



TEACHING & ACTIVITY GUIDE

OUTPOST ZERO

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Overview: Welcome to Outpost Zero: the smallest town in the universe. The people there work the land, go to the fights every Friday night, and tuck their children into bed... but the Outpost is no place for dreams. To survive is ambitious enough. As Alea and her friends graduate to adulthood under the artificial sky of a faulty biome, on a frozen world never meant to support human life... something stirs. Something sees.

IMPORTANT SETTINGS

- Outpost Zero
- The Frost
- The Airlock
- Beneath the Outpost

KEY THEMES

- Discovery
- Survival
- Deception
- Trust
- Loss
- Family
- Grief
- Surviving vs Thriving
- Forbidden Knowledge

NOTABLE CHARACTERS

- Alea: Daughter of Jann and Denis. Plans to join the Discovery Team, like her parents.
- Steven: Friend of Alea and Lyss. Loses his life in the frost . . . or so it seems.
- Jann: Alea's mother. On the Discovery Team.
- Denis: Alea's father. Also on the Discovery Team.
- Mitchell: Aspiring fighter, Maddie's twin brother. An angry young man.
- Maddie: Mitchell's twin sister, adrift in addiction.
- Lyss: Friend of Alea, Steven, and Mitchell, with "no particular aptitude." Free-spirited and adventurous.
- Sam: Stepson of "the Chief," Karen. Friend of Steven, object of Mitchell's loathing.
- Karen/The Chief: Sam's foster mother. In charge of the Discovery Team.
- Doctor Xi: Ailing elder of Outpost Zero. Close family friend of Karen and Sam.
- "Otto": A robot initially designed to "provide sustenance to the crew of Genship Zero-Eight." Now the self-appointed steward of the cats of Outpost Zero.
- The Alien: A mysterious beast lurking in the bowels of the Genship. Horrifying in appearance, but intelligent and capable of communicating, though its intentions are unclear.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the society presented in Outpost Zero? Do the inhabitants of the genship seem to have a full understanding of how to use the technologies at their disposal? Support your answers with evidence from the text.
2. Why do you think Mitchell is so cruel to Sam? How does Sam react to him? What does this suggest about their personalities?
3. Throughout Outpost Zero, Sam repeatedly views a holographic video of a woman speaking, and as the story progresses we learn more about this video. Why is Sam so fascinated by the video? What does he eventually learn about its origin? How does he react to what he learns?
4. How do Steven's friends and family react to his (presumed) death? What do their reactions say about the nature of the society in which they live?
5. What is Lyss's "singularity"? What does her anticipation and enjoyment of this event tell you about her as a character?
6. Many of the characters in Outpost Zero have secrets of one kind or another. Pick two of the characters, and answer these questions: What are their secrets? Are they good at keeping those secrets? Are they good at keeping other people's secrets? Do their secrets change over the course of the story?
7. What do we learn about Mitchell's family and their past? In what ways do you think this influences his choice to become a fighter, a brutal and dangerous career?
8. What has happened to Maddie? Why do you think she has ended up this way? What effect does it have on the other characters? Do you think there is more anyone could do to help her?
9. Think about a time when you took a risk, whether it was a physical leap of faith like Alea's, or making yourself vulnerable emotionally. What did you do to prepare yourself for the risk? Did it end up paying off? What did it teach you about risk taking in life, if anything?
10. Consider the concept of "universe." What is humanity's relationship with our own universe? Do you ever consider your relationship with societies outside of your own? How could you apply this to fictional worlds and societies?
11. More than once in Outpost Zero, characters learn information that changes how they view their world. Highlight a few examples of this in the text. What does the character learn, and what impact does it have on them? Can you think of an occasion when you've learned something that has changed the way you thought or felt in a major way?
12. Outpost Zero depicts different ways of grieving loss. Alea cries and is solemn, Lyss relies on recalling happy memories. Mitchell's rage escalates and he lashes out. Think of a time when you have experienced grief or loss (or imagine it, if you have not). What ways did/would you deal with your feelings? What do we learn about these characters based on their coping mechanisms?



ACTIVITY IDEAS

1. Have you ever had a recurring dream? Draw a scene from it (or an imaginary dream). Write one to two sentences about what you think the dream means. Once this is complete, share with your student group if you feel comfortable.
2. Characters in Outpost Zero make a distinction between “thriving” and simply “surviving.” What, to you, is the difference between surviving and thriving? What does “thriving” look like? Does striving only to survive necessarily mean you have “given up hope”? Write one or two paragraphs or draw a short comic on this topic.
3. The characters in Outpost Zero have very specific roles assigned to them by the social structure of the Genship. Throughout human history, societal roles and identity have often been deeply connected (for instance, someone’s whose last name is Baker, probably had an ancestor who was a baker!) What role do you play in your family? What role do you plan on playing in society? How do people navigate breaking out of the roles that society expects them to play and into their own way of doing things? Can you give real world examples of this?
4. Imagine you are in the far future. What role would you take on to help an Outpost survive in a new world? Would it be one of the jobs in the book or a new one? Compare your answers with other students.
5. Lyss borrows ancient earbuds that include only a song or two, which she listens to on repeat. Design a playlist of five songs using an online music streaming service or by making a list that includes links to information about the songs. Explain why you picked the songs and what they represent.



TEACHER'S KEY

Reading/Interest Level: Ages 13-18 /Grades 9+

Common Core Aligned Pre-Reading Key Ideas and Details

- Text to World: When and where does this story take place? What assumptions can you make about the future of humanity as envisioned by Outpost Zero, based on hints given in the text? How does this imagined future relate to where we are now, socially and technologically?
- Text to Media: Other film and television about space exploration and human settlements/survival in space: Star Wars, Battlestar Galactica, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Lost in Space, The Martian.
- Text to Text: The role of the "space exploration" tale in the history of great adventure/exploration literature, from Robinson Crusoe to Rendezvous with Rama.
- Text to History: What do tales of space exploration and discovery derive from historical narratives of exploration? Consider real-life explorers/settlers and popular adventure narratives around exploration, in contrast with the brutal history of colonization and treatment of indigenous peoples.

TEACHING GUIDE

Engage: Societal expectations, jobs/roles vs. individuality and free will.

- Do you feel you have a plan or "role" set out for you, the way several characters in Outpost Zero do? If so, was this planned out for you, or did you consent and contribute? If it was planned without you, why do you think that is, and how do you feel about it?
- Do the characters' relationships to their chosen paths change over the course of the book? Have your own feelings about your goals - or lack thereof - changed over time?
- In Outpost Zero, survival is tenuous and the future is uncertain. How does that resemble our own society in this cultural moment? How does it differ? Do you relate to these characters?

Explore: Have students explore other books, films, and/or television shows that deal with interstellar exploration and human survival in space.

- Identify similarities and differences in different visions of space exploration.
- What are the differences between more optimistic and more pessimistic visions of space travel? What do the differences suggest about the time/society from which these stories originated?
- What would survival in space require? Are outposts like Outpost Zero possible within the next two-to-three generations?



Explain: Narratives of exploration, survival, and perseverance.

- How does Outpost Zero fit in the tradition of “human vs. nature” narratives? What about “human vs. society”?
- How do exploration stories reflect how a society sees itself at that time, both positive and negative? What does Outpost Zero reflect about our current society?
- What is the role of “the alien” in exploration stories - interstellar and otherwise? How does that vary amongst stories, and change over time? How have actual encounters of different cultures informed these stories?

Elaborate: Outpost Zero ends with adventures to be had but secrets and mistrust brewing beneath the surface. Have students explore where they think the story will go from here:

- What effects will the secrets and ulterior motives revealed at the end of this book have on the Discovery Team?
- What does the alien want? Is the information it is revealing truthful? Is it trustworthy?
- How have the characters’ relationships changed over the course of the book? What changes may be likely to occur as the story progresses?

RECOMMENDED TITLES FOR FURTHER READING

- *Clementine Book One* by Tillie Walden. Image Comics, 2022.
- *The Sacrifice of Darkness* by Roxanne Gay, illustrated by Tracy Lynne Oliver. Archaia, 2020.
- *Wonder Woman: Warbringer* by Leigh Bardugo, adapted by Louise Simonson, illustrated by Kit Seaton. DC Comics, 2020.
- *Scales & Scoundrels Definitive Edition Book 1: Where Dragons Wander* by Sebastian Girner, illustrated by Galaad, lettering by Jeff Powell. TKO Studios, 2021.

