

Point Zenith

Discussion & Reading Guide

Point Zenith is the second book in the UBU Adventure series and possibly the most challenging interactive book the imprint has yet produced. The reader is the Inventor, one of the Originals on a flooding planet called Point Zenith, whose Hydrolizer once saved the world and is now under suspicion as the cause of its collapse. The book has **only seven endings**: three generally Good and four generally Bad. Many choices loop back on themselves; the form is a maze rather than a tree, by design. For ages 14 to 17.

This guide is built for the high school classroom, the advanced middle-school reader ready for it, and the adult book club working with interactive science fiction. Six sections: themes, choice-point questions, vocabulary, classroom and book-club activities, Common Core alignment, and essay prompts.

§ SECTION 1

Themes worth pulling at

Trust and authority.

The author opens with a series of questions the reader will face on every page: *Can you trust Eleutheria? Can you trust the Original Board? Can you trust the Clones? Can you trust yourself?* Each ending in the book is, in one sense, an answer to the question of who the Inventor trusted at the wrong moment.

Identity and what makes someone real.

The Originals consider themselves True Humans. So do the Clones. The book's rules say only Originals can be saved through Leap Frog Events. The GOOD ENDING (page 184) hinges on a hidden fact about the Inventor that the reader may not see coming. What does it mean to be human in a world that classifies?

Ecological collapse and engineering hubris.

The Inventor built the Hydrolizer to save Point Zenith from flood and drought cycles. The Hydrolizer worked. Now the planet is flooding again, and the Clones think the Hydrolizer is the problem. The book asks what we owe the technologies that have saved us, and what they owe us when they begin to fail.

Power, displacement, and the colonial wound.

Originals see Clones as virus-like. Clones overpopulated, and the Originals shifted from Sustain to Harvest. The VAPORIZATION INCIDENT ENDING is, structurally, a genocide. The book does not soften this. A novel about a flooding planet is also a novel about who gets the lifeboat.

Cosmic perspective versus immediate survival.

The EXISTENTIAL ENDING shows what happens when you fix Point Zenith's flooding only to have a gamma-ray burst destroy the planet centuries later. The Inventor's timescale and the universe's timescale are not the same. The book asks whether short-term success means anything when the long view eventually arrives.

The cost of compliance.

The REINVENTION ENDING is what happens when the Inventor agrees to being remade. The VAPORIZATION ENDING is what happens when the Inventor lets others decide. The DISCONNECTING ENDING is what happens when the Inventor unplugs the system. The book is sharp about the difference between compliance, delegation, and active refusal.

§ SECTION 2

Choice-point discussion questions

These questions are tied to decision moments and ending outcomes throughout the book. Use during a class read-aloud, or revisit after a reader has reached an ending and is reflecting on the path taken.

Eleutheria and consent of the governed.

Eleutheria is an AI program that organizes Point Zenith life. She can veto the Originals' Leap Frog plans based on her latest update's calculations. What is the difference between a useful authority and a tyrannical one? Where does Eleutheria cross the line, if she does? The DISCONNECTING ENDING (page 176) is the most explicit answer the book offers; what does the Inventor have to give up to unplug?

The Originals and the Clones.

Compare how the book describes Originals and Clones in the front matter to how each ending treats them. In the GOOD ENDING (page 184), the Inventor turns out to have been a Clone all along. In the VAPORIZATION ENDING (page 196), the Clones are wiped out and the Inventor passively allows it. What is the book's argument about who counts as "True Human"? Is the argument the same in every ending?

The Hydrolizer.

The Inventor's great invention saved the planet, then began to fail. In some paths the Hydrolizer is dismantled; in others it keeps running. In the EXISTENTIAL ENDING the Hydrolizer rumbles to a stop on its own. What does the book think about the inventions that save us? Are they worth defending when they stop working as intended?

The Three-Step Process.

The Originals' Point Zenith Program uses a Three-Step Process: wildercation, unication, incorporation. These are invented words. What do they appear to mean from context? What does it suggest about a civilization when its core process has names that ordinary citizens cannot easily translate?

The Eucliddeans.

In the EUCLIDDEAN TAKEOVER ENDING, an alien species descends on Point Zenith because it prefers dry planets. The Eucliddeans are smart enough not to kill the Originals; they enslave them instead. What is the book saying about survival as a form of conquest, or about service as an alternative to death? How does this ending compare with the REINVENTION ENDING's account of survival without identity?

The whale.

The author warns in the opening note: *is it really so bad to get swallowed by a whale?* In the EXISTENTIAL ENDING the Inventor is in fact swallowed by a great black whale, after which the planet briefly stabilizes and then is destroyed centuries later. Why does the book include this image? What tradition is the whale-swallowing borrowing from? Is it tragedy, comedy, or both?

Compare the four bad endings.

REINVENTION, EXISTENTIAL, EUCLIDDEAN TAKEOVER, VAPORIZATION INCIDENT. What does each lose? Identity, cosmic continuance, freedom, an entire population. Rank them, and defend the ranking. Is one of the bad endings worse than the others, or is the book arguing that they are equally weighted forms of failure?

Compare the three good endings.

DISCONNECTING, ORIGINAL EVOLUTIONARY, GOOD END. What does each preserve? Unity (Clones + Originals), evolution (the species becomes higher), memory (the Originals stop repeating their mistakes). Which is the version of "Good" you would choose for the Inventor, and what does your choice say about your own values?

§ SECTION 3

Vocabulary and reference

The book uses an invented vocabulary common to Point Zenith life. Most of these terms are defined in the glossary in the back matter, but the discussion below pulls forward the ones most worth pausing on as a class.

Eleutheria

The artificial intelligence program that organizes the Point Zenith Republic. Named for the Greek goddess of liberty. The name choice is worth a discussion: is Eleutheria actually liberating, or has she become the thing she was meant to prevent? The novel takes both positions across different endings.

Originals and Clones

The two populations of Point Zenith. Both consider themselves True Humans. The Originals arrived first and built the Republic; the Clones came later and overpopulated the planet. The category boundary between them is enforced socially and technologically, and the GOOD ENDING reveals it may be illusory.

The Hydrolizer

The Inventor's great invention. Originally designed to maintain balance to the Tranzosphere through flood and drought cycles. Now suspected as the cause of Point Zenith's renewed flooding.

The Eucliddeans

A war-like alien species "known across the galaxies" for aggression and power-hunger. They prefer dry planets. They are intelligent enough not to kill the species they conquer; they enslave instead.

Leap Frog Event

A dangerous emergency plan, defined in the Bylaws of the Termini, to exit Point Zenith and leap to another universe in the Multiverse. Requires enormous energy that cannot be reproduced for generations. A last resort, available only to Originals.

The Three-Step Process

The Originals' Point Zenith Program: wildercation, unication, incoration. The terms are invented and opaque. The book never fully defines them, which is itself the point.

The Tranzosphere

Point Zenith's atmosphere. Dense, cloud-covered, lit by two dying suns. Contains a nitrous-like gas (Tranzo) that transmits information in ways "not even fully understood by Eleutheria." Worth a discussion about what it means when even the system's own brain does not understand the medium it is running in.

Sustain and Harvest

The Natural Order belief at the heart of Original ideology: Sustain over Harvest as the rule, Harvest as the exception. The Clones, by overpopulating, forced the inversion. The book's climate-and-population argument lives in this distinction.

LIKIWIKI

An organization of hackers who can make anything ever written and transferred through media public. Worth knowing because the book's information-control politics depend on understanding what the system is trying to keep private.

§ SECTION 4

Activities for the classroom and the book club

The "What I Chose" map.

Each student or member completes the Decision Tree Matrix (the companion download). They mark the endings they have personally reached and the order in which they reached them. Discussion: which ending did you reach first? What does the order of your choices say about your reading instincts?

The trust audit.

On a single sheet, list Eleutheria, the Original Board, the Clones, and Yourself. Next to each, rate trust from 1 to 10 based on the reading. Defend each rating with one specific scene from the book. Compare lists in pairs; surface where readers disagreed and why.

Reinvention vs. disconnection.

The REINVENTION ENDING and the DISCONNECTING ENDING both involve losing one's previous identity, but one is bad and one is good. Write 250 words on the difference. What makes one a loss and the other a liberation? Is it the agency, the destination, both, or something else?

Build a Clone bylaw.

The book never gives us the Clones' point of view formally. Write a one-page bylaw, in the voice of the Clones, that responds to the Originals' Three-Step Process. What do the Clones believe? What do they want? What would they propose instead?

The eighth ending.

There are seven endings. Write the eighth one, set on Point Zenith, in the voice of the Inventor, in no more than 300 words. Justify in a short paragraph what choices through the existing decision tree could lead to it. Is yours generally Good or generally Bad? Or does it complicate the binary?

Compare to a real-world flooding story.

Point Zenith is a science fiction planet. Earth has real flooding cities (Jakarta, New Orleans, Miami, Venice). Pick one. Compare the Inventor's choices to the choices facing planners and citizens in that real city. What does the science fiction frame let the novel say that journalism cannot?

§ SECTION 5

Common Core ELA alignment

Suggested standards alignment for grades 9 to 12. *Point Zenith* serves reading-literature, writing-narrative, and speaking-and-listening anchors well. The interactive form is itself an analytical opportunity for structural standards.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3 / RL.11-12.3 — Character development under uncertainty.

The Inventor's character emerges through the reader's decisions, not the author's. This is unusually direct material for analyzing how a protagonist's identity is constructed through choice rather than narration.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5 / RL.11-12.5 — Author's structural choices.

The book is explicitly a maze, not a tree. Many decisions loop back on themselves. The author's structural choice is the form's argument: in a flooding planet there are no clean branches, only recurring problems. Ideal for analyzing how form encodes meaning.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6 — Point of view and the second person.

The book uses second person ("you are the Inventor"). This collapses reader and protagonist in a way that intensifies the moral weight of each ending. Worth analyzing how POV decisions change the contract between writer and reader, especially in a book where the reader is implicated in genocide or rescue depending on path.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3 / W.11-12.3 — Narrative writing with branching structure.

The "Eighth ending" activity above directly serves narrative writing standards. Students produce alternative branches and justify the consequences, exercising both creative and analytical writing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7 — Analyzing how a subject is treated across mediums.

Compare *Point Zenith's* climate-collapse narrative to a documentary, a news article, or a graphic novel on the same theme. How does interactive fiction change what the reader can be asked to do?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 / SL.11-12.1 — Collaborative discussion.

The choice-point questions in Section 2 are built for small-group or whole-class discussion. The trust audit activity is the discussion engine — every reader will rate the four parties differently and the disagreement is the conversation.

§ SECTION 6

Essay prompts (for assessment or book-club writing)

- Choose two endings, one Good and one Bad. Argue, with specific textual evidence, which one represents the more honest answer to the book's central question: *who do you trust on a flooding planet?*
- The book is written in second person. Write 750 to 1,000 words analyzing how the second-person point of view changes the moral weight of the VAPORIZATION INCIDENT ENDING. Would the same ending feel different in third person? Use specific scenes.
- In the GOOD ENDING, the Inventor turns out to have been a Clone all along, mistaken by Eleutheria for an Original. Argue whether this twist is a fair payoff to the book's identity questions or a narrative cheat. Use textual evidence from at least three earlier scenes.
- Compare *Point Zenith* to a non-interactive dystopian YA novel you have read. How does the interactive form change what dystopia means in this book? What does the reader's participation give to or take from the genre?

- The author warns that being swallowed by a whale is not as bad as it sounds. Argue what the book is asking the reader to understand about endings, finality, and the cosmic frame. Use the EXISTENTIAL ENDING and at least one Good ending in your case.

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