



An Uncommon Education

By Elizabeth Percer
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Questions for Discussion

1. In the opening paragraph, Naomi says, "I suppose it was one of many talismans, real and imagined, I began collecting around that age to help me believe that what I told myself just might be true." What are some of the talismans that Naomi carries with her throughout the novel? Which ones would you categorize as real and which would you consider to be imagined?

2. The novel opens at the John F. Kennedy National Historic Site, and Rose Kennedy and her daughter Rosemary come to play a role in Naomi's coming-of-age. What parallels can be drawn between the relationship that Naomi and her mother share, and the relationship of Rosemary to her mother, Rose Kennedy?

3. At the end of the chapter 2, Naomi foreshadows the story with the line, "I had tried and failed to save three of the people I most loved: two who, at very different times in my life and in very different ways, became the sort of friends we think we might never be able to live without, and then my mother, who in the end might have saved me." Could Naomi have saved Teddy or Jun? Is Naomi's mother a savior?

4. Naomi and Sol look to Wellesley College as a beacon of enlightenment and hope. What are the places in your own life that have served as similar sources of inspiration?

5. *An Uncommon Education* raises important issues about women's education. What conclusions can be drawn about women's education and Naomi's college experience? Did the novel reinforce or dispel any preconceived notions of all-women's colleges?

6. At the novel's opening, Naomi takes a letter belonging to Rosemary Kennedy that references Amelia Earhart. Does Earhart personify any themes of the novel?

7. How does the Shakespeare Society shape Naomi's character evolution? How would Naomi's time at Wellesley have been different without Shakes?

8. Toward the end of the novel, when Naomi encounters Phyllis, Phyllis claims, "You're a credit to the school. You should present at the alumnae research conference." To which Naomi replies, "They ask for significant findings." What does Naomi mean by this? Has Naomi discovered any "significant findings"?

9. When Naomi's parents come to see her perform in *Troilus and Cressida*, Naomi remarks, "Our brief, strained exchange made me want to walk out the door after him and back into my old life." How do you relate to the experience of the feeling of wanting to return to a former self?

10. What is the significance of an "uncommon education"? What are some of the milestones of Naomi's college education, and are they fairly commonplace, or is there anything unique about them, singularly or collectively? Describe your own "uncommon" education formal or informal.