloid reports alleged he was being held by a housekeeper against his will, Mr. Simmons called in to the “Today” show to insist that he was fine. TMZ reports that two visits from Los Angeles Police Department officers have confirmed as much. He was just leading a more private life.

But that isn’t good enough for Mr. Taberski. So he rifles through Mr. Simmons’s social network, interviewing people who crossed his path and publicizing their speculation about his mental state. He urges listeners to call in with “any theory you think we missed.” Various potential personal crises — like the suggestion that his physical decline has made Mr. Simmons depressed, or that he’s grieving the deaths of his dogs — are raised like clues, turned over by Mr. Taberski and pals, and often dismissed as unserious. Though Mr. Simmons has acknowledged suffering
from depression before, that wouldn’t justify a “complete and total retreat,” Mr. Taberski decides, which conveniently excuses him to keep digging.

Most disquieting is a “clue” teased in the first episode, when a former Slimmons client says that “for the last two or three months, he was showing up in drag.” In a forthcoming episode, Mr. Taberski digs into a tabloid report that Mr. Simmons is transitioning to female. He takes a moment to note that Mr. Simmons’s gender identity is nobody’s business but his own, then forges right ahead.

Mr. Taberski ultimately decides that the report is false — Mr. Simmons himself rebutted the story on Facebook — but regardless of its veracity, it feels exploitative to spread it while simultaneously championing the podcast’s great respect for Mr. Simmons’s privacy. A serious journalistic transgression — outing a person — is played here as just another sensational twist to be picked apart for podcast fodder. Mr. Taberski ends the segment with a jokey shrug: “But if he is transitioning? Mazel tov. But he’s not. I don’t think?”

Mr. Taberski spends much of the podcast attempting to justify his invasions. Little details — like the fact that Mr. Simmons called in to “Today” instead of appearing on video — are used to rationalize the project. “Why wouldn’t he want to be seen?” Mr. Taberski asks, then conjures the image of “a kidnapper holding a gun to his head.” The implication: Mr. Taberski will rest only when Mr. Simmons is fully exposed.

Mr. Taberski told *The New York Times* that the podcast “was coming from a place of love and coming from a place of real concern.” In Episode 2, Mr. Taberski takes listeners on a drive up to Mr. Simmons’s gated home for what he half-seriously calls a “stakeout.” “I don’t want him to feel like I’m invading his privacy,” Mr. Taberski says. “On the other hand, I’m Richard’s friend.”

Is this what friends do? Turn their loved one’s personal crisis into a fun mystery investigation and record it for a hit podcast? (It has topped the iTunes podcast charts for four straight weeks.) Despite his claims, Mr. Taberski is not principally a “friend” to Mr. Simmons. In the podcast, he presents himself as a regular at Slimmons Studio who became friendly with the instructor, but really he was always a documentarian circling a sensational subject. (Talk of a film documentary dissolved when Mr. Simmons cut off contact with Mr. Taberski.)

The relationship between journalists and subjects shouldn’t be confused with friendship. Journalists have power over their subjects and a responsibility to try to minimize harm. But Mr. Taberski leverages his claim to friendship to reverse the equation, arguing instead that it’s Mr. Simmons who has the responsibility to speak to him, and to explain himself to his former
acquaintances and fans. He compares Mr. Simmons’s relationship to them to the responsibilities of a licensed therapist. Mr. Taberski says he took care to ask Mr. Simmons’s manager “if there was something serious going on, like illness, so I could just let it be.” But is depression not an illness? Is a person’s gender identity not sufficiently serious to leave alone? Having decided that Mr. Simmons’s reasons for withdrawal are not “serious,” Mr. Taberski feels freer to pursue the guy.

“Missing Richard Simmons” speaks to both the possibilities and the limits of the emerging prestige podcast form. Many of the podcast’s tropes — the mystery framing, the crowdsourcing of clues from the audience and a format that focuses on the narrator as much as his subject — are borrowed directly from “Serial.” By turning a journalist into a friend and casting a man’s personal life as a mystery, “Missing Richard Simmons” has retooled the stale Hollywood documentary as an addictive media sensation. But it’s also turned it into a morally suspect exercise: An invasion of privacy masquerading as a love letter. Mr. Simmons is a public figure, and that gives journalists a lot of latitude to pry. But a friend who claims to want to help Mr. Simmons should probably just leave him alone.