If it worked once, it will work again right? Not exactly, just because something was successful in the past, does not mean that it will be appropriate for the future. Traditional education itself may have been suitable in times past, but that simply is not enough to survive the jungle that is the real world today. Experience is necessary and probably required anywhere not of the burger-and-fries variety.

Experience: what differentiates an experience from a simple happening, what makes learning outside the box so much more beneficial? Simply put, there is a difference between knowing how and being able to. You can have a student read ad nauseum about anything, be it calculus, paper writing, or scientific fact, but that does not mean those black and white typed pages are going to miraculously show them everything they need to know for everyday implementation. It takes hands on experience. Sure, traditional learning is wonderful, textbooks are informative, and hours of studying will implant thousands of formulas into the brains of college students everywhere, but what it will not do is give the students the experience needed to carryout whatever they read about in real-life scenarios. That is where nontraditional learning comes into play. It is time to think unconventionally.

Raised under Freeman’s intellectual roof, first glance would take George to be a highly educated, highly intelligent, and excellently schooled young man. Yet, George forces a second glance. With his tree house, all natural lifestyle, and high tech baidarka, George is the exact opposite of his father, or is he? While he was out studying ancient techniques, his father was examining nuclear reactions, research is research after all. Relative research is imperative to survival, survival is essential for experience, and experience is an indispensable element of an education.

In our ever advancing world, is it more crucial to be highly educated or highly intelligent? Contrary to popular belief, these two do not come hand in hand. It is one thing to be educated in the traditional, twelve to sixteen year way, and a completely different thing to have the skills, passion, and experience to effectively complete real life task. We have heard time and time again, “you can bring a horse to water, but you cannot force him to drink,” you can provide the students with the ability to learn but you cannot supply the capability to act appropriately in spur of the moment situations. Experience is the best educator, if something does not work the first time, then it will not be used again under the same circumstances. For example, would you rather undergo surgery performed by a doctor who can tell you how exactly how to complete the operation but has never actually engaged in a surgery himself, or a surgeon who not only learned through traditional methods but through a series of observations, and gradual involvement in the surgical process until he was confident and competent enough to perform his own operations? Chances are you are thinking about the hiring the second doctor, as for the first one: no experience, no thanks.
When push comes to shove, experience is valued over book smarts, real life scenarios over fabricated ones. Ideally, a traditional education would be supplemented with real life experience in order to better prepare the students for a career out in the real world but unfortunately that is not commonplace. Hands-on experience is the best teacher, no book can teach it. No book can tell a pre-med student how to react in a split second to a glitch in the surgical process; no book can prepare you to fail. No book can prepare you to know how to dust off and get back up once you fail. That takes time, experience, and advice from those who have been there and done it. Just as George modified the Aleut design of the badairka, we need to draw from the past to aid the future. We need to adapt the methods of past education to further our knowledge of today. The best education is one that allows you first hand experience, allows you to learn from your own mistakes not those made thousands of years ago by some long dead poet or scientist or astronomer. The only way to maximize your potential is to discover what your own potential is, to find who you are and what you are capable of in your own terms, in your own time, with your own mistakes and solutions.