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Westover, Coates, and Rodriguez's Unifying Claim

Tara Westover, Richard Rodriguez, and Ta-Nehisi Coates consider how education plays a critical role in the development of character in their respective memoirs. All three authors describe their experience in education while considering how they were integral to their development as individuals. In Westover's "Education" for example, she recounts a childhood in which she received no formal schooling—offering a different perspective of the experience of entering higher education. Westover addresses how her sudden interest in history “caused a kind of crisis” because of how her interests in music were “compatible” with what she thinks a woman should be (Westover 13). Growing up in a family that refused to trust institutions such as schools, music could be considered something ‘suitable’ for a woman to study. When finally being exposed to subjects such as history and politics after neglecting a formal education, the daunting question of how this new identity aligned with her family's views became prominent. Similarly, Rodriguez's "Scholarship Boy" describes his struggle in navigating cultural identity within his immigrant family while being educated in America. Rodriguez writes that he “couldn't forget that schooling was changing me and separating me from the life I enjoyed before becoming a student” (Rodriguez 7). His memoir addresses how his pursuit of knowledge was pulling him away from the life he once had—specifically in terms of language, culture, and social class. As Rodriguez continues to further his studies, the differences in the language and culture he is adopting causes a wider gap between him and his parents. Although he is raised in a working-class family, Rodriguez consistently engages with students from privileged homes who

were born into traditional American culture or society. As he slowly immerses himself in the English language as well as American customs, he drifts away from his family's Spanish roots. While Rodriguez considers how pursuing education changed his view on his identity within culture and society, Coates' narrative details the quest to understand his identity as an African American in the U.S. by educating himself in the history of Black Americans. He writes, "I had thought that I must mirror the outside world, create a carbon copy of white claims to civilization" (Coates 4). This journey of understanding African American history and their experiences in the U.S. is how education molded his perspective of his identity. When he addresses "the Dream," it can be interpreted as the familiar concept of the "American Dream" and how Coates' believes he must fit in to this specific mold. Eventually, his education of Black history leads him to the realization that the experiences of African Americans are much different than a "carbon copy of white claims to civilization." The knowledge Coates pursues at Howard influences his own identity by furthering his understanding of the identities Black individuals in America. In all three memoirs, education is a critical part of each of the authors' pathway to finding a sense of self. Their quest for knowledge is often in contrast with the unique circumstances from which they come from, therefore being vital to their development of character.