“Educated”

Parents are our very first teachers. Our home and our family are the first classroom. Education begins in childhood. As the first educators, parents steer children in the direction of their own standards, values and beliefs. The results of these ambitions can be very difficult for our youth. Doing your very best is not always the objective; the expectation is to be the very best. These early aspirations open the door to many anxieties that are amplified in the school environment.

John Holt was an English author and critic of education in a formal setting. In his well-known book, *How Children Fail*, Holt says, “They are afraid, above all else, of failing, of disappointing or displeasing the many anxious adults around them, whose limitless hopes and expectations hang over their heads like a cloud.” Sadly, this is often true for many young people today.

Most children learn early on to read adults, searching for signs that it’s safe to speak or act. They learn how rowdy to be in the park, or how to be quiet in the library simply by observing the supervising adult. Some children grow up with great anxiety, afraid to act and speak without an adult’s approval. Why would young people feel it is necessary to study an adult before interacting with them? The answer is fear. Fear of failing the checklist of perfection presented to them. Tara Westover was always reading family members, searching for their approval and sometimes for her own personal safety.

The anxiety and drive to perfection continues further. To be educated no longer means doing well in school; it has been replaced with the best performance in top schools and in the chosen career path. Parents, teachers and the media continue to contribute to the impossible achievement of perfection through ideas, hopes and advertising. Social platforms continuously proclaim the value in individuality, acceptance, and self-worth while at the same time they widely glamorize the “Perfect Life” with wealth and status.

You do not have to be perfect to be educated. You do not have to be at the top of your class or the best at everything you do in life. Thomas Merton also wrote about his opinions of education in a formal setting. In his collection of essays, *Love and Living*, Merton writes, “The least of the
work of learning is done in the classroom.” He felt that people should take their knowledge from their schooling and apply it to living in the world. You don’t have to be in a classroom to learn kindness, loyalty, gratitude or honesty. A textbook doesn’t teach compassion and empathy.

Every person you encounter will influence your lifelong learning. People will educate you every day in so many ways. Let others teach you the wisdom they have obtained from their adventures. To be educated is to live. You take your schooling and go out into the world and live. Give back to those around you. Observe and learn all you can from the people and places you encounter.

Thomas Merton and Tara Westover were both educated in prestigious educational institutions. They each had unusual, challenging young lives and used their education to attain personal peace.

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