

Reckoning by V Reading Guide

The work of a lifetime from the Tony Award–winning, bestselling author of *The Vagina Monologues*—political, personal, profound, and more than forty years in the making—now in paperback.

The newest book from V (formerly Eve Ensler), *Reckoning* invites you to travel the journey of a writer’s and activist’s life and process over forty years, representing both the core of ideas that have become global movements and the methods through which V survived abuse and self-hatred. Seamlessly moving from the internal to the external, the personal to the political, *Reckoning* is a moving and inspiring work of prose, poetry, dreams, letters, and essays drawn from V’s lifelong journals that takes readers from Berlin to Oklahoma to the Congo, from climate disaster, homelessness, and activism to family.

Unflinching, intimate, introspective, courageous, *Reckoning* explores ways to create an unstoppable force for change, to love and survive love, to hold people and states accountable, to reckon with demons and honor the dead, to reclaim the body, and to see oneself as connected to a greater purpose. It reimagines what seems fixed and intractable, providing a path to understand one’s unique experience as deeply rooted in the world, to break through one’s own boundaries, and to write oneself into freedom.

1. In her introduction, V proposes that reckoning demands “remembering, acknowledging, and accounting.” She then discusses writing as a therapeutic tool and the ways it acts as a “witness” (page xxii). Do you turn to writing as a tool for reckoning? How does writing serve as a witness? If you don’t prefer to write, is there another tool you use instead?
2. V discusses changes in American culture during Covid. She suggests the pandemic compelled many of us to question, *What is essential to our livelihoods and happiness?* It’s been several years now since the initial lockdown. How did the answer change for V? How has it changed for you?
3. In “Mother Hunger,” V discusses writing a letter to her mother that her mother would never read. If you could write a letter to a person in your life that they would never read, what might you discuss? What is different about these letters than those intended to be read?
4. In “Battered Baby,” V discusses a parcel of photographs and ephemera her mother had left to her when she died. Why do these objects elicit such a strong reaction from V? Do you have objects that hold similar power in your life?
5. V discusses taking ownership of her own body for the first time in her life when she decides to have an abortion (page 57). Why was this such a pivotal moment for her? Is there a moment you can remember when you took ownership of your body?
6. In the chapter “Women Left for Dead and the Man Who’s Saving Them,” V discusses how “the simple act of listening” can have enormous impact for survivors healing from sexual trauma. Can you remember a moment when someone listened to you and it helped you heal? How can this passage inform the ways you make space to listen to others?
7. In the chapter “Disaster Patriarchy,” V discusses how communities of women can help manage “disasters” of a patriarchal society. How do they achieve this goal? In what ways have communities helped you survive?

8. Also in “Disaster Patriarchy,” V writes on page 99, “as powerful as patriarchy is, it’s just a story.” What does V imagine a story of liberation to look like? How has this passage informed the way you think of it?
9. In the chapter “Freeing the Birdsong,” V discusses the story her body needed to tell (page 101–102). Why does this story come from her body? What is the story your body needs to tell?
10. In the chapter “Where All the Grief,” V ponders the process of grief. What does grieving look like for her? Why is this significant to the type of pain she feels?
11. In the chapter “How do you live on the edge of what’s over?” V writes a poem of questions related to difficult topics. Choose one to five of these questions and try to answer them. What do they make you feel and think about? Refer to pages 128–129.
12. In the chapter “Dear Mother (Earth),” V shares on page 132 that she eventually wrote the apology she was waiting to hear from her father in the form of the book *The Apology*. Why was she driven to do this? To you, what is the power in writing an apology from someone else’s perspective?
13. In the final section, “Reckoning,” V outlines things she strives to be “free to” do. If you were to define your own freedom, what would you write? What would you be free to do?
14. On page 186, V asks: “what determines place?” Discuss how the book answers this question. What determines place for you?
15. In the chapter “Disruption,” V discusses the challenge of thinking “we’re fucked.” She then argues we must learn the “art and patience of disruption” to avoid that thought. What does the art and patience of disruption look like for her? How could you implement a practice of disruption into your daily life?
16. In nearly every chapter, V argues for a revolution of love. On page 91, she writes: “The failure of this century is the failure of love.” What does she mean? What does “successful” love look like to you? How does V argue it can contribute to a liberated society?

Recommended reading:

Trauma and Recovery by Judith Herman
The Myth of Normal by Gabor Maté
This Changes Everything by Naomi Klein
The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin
Lost Connections by Johann Hari
Stolen Focus by Johann Hari
The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander
Poverty, by America by Matthew Desmond
Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination by Robin Kelley
Silent Spring by Rachel Carson