

Study Guide Questions for *After Virginia Tech*

1. The author begins this history with what can be described as a journey through a decade of mass gun violence that started with the shootings at Virginia Tech, shocked the nation even more at Sandy Hook Elementary School, and brought horror to Orlando, Las Vegas, and many other communities. Take a moment to think about one or two of these tragedies. What do you remember about them? What do you recall about the national or state response?
2. Kristina Anderson's account of April 16, 2007, in chapter 1 takes us inside the classroom as she describes the routine morning before the attack, the terror that came afterward, and, finally, her rescue. Later in the book, she recalls hearing the first sounds of gunfire, "those few seconds of 'what is that noise,' and then very quickly the world changed." How does her detailed description add to your understanding of what takes place in a mass shooting?
3. In chapter 2 we learn details of what happened that morning and the challenges faced by students, faculty, administrators, and police. Do you think the shooter would have gone to the classroom building after the dormitory murders if the university had been in lockdown? How would the university's response be different today?
4. The author takes you behind the scenes in the early physical and emotional recoveries of Tech survivors. What surprised you about these stories in chapter 3? Are there lessons here for how individuals, communities, and institutions can help?
5. In chapter 5, Kristina Anderson talks frankly about recovery, emotional overconfidence, confronting PTSD, and graduating. Discuss what Anderson, Colin Goddard, and fellow survivors accomplished on their own and what they did with the help of others. In general, what do you think the similarities and differences are between these civilians' responses to what they experienced, how police officers deal with their trauma, and how the experiences of both groups compare to those of combat veterans?
6. The myriad accountability issues in the aftermath of the shootings are detailed in chapters 6, 7, and 12. What do you think about how authorities handled these questions?
7. The author observed early in the book that "a great trauma holds a mirror to our response. Sometimes the reflection isn't what we want to see." In looking at the mental health issues raised in chapter 11, what would a mirror show us today?
8. Colin Goddard and John Woods became nationally prominent gun-safety advocates. What are some of the key elements in their advocacy?
9. In the debate over gun control, there are some who don't believe that more laws will reduce violence. Nick Roland and Ken Stanton describe their views in chapter 14. What do you think about the positions they've supported?
10. Congress failed to act after the Sandy Hook shootings in 2012. The new Democratic majority in the U.S. House of Representatives passed a background checks bill in 2019 only to see it stall in the Republican-controlled Senate. Yet many states—now including Virginia—have passed gun-safety legislation. What could be some elements of a national strategy to reduce gun deaths?