



Haben: The Deafblind Woman Who Conquered Harvard Law

Girma, H.

Book Study

1. Haben begins the *Introduction* by stating, "I'm Deafblind." What does the term "deafblind" mean to you when it comes to considering someone's levels of vision and hearing? (Introduction)
2. The *Introduction* includes a brief description of Haben's progressive loss of vision and hearing. How might progressive losses have an impact on a child or adult's learning and how they engage with the environment and others? (Introduction)
3. In Chapter Two, Haben describes her experiences as a middle school student and "the burden that was placed on her to step out of her world and reach into another." What message do you believe this sent to Haben as a student? How did each person in the school play a role? (Chapter 2)
4. Haben makes comparisons between the stories from her family and their struggle with war and loss and her struggles as a Deafblind girl in a sighted, hearing world. What are some of the injustices she references? (Chapter 3)
5. In Chapter Four, Haben talks about gender roles in her family and the task of cutting meat for stew. What factors lead to her taking a "me-against-them" stance? What approaches might have been taken to reduce her feelings of exclusion and loneliness? (Chapter 4)
6. When Haben talks about her first big adventure at camp when she was 15, how did touch play a role in learning to dance? Share an activity that might

traditionally be viewed as being learned or enjoyed visually, talk about what can be adapted to support someone with limited sensory access. (Chapter 6)

7. How did self-advocacy play a role in Haben being allowed to take the school trip to Mali, West Africa to build a school? Identify two instances when self-advocacy played a role in Haben having the opportunity to fully participate in an activity while on the trip? (Chapters 7-11)
8. As Haben prepared to apply to college during her senior year, how did her parents' fear play a role in their discussion? (Chapter 12)
9. What skills did Haben work on developing at the Louisiana Center for the Blind? How might these skills contribute to a higher quality of life for someone at home and at school? (Chapters 13-14)
10. In Chapter Fifteen, what is meant by the term "ableism"? (Chapter 15)
11. Haben addresses assumptions about what it means to be blind. What are some ways you believe would help to "get rid of old assumptions"? In your experience, has there been a shift in our society about assumptions regarding disability over the last decade? Explain. (Chapter 15)
12. Compare Haben's experience working with the cafeteria staff and the disability services office to get information in an accessible format at Lewis & Clark College. What made the process easier? What made the experience more challenging? (Chapters 16 and 18)
13. When emailing the cafeteria staff, how does framing the access barrier related to the menus as a civil rights issue under the Americans with Disabilities Act, rather than an act of charity, shift how the issue is addressed? (Chapter 18)
14. In Chapter 19, Haben shares her experience applying for work in Juneau, Alaska. She states that approximately 70% of people who are blind are unemployed. Why do you think the percentage is so high? Discuss some strategies that can be used to empower students for work readiness and promote cooperation in schools and in the community? (Chapter 19)
15. Haben states that through Maxine, she started to understand parental love and the paradox of taking personal risks while holding loved ones to a higher standard. How might increasing this understanding impact a relationship between a child and a caregiver? (Chapter 21)
16. When discussing attending lectures and interacting with classmates at Harvard Law School, what accommodations are mentioned and how are they used to increase access? (Chapter 22)
17. In Chapter 22, what might Haben mean when she states, "People with disabilities get called inspiring so often, usually for the most insignificant things,

that the word now feels like a euphemism for pity?—Sometimes when a nondisabled person uses the word to describe a person with a disability, it is a sign that they are feeling overwhelmed or uncomfortable. “(Chapter 22)

18. In regard to assistive technology, how does “the keyboard operate like a life raft people can cling to in a vast sea of unknowns”? (Chapter 22)
19. Two court cases are discussed regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act involving captioning on Netflix and digital barriers with Scribd. How do you think cases like these have impacted equality and accessibility to the digital world over the last decade? (Chapter 23)
20. In Chapter 24, Haben describes attending the White House celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. What considerations for communication, visual access, and mobility needed to be addressed in the planning process? How do you think it was handled by the White House staff? (Chapter 24)
21. What is your reaction to the following quote from Haben, “Disability is not something an individual overcomes. I’m still disabled. I’m still Deafblind. People with disabilities are successful when we develop alternative techniques and our communities choose inclusion.”? (Chapter 24)
22. Haben discusses her preference for dancing versus watching others dance. What can experiential learning offer to a student in academic and non-academic environments? (Chapter 24)
23. In the Epilogue, Haben explains why organizations should invest in accessibility and offers “While we can’t change our past, we can influence our future through the message we send.” Describe one idea for improving accessibility for someone who is deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, and/or deafblind where you work or where you live. (Epilogue)
24. Reflect on the educational, professional, familial, and social experiences Haben shared throughout the book. What makes her experiences similar to yours? What makes them different and why? How does accessibility play a role?