



# Elsewhere

By Gabrielle Zevin

Teacher's Guide

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LIVING  
LITERATURE  
SERIES

A Perma-Bound Production

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## Synopsis

### PROLOGUE: IN THE END

Lucy, Elizabeth (Liz) Marie Hall's beloved pug dog, thinks about her mistress's death at age fifteen. In the park, Lucy talks with Bandit, another dog, about the tragic loss.

### PART I: THE NILE

#### At Sea

Liz wakes in a strange bed in strange room. Thandiwe (Thandi) Washington, a girl around Liz's age, is in the top bunk. Liz is bald; Thandi has a bullet wound in her head. Both girls are having trouble placing where they are and why.

#### Curtis Jest

The girls go into the hall, where they meet the other passengers, who are mainly elderly. They meet Curtis Jest, a musician with track marks from drug use. Liz begins to realize that she is dead, killed in a hit-and-run accident while she was riding her bicycle to the mall. She also realizes that the Nile is a ship.

#### In Memory of Elizabeth Marie Hall

During the journey, Thandi says that she misses her boyfriend. Liz realizes that she has a long row of stitches on her head and begins to remember more about the accident. Liz receives an invitation to the observation deck and a coin, one "eternim." On the observation deck, Liz inserts the coin into a set of binoculars and sees her own funeral. She realizes that she is dead and that Curtis died of a drug overdose. As they talk, he spots land.

### PART II: THE BOOK OF THE DEAD

#### Welcome to Elsewhere

The ship arrives at Elsewhere. The passengers are excited, hoping they will see people they love who have died. Liz, however, decides not to go ashore. Meanwhile, Betty Bloom, Liz's grandmother, is driving to the dock to meet Liz. They have never met because Betty died of breast cancer before Liz was born. The captain, a young boy, rousts Liz from her room and sends her to the dock.

There, Liz meets Betty, who looks familiar to her because she resembles Liz's mother, Olivia. Betty explains that in Elsewhere, people grow younger rather than older. Betty is sure that Liz will love living in Elsewhere, but Liz is not so sure.

#### A Long Drive Home

As they drive to Betty's house, Betty explains that many famous people continue to be creative in Elsewhere, while others take entirely new jobs. Although Elsewhere is beautiful, Liz is despairing, intractable, sullen, and furious. As they drive, she explodes: "You mean I'll never go to college or get married or get big boobs or live on my own or get my driver's license

or fall in love?" To calm Liz down, Betty lets her drive the car home, but it does not go well, as Liz has a small crash. Betty explains more about life on Elsewhere: everyone ages backwards until they become a baby. When the babies are seven days old, they are sent back to Earth to be born anew, a process called "Release."

#### Waking

Liz remembers more of the accident, specifically that she was hit by a taxi cab. Liz attends her acclimation appointment at the Registry building.

#### A Circle and a Line

The peevish Yetta Brown sends Liz to watch a



movie about Elsewhere, but Liz dozes through much of it. Liz then meets her acclimation counselor, Aldous Ghent. A kindly man, Aldous reassures her that it takes time to get used to the after-life. Aldous guides Liz to choose her avocation. Liz considers working with dogs in some capacity, but she is still too sullen and depressed to focus. She has a year to decide on her avocation. Aldous explains that a place called the "Well" is forbidden and that Liz can exercise the "Sneaker Clause" within the year, but Liz cuts him off before getting a full explanation.

#### **Last Words**

Liz must next verify her last words, which were a disappointing "um." Thandi's last words were much more colorful and profane. Aldous is delighted that a position has opened in the Division of Domestic Animals in the Department of Acclimation. Aldous asks Liz if she speaks the dog language "Canine" and she says no.

#### **Sightseeing**

Liz spies on her family and friends through the magical coin-operated binoculars on the Observation Deck. She sees that her parents and younger brother Alvy are mourning her death very deeply. A month passes with Liz getting more and more obsessed with her family and friends on Earth. Betty, deeply worried, takes Liz to one of Elsewhere's beautiful beaches, but Liz continues to take more and more money from her grandmother for time on the binoculars.

#### **Lucky Cab**

Looking through the binoculars, Liz locates the cab that hit her and obsessively tracks the driver, Amadou Bonamy. Liz goes to see Curtis, who has happily become a fisherman, which Liz cannot understand. Why would a famous rock musician want to be a fisherman, she thinks. She asks Curtis how to contact the living, and he reluctantly explains that he has heard that it can be done through a place called the "Well."

#### **The Big Dive**

Liz continues to spy on Amadou Bonamy and readers see that he is a kindly man whose son is very ill. Liz lies to her grandmother to get money to buy a wetsuit for her dive down to the Well. Meanwhile, Liz sheds some of her anger at Amadou when she realizes that she shares the fault for her fatal acci-

dent because she did not look both ways when she crossed the street that fateful day. Betty and Liz talk and Betty admits that she had an affair, which caused a breach with Liz's mother. Betty tells Liz that she has been lonely for a very long time. The next day, Liz calls Aldous to accept the position at the Division of Domestic Animals.

#### **Sadie**

Liz goes to the Division of Domestic Animals and realizes to her astonishment that she does indeed speak "Canine." She speaks to a recently deceased dog named Sadie and ends up adopting her. She also counsels an insecure Chihuahua named Paco who cannot understand where his owner Pete has gone. Back home, Betty accepts Sadie graciously.

#### **The Well**

Thanks to her job, Liz pays back Betty all the eternims she borrowed and finds that she is spending much less time at the binoculars watching her friend and family on Earth. Thandi also loves her avocation, working as a television newscaster. However, Liz is very upset that her father might not get the cashmere sweater that she had bought for his birthday, which she has hidden in her room. To make sure that he gets the gift, Liz decides to dive to the Well and tell her brother Alvy about it. Liz's attempt to do a good deed backfires miserably when Alvy misunderstands the message, thinking the sweater is hidden in his parents' closet. Mr. and Mrs. Hall are very upset, thinking Alvy made the whole thing up. Detective Owen Welles of the Elsewhere Bureau of Supernatural Crime and Contact arrests her, but Liz refuses to be intimidated by him. Owen sympathizes with Liz, but does not tell her.

#### **A Piece of String**

Liz discovers that the stitches behind her ear have gone, which causes her to sob uncontrollably. Liz tells Betty about the dive and arrest. Liz lists the five things she misses most about Earth, ending with her pocket watch.

#### **Owen Welles Takes a Dive**

Owen had been a fireman on Earth. He had married to his childhood sweetheart Emily, a doctor, but their marriage ended when he was killed in a fire. Nonetheless, Owen has never gotten over his love. Owen dives down to the Well and tells Alvy where the sweater is really hidden. Liz invites

Owen to Thanksgiving, and he accepts.

### Thanksgiving

The party also includes Aldous and his wife Rowena, Thandi and her cousin Shelly, and several dogs. They have a wonderful holiday. Owen resolves to call Liz for a date, realizing that although he has been in Elsewhere for a decade, his most significant relationship is with his wife, even though he is dead.

### A Mystery

Owen and Liz are falling in love. Owen adopts a dog named Jen. Owen invites Liz to dinner and then gives her driving lessons, which are their dates. Liz masters parallel parking.

### Liz in Love

Liz and Owen celebrate Christmas together. Owen takes Liz to the drive-in movies many times. Liz sees Owen's tattoo "Emily Forever."

### Arrivals

Owen's wife Emily arrives in Elsewhere, having died of the flu, and moves in with Owen. This disrupts the growing relationship between Owen and Liz. Emily is allergic to the dog, Jen, and brings the dog to live with Liz. The dog is furious, as Owen had promised to love her forever. Ironically, Emily can understand and speak Canine. Owen is surprised when ambitious Emily wants to be a librarian and even more shocked to find that things are not the same between him and Emily. Liz and Owen kiss, and Emily sees them but is not at all upset. Nonetheless, Owen tells Liz that he loves Emily and must stay with her. He cannot be with Liz.

### The Sneaker Clause

Aldous reminds Liz that she has been on Elsewhere close to a year and can exercise the Sneaker Clause if she so desires. Owen is surprised that his tattoo has vanished.

### To Earth

Liz decides to exercise the Sneaker Clause and return to Earth as a baby. She is swaddled and taken to the River. Meanwhile, Curtis tells Betty and Owen what Liz has done. They race to the river. Curtis and Betty fall in love.

### At the Bottom of the Ocean, in the Land Between Elsewhere and Earth

Liz decides that she has made a terrible mistake and frees herself from her swaddling. Owen rescues her.

### Restoration

Liz recuperates for two weeks. Curtis asks Liz's permission to court Betty, which Liz eagerly grants. Owen gives Liz a gold watch to replace the one that she had lost. It is very different from her old watch, but Liz finds that she likes it very much anyway.

### PART III: ANTIQUE LANDS

#### Time Passes

Five years pass. Liz realizes that happiness is a choice and that she has chosen to be happy.

#### Two Weddings

Owen gives Liz a message in a bottle that he found, a message in a bottle being a method of communication from Earth to Elsewhere. The message is from Zooney, Liz's best friend on Earth, an invitation to her wedding. Liz and Owen dive to the Well, where Liz yells a message of congratulation to her friend. Alvy hears her and they have a sweet and loving communication. Betty and Curtis marry.

#### The Change

Liz turns eight; Sadie becomes a puppy again. Sadie undergoes the Release and Liz's pug Lucy arrives in Elsewhere and rejoins Liz.

#### Amadou

Amadou arrives in Elsewhere where his son has long ago come. Amadou explains that he did not stop the day that he hit Liz because he was afraid of losing his job, as his son was very ill. Liz explains that she long ago forgave him.

#### Childhood

Owen is six; Liz is four. At a poignant moment, Liz loses the ability to read, as she is very young.

#### Birth

Liz is Released, sent back to Earth to be raised as someone's baby.

#### What Liz Thinks

Liz views the other babies on her way down the river.

EPILOGUE: AT THE BEGINNING

A baby girl is born. She laughs.

## Timeline of Modern Events that Impact Fantasy Literature

<b>1970</b>	liquid crystal watches go on market
<b>1971</b>	CAT scan becomes available
<b>1972</b>	pocket calculator hits market
<b>1973</b>	car airbags introduced
<b>1974</b>	barcodes added on supermarket products
<b>1975</b>	home computers become available
<b>1976</b>	VHS and Betamax introduced
<b>1977</b>	first complete genetic structure of an organism found (Great Britain) first flight of the Space Shuttle first commercial flight of supersonic Concorde between New York, Paris, and London USA admits testing neutron bomb Trans-Alaska Pipeline starts oil flowing from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez
<b>1978</b>	Louise Brown, first baby conceived through vitro fertilization, is born
<b>1979</b>	graphical user interface developed
<b>1980</b>	Sony Walkman introduced
<b>1981</b>	compact disks hit the market
<b>1982</b>	video keyhole surgery first accomplished
<b>1983</b>	synthetic human insulin approved for sale
<b>1984</b>	DNA fingerprinting introduced
<b>1985</b>	first dotcom registered
<b>1986</b>	laptop computer for sale to consumers
<b>1987</b>	Prozac hits the market
<b>1988</b>	first Internet virus attack; 10% of online computers disabled
<b>1989</b>	toaster becomes first appliance controlled over the Internet
<b>1990</b>	first gene therapy accomplished (four-year-old girl with an immune disorder)
<b>1991</b>	Internet browser developed (spawns World Wide Web)
<b>1992</b>	text messaging introduced
<b>1993</b>	Global Positioning Satellite introduced
<b>1994</b>	genetically modified tomatoes hit market

<b>1995</b>	<i>Toy Story</i> , the first entirely computer-generated feature film, is released
<b>1996</b>	The Hubble Ultra Deep Field photograph reveals some 10,000 galaxies at a distance between 2.5 billion and 10.5 billion light years from earth
<b>1997</b>	Dolly the sheep, first mammal cloned from an adult cell, is born
<b>1998</b>	first segment of the International Space Station launched
<b>1999</b>	electronic reusable paper invented
<b>2000</b>	Y2K panic sweeps the world
<b>2001</b>	implanted microchips give sight to three blind men
<b>2002</b>	iris (eye) scanners first used for airport security cosmic background radiation revealed to be polarized
<b>2003</b>	China becomes the third country to put a human being in orbit
<b>2004</b>	Sedna, a large orbiting body, is discovered and revealed to be just one of many new planetoids
<b>2005</b>	NASA launches Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter
<b>2006</b>	Scientists decide that Pluto is not a true planet Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter lands
<b>2007</b>	NASA's Dawn Mission begins eight-year, 3.2 billion-mile journey to the beginning of the solar system. Apple releases the iPhone, a multimedia and Internet-enabled cell phone that includes a camera, portable media player, text messaging, and visual voicemail.

### Author Sketch

Gabrielle Zevin was born in 1977 in New York City, where she currently makes her home. Zevin earned her undergraduate degree from Harvard University in 2000. Although perhaps best known to the general public for her three novels (the others being *Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac* and *Margarettown*), Zevin is more involved in her career as a screenwriter. Several of her screenplays have been optioned, and one, *Conversations with Other Women*, was recently produced. For her work on the film, Gabrielle was nominated for a 2007 Independent Spirit Award.

In a biography posted on her website, Zevin noted: "When I was around eight, I learned how to touch type at school, and I received a computer as a present. ... I started writing plays and for many years, I thought I would be a playwright. Over the years, I had studiously managed to write everything but novels—I had been a copious pen pal, a first-class transcriptionist, a professional screenwriter (still am, actually), a teen music reviewer, a mediocre research paper-writer, and of course, a writer of plays. So, although I was not writing novels, I was always writing something. Actually, I hadn't ever felt any particular calling to be a novelist, and I clearly remember telling a friend of mine about six months before I started work on *Elsewhere* that I would NEVER write a novel. And then I thought of the idea for *Elsewhere*, which did not seem to want to be a play or a screenplay. It kept sounding awfully novel-ish in my head, and though I was a little scared, I just sat in front of my computer and started to type. So it was fortunate that I liked typing, because I would be typing Liz's story for many a moon."

## Selected Other Works by Gabrielle Zevin

### NOVELS

*Margarettown*, 2005

*Memories of a Teenage Amnesiac*, 2007

### SCREENPLAYS

(And producer and designer) *Alma Mater*, produced 2002

*Conversations with Other Women* (screenplay), produced 2005

*After Dark*, produced 2008

## Critic's Corner

*Elsewhere* received excellent reviews. For instance, Charles de Lint, reviewing the novel in the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, commented that Zevin's fiction debut "makes for a most absorbing and fascinating read" because the author "peoples her book with such an interesting cast of characters." *Publishers Weekly* noted "even readers who have strong views on what happens after death may find themselves intrigued by the fascinating world of *Elsewhere*."

*Booklist* called *Elsewhere* "a work of powerful beau-

ty. ... This inventive novel slices right to the bone of human yearning, offering up an indelible vision of life and death as equally rich sides of the same coin." *Horn Book* said the novel "rewards readers with a view of death that celebrates the rich complexities of being alive." *School Library Journal* found the novel "intriguing." The critic for *Kirkus Reviews* concluded that *Elsewhere* has "an unusual premise and a thoughtful treatment... [the novel] will captivate teens ready for a thought-provoking read. Hopeful and engaging."

*Elsewhere* was nominated for a 2006 Quill Award and won the Borders Original Voices Award. Reviewing the novel, *The New York Times* wrote, "Every so often a book comes along with a premise so fresh and arresting it seems to exist in a category all its own. ... *Elsewhere*, by Gabrielle Zevin, is such a book." *Elsewhere* has been translated into seventeen languages.

## Bibliography

### Periodicals

*Booklist*, April 15, 2006, Traci Todd, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 70.

*Bookseller*, August 12, 2005, Becky Stradwick, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 28.

*Bookwatch*, January, 2006, review of *Elsewhere*.

*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, September, 2005, Deborah Stevenson, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 58.

*Horn Book*, September-October, 2005, Kitty Flynn, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 591; January-February, 2006, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 12.

*Kirkus Reviews*, August 15, 2005, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 925.

*Kliatt*, May, 2006, Janet Julian, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 43.

*Library Journal*, Janis Flint-Ferguson, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 16.

*Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, April, 2006, Charles de Lint, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 32.

*Publishers Weekly*, August 29, 2005, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 57.

*School Library Journal*, October, 2005, Sharon Grover, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 180.

*Times Educational Supplement*, December 9, 2005, Geraldine Brennan, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 18.

*Voice of Youth Advocates*, April, 2006, Pam Spencer Holley, review of *Elsewhere*, p. 31.

**Online**

Gabrielle Zevin's official website, [www.memoirsofa.com/](http://www.memoirsofa.com/)  
Contemporary Authors Online, Thomson Gale, 2007.  
Teenreads profile of Gabrielle Zevin [www.teenreads.com/authors/au-zevin-gabrielle.asp](http://www.teenreads.com/authors/au-zevin-gabrielle.asp).

**Biographical information**

[wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabrielle\\_Zevin](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabrielle_Zevin)  
Interview with Gabrielle Zevin, [www.nantucketindependent.com/news/2006/0614/The\\_Arts/025.html](http://www.nantucketindependent.com/news/2006/0614/The_Arts/025.html)  
Interview with Gabrielle Zevin, [www.imdb.com/name/nm0955251/](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0955251/) - 21k  
Interview with Gabrielle Zevin, [thelongstockings.blogspot.com/2007/10/gabrielle-zevin-stops-by-for-chat.html](http://thelongstockings.blogspot.com/2007/10/gabrielle-zevin-stops-by-for-chat.html)  
Interview with Gabrielle Zevin, <http://bloomsbury.com/> "Gabrielle Zevin."  
Interview with Gabrielle Zevin, <http://www.fsgkidsbooks.com/>

**General Objectives**

1. To recognize that the novel is a fantasy
2. To comprehend the author's vision of the afterlife
3. To compare and contrast life on Elsewhere to life on Earth
4. To appreciate the novel's humor, especially its sly wit
5. To trace the developing friendship between Liz and Owen
6. To identify how Liz matures
7. To grasp the novel's primary themes
8. To analyze the novel's main symbols
9. To describe the novel's plot
10. To evaluate the novel's ending.

**Specific Objectives**

1. To distinguish between realistic and non-realistic elements in the novel, such as the realistic driving lessons and the fantasy "Well"
2. To appreciate the difficulty Liz initially has in accepting that she has died
3. To determine why Amadou did not stop his cab when he struck Liz
4. To understand that people in the afterlife have

the opportunity to pursue occupations that satisfy their souls

5. To evaluate the role that dogs play in the novel
6. To sympathize with the grief that Liz's parents and brother feel at her death
7. To trace the Egyptian motif in the novel
8. To explore the symbolism of the pocket watch, wrist watch, cashmere sweater, snow globe, garden, and so on
9. To discuss the author's message about the importance of using the time that you have to make a good life
10. To decide whether or not the novel's ending is logical, based on the plot

**Literary Terms and Applications**

For a better understanding of Gabrielle Zevin's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

**Fantasy:** a kind of writing that describes events that could not take place in real life. Fantasy has unrealistic characters, settings, and events. The entire concept of Elsewhere is based on fantasy: the afterlife as similar to life, except people are free to pursue their avocations and rather than dying at the end of their lives, they lose years until they become babies and are reborn at the "Release." Humor: parts of a story that are funny. Zevin wisely leavens her deeply serious story with amusing touches of humor. For instance, when Liz arrives at the Office of Acclimation, she is greeted with the following sign: "SO YOU'RE DEAD, NOW WHAT? The Office of Acclimation is here to help." We would not expect to encounter bureaucracy, even helpful bureaucracy, in the afterlife. (page 67) Similarly, on page 99, Zevin resurrects an old Burma shave ad with a new twist: "YOU MAY BE DEAD, BUT YOUR BEARD GROWS ON, LADIES HATE STUBBLE, EVEN IN THE BEYOND. BURMA SHAVE." On page 103, Betty takes Liz to the beach and buys her a T-shirt whose slogan reads: "MY GRANDMOTHER WENT TO ELSEWHERE AND ALL SHE GOT ME WAS THIS STINKY T-SHIRT," a play on the t-shirts often found at vacation locations. It is humorous that the afterlife would have t-shirts for sale, as though death were merely a vacation stop.

**Symbolism:** occurs when an image stands for something other than what was expected. The ocean, for example, may be said to symbolize "eter-

nity” and the phrase “river to the sea” could stand for “life flowing into afterlife.” In most instances the symbol does not directly reveal what it stands for; rather, the meaning must be discovered through a close reading of the literary work and an understanding of conventional literary and cultural symbols. For example, we realize that the “stars and stripes” stands for the American flag. We know this because we are told it is so, for the flag itself in no way looks like the United States. Without cultural agreement, many of the symbols we commonly accept would be meaningless. *Elsewhere* is rich in symbolism. Liz’s pocket watch from her father and the wristwatch that Owen gives her both represent the importance of living every moment to the fullest. The former watch represents Liz’s life on Earth; the latter, her life in Elsewhere. In one of the last chapters, Liz attempts to read a passage from Natalie Babbitt’s *Tuck Everlasting*, a meditation on the march of time and change. Liz is too young to read, having become four years old, again showing the swift passage of time and the importance of seizing the moment.

## The Importance of Setting

The novel’s setting is critical to its meaning because the setting determines the entire plot and theme. When the novel opens, Liz has died and she is on her way to Elsewhere, an elaborately conceived afterlife. Elsewhere is a resolutely secular island realm of surprising physical solidity—no fluffy white clouds, harps, or pearly gates in this novel. In Elsewhere, the dead exist much as they once did—except that no one dies or is born, and aging occurs in reverse, culminating when the departed are returned to Earth as infants to start the life cycle again.

## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Fiction

Mitch Albom, *For One More Day*  
 Natalie Babbitt, *Tuck Everlasting*  
 Dannion Brinkley, *Saved by the Light*  
 Kevin Brockmeier, *The Brief History of the Dead*  
 Sylvia Browne, *Life on the Other Side: A Psychic’s Tour of the Afterlife*  
 Sylvia Browne, *Visits from the Afterlife*  
 Chris Crutcher, *The Sledding Hill*  
 Matthew Dovel, *My Last Breath*

Betty Eadie, *Embraced by the Light*  
 Adele Griffin, *Where I Want to Be*  
 Kathie Jordan, *The Birth Called Death: The Remarkable Story of One Woman’s Journey to the Other Side of Life*  
 Martine Leavitt, *Keturah and Lord Death*  
 Lois Lowry, *The Giver*  
 Raymond Moody, *The Light Beyond*  
 Melvin Morse, *Closer to the Light*  
 Don Piper, *90 Minutes in Heaven: A True Story of Death*  
 George G. Ritchie, *Return from Tomorrow*  
 Alice Seabold, *Lovely Bones*  
 Kimberly Sharp, *After the Light: What I Discovered on the Other Side of Life that can Change Your World*  
 Gary Soto, *The Afterlife*  
 Howard Storm, *My Descent Into Death: A Second Chance at Life*  
 Kevin Williams, *Nothing Better than Death*

### Drama

Thornton Wilder, *Our Town*

### Nonfiction

John Clute, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*  
 Vincent Di Fate, *Infinite Worlds: The Fantastic Visions of Science Fiction*  
 Frank M. Robinson, *Science Fiction of the 20th Century: An Illustrated History*  
 Robert Silverberg, *Reflections and Refractions: Thoughts on Science-Fiction, Science, and Other Matters*

### Audiocassettes

*Elsewhere*

### DVDs/TV

*Defending Your Life*  
*Escape from Heaven*  
*Heaven Can Wait*  
*Made in Heaven*  
*Michael*  
*Oh God!*  
*Waiting for Mr. Jordan*  
*What Dreams May Come*

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Gabrielle Zevin’s *Elsewhere* should include these aspects:

**Themes**

- afterlife
- communication
- death
- dogs
- family
- friendship
- loneliness
- love
- maturity
- time

**Motifs**

- comparing the author’s view of the afterlife with your own conception of the afterlife
- pursuing your avocation and working for the pleasure it gives you
- understanding and accepting that everyone is mortal
- communicating with pets
- cherishing your family and friends
- appreciating humor
- dealing with loneliness
- making the most of the time you are given
- falling in love
- coping with great loss and grief

**Meaning Study**

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. “In the end, the end of a life only matters to friends, family, and other folks you used to know,” the pug whimpers miserably. (p. 6)  
*(In the prologue to the novel, Lucy the pug serves as a speaker for the author, who believes that our lives have meaning because of those we affect. For everyone else, our death is just another death. This is one of the novel’s primary themes, as Liz forges new relationships in Elsewhere and touches the lives of others who will mourn her when she is Released, including the readers of this novel.)*
2. She knows what she had, until now, only suspected: she is dead. (p. 31)  
*(In this scene, Liz is watching her own funeral. It finally hits her that she has indeed died, some-*

*thing she had suspected, given her change in circumstances, but not really believed. The realization that she is dead leaves her curiously empty, however, neither sad nor angry. Those emotions come later and forcefully.)*

3. “Oh no, no, no,” Aldous says, “An avocation is not a job.” (p. 74)  
*(One of the delights of Elsewhere is that people work at jobs that satisfy their souls. They are paid for their labor, too. As a result, they no longer have to toil for prestige and to satisfy the dreams and desires of others. Liz finds her avocation counseling newly-dead dogs, Betty finds hers as a seamstress, and Curtis finds his as a fisherman, for instance.)*
4. “Dead,” Aldous says, “is little more than a state of mind. Many people on Earth spend their whole lives dead, but you’re probably too young to understand what I mean.” (p.86)  
*(The author states one of her primary themes outright in this passage: we must make the most of the time we have been given by living consciously and deliberately. Naturally, we cannot always do what we want to do—nor should we—but we can do our best to make each day count.)*
5. “People, you’ll find, aren’t usually all good or all bad.” (p.123)  
*(In this scene, Liz wonders why Amadou did not stop when he hit her with his cab. She cannot fathom what would make someone commit a hit-and-run. Betty counsels her that people may be a little good and a lot bad, or mostly good with a little bad. Most people, she says, fall somewhere in the middle. Liz finds this is just the case when she meets Amadou years later when he arrives in Elsewhere.)*
6. “I’ve been here before. And the truth is, intimacy doesn’t have all that much to do with the backseats of cars. Real intimacy is brushing your teeth together.” (p.186)  
*(Owen has been taking Liz to the drive-in movies, but they are not having sexual relations in the back seat. When Liz questions why they are not doing so, Owen replies with this comment about intimacy. His wisdom helps Liz realize that love and closeness take time and effort to develop, as they are built from many, many*



daily encounters and shared routines.)

7. "Nothing. It's only to say that just because someone did something before doesn't mean they have to do it still." (p.212)  
*(Owen explains the importance of self-determination to Liz, but she is still too inexperienced to understand. She calls Owen a "coward" and walks away. Owen realizes what Liz does not: we have the power to think, to remake ourselves, to determine some of our fate. In short, we have free will.)*
8. If you are going to forgive a person, Liz decides, it's best to do it sooner rather than later. (p. 235)  
*(This scene occurs very close to the end of the novel and Liz has come to realize that later can be sooner than you realize. She understands that we may not have a second chance to tell someone that we love them, to do a good deed, to apologize for a misstep. Liz has realized that Owen, like all people, is flawed, and she chooses to accept him for his flaws. She has matured. Ironically, of course, she is growing younger so she will not be able to build on her new-found maturity.)*
9. A month later, Liz changes her mind when an aged pug named Lucy arrives in Elsewhere. (p. 261)  
*(The novel has come full circle: it opened with Lucy the pug mourning Liz's death and it draws to a close with Lucy's own death and her arrival in Elsewhere. This parallelism gives the novel greater unity and coherence.)*
10. Amadou shakes his head. "Can you ever forgive me?" (p. 265)  
*(At the end of the novel, we find out why the cab driver who struck Liz did not stop his cab: his son is very ill. He was worried that he might have lost his cab in a lawsuit or been forced to pay a great deal of money. He was desperate to protect his family. He is a mix of good and bad, as Liz's grandmother Betty had explained characterizes most people. Liz concludes correctly that a good man did a bad thing and explains that she forgave him many years ago. Again in this scene we see Liz's maturity, a sharp contrast to her character when she arrived in Elsewhere.)*

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

### Questions 15 (Literal Level)

- How did Liz Hall die?  
*(She was hit by a taxi cab while riding her bicycle to the mall.)*
- How did Curtis Just die?  
*(He died of a drug overdose.)*
- What is the "Sneaker Clause"?  
*(People who die very young, age sixteen and under, can be sent back to Earth early, as babies. People who qualify for the clause have one year to exercise it.)*
- What is the "Well"?  
*(The Well, the deepest place in the ocean on Elsewhere, contains a window where residents of Elsewhere can penetrate to Earth. At the Well, people on Earth can see and hear the speakers from Elsewhere. However, people on Elsewhere are strictly forbidden from making contact from the Well to residents of Earth.)*
- What is the "Release"?  
*(When a resident of Elsewhere reverts to age zero, he or she becomes a baby again. When a baby is seven days old, it is sent down the River back to Earth to be born anew. This is called the "Release.")*

### Questions 68 (Interpretative Level)

- What are the author's primary themes or messages in the novel?  
*(Possible themes include the importance of making the most of the time you have by living your life deliberately; cherishing your family, friends, and pets; and showing forgiveness to those who have hurt you.)*
- What do Liz's pocket watch and the watch that Owen gives Liz symbolize?  
*(They symbolize the swift passage of time and the link between the past and the present.)*
- What responsibility does Liz have for her own

death?

*(As she matures, Liz comes to realize that she does bear some responsibility for her own death because she did not look both ways when she rode across the street on her bicycle. She comes to see that few situations – and fewer people— are simple and straightforward. There are shades of gray, shades of good and bad, in virtually all situations and people.)*

**Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)**

9. Most of the reviews for Elsewhere were highly laudatory, but a few were negative. One such critic wrote: "If this novel intends to be comforting to readers who have lost a friend or family member, a much more believable fantasy would need to be constructed, with characters that matter, and a better idea for eternity than multitudes of dead folks becoming other people's babies after leading a bland second life in suburban America." (Children's Literature) Agree or disagree with this assessment.

*(Students who admired the novel are likely to disagree vehemently; those who disliked the novel, in contrast, will probably argue that the afterlife should be described as far more exciting.)*

10. Did you find the love affair between Liz and Owen believable? Why or why not?  
*(Most readers will find the relationship sweetly appealing as well as realistic, as Liz is young and inexperienced and Owen is conflicted about his feelings and kind toward Liz.)*

**Questions 11-2 (Creative Level)**

11. Make a model of Elsewhere as it is described in the novel.

12. Choose three moments from your life that you would like to relive. Working with some classmates, describe each moment and explain why you chose it.

**Across the Curriculum**

**Art/Music**

1. Design an eternim, the official coin of Elsewhere.
2. Design a prom dress for Zooney, Liz's best friend.
3. Imagine that you are Curtis Jest. Write a love song for Betty.
4. When Gabrielle Zevin first started writing

*Elsewhere*, she intended to begin every chapter with an Egyptian hieroglyph. She ultimately abandoned the idea, as you know. Choose any five chapters and draw an Egyptian hieroglyph to introduce its main idea. Make up the Egyptian hieroglyphs, based on your imagination and the content of each chapter.

5. The line Liz thinks about on the ship ("I met a traveller from an antique land") is from "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Read the poem and then illustrate it, based on your vision of Elsewhere.

**Language Arts**

1. Liz is upset that her last words are so uninspired. Research the last words of ten famous people. Write the words on a chart for everyone to read. Who had the most impressive last words?
2. Betty calls Liz, "doll." List ten affectionate names that people use for each other. Then analyze what each name reveals about the time and place in which it is used. Which names are most enduring and why?
3. "A Piece of String" is the name of a chapter in this novel as well as a famous short story by de Maupassant. Read the story and explain whether or not it applies to the novel.
4. Liz lists the five things she misses most about Earth. List the five things you like most about your life.
5. Owen says that messages in a bottle are one method of communication between Earth and Elsewhere. Write a message in a bottle to communicate with someone you no longer see.
6. The novel contains many references to literature, including *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Tuck Everlasting*. Choose any two examples and explain how each reflects one aspect of Liz's life.

**History/Social Studies**

1. Betty mentions many famous people who now live in Elsewhere, including Pablo Picasso and Marilyn Monroe. Skim the novel and isolate at least three famous people. Report on their lives, and where appropriate, explain the humor in their new avocations.
2. Explain the novel's Egyptian motif, analyzing its thematic function. Trace it in at least three

places in the novel.

3. Liz encounters some mermaids as she drifts in the river. Research mermaids, reporting on the myths that surround these creatures.
4. On her website, Gabrielle Zevin explains that one of the motivating forces behind *Elsewhere* was the events of 9/11. Report on 9/11, including a hypothesis of why the terrorist attacks might spur someone to write a novel with the topic and themes of *Elsewhere*.
5. Find a real island that could serve as a model for *Elsewhere*. Show its location on a map and explain the parallels between this real location and the fictional *Elsewhere*.

#### Speech/Drama

1. Write and deliver a eulogy for Liz, speaking as though you were one of her classmates.
2. Liz can speak "Canine." Choose any foreign language and write ten words that everyone can use. Teach these words to a classmate.
3. Gabrielle Zevin has a pug dog; Liz loves her pug Lucy. People often feel passionately attached to their pets. In a speech, explain what pet you would like to have and why.
4. Give an orientation speech for newcomers to *Elsewhere*.
5. With a partner, act out a scene between Amadou and Liz in which she confronts him right after the accident, rather than meeting him many years later.

#### Science/Math

1. Betty died of breast cancer. Report on the latest treatment for this disease. Include information about theories of prevention.
2. Choose ten famous dead people and express their ages in *Elsewhere* nomenclature.
3. Liz buys her father a beautiful cashmere sweater. Find out what cashmere is, how it is made, and why it is so highly valued.
4. Liz dives far down to the Well to communicate with her family. Create a chart showing how to dive safely. Be sure to include information about how deep dives can adversely affect people.
5. Emily Welles dies of the flu. Explain why the flu is so dangerous and how people can protect themselves against it. Include information about the great flu pandemics.

#### Alternate Assessment

1. Liz dies in a hit-and-run accident, in part because she did not pay attention on the road. Create a poster for bike safety. Display the poster where everyone can see it.
2. The people in *Elsewhere* get to choose their avocations. Imagine that you could do anything you wanted. What would you do? Why does this activity give you pleasure?
3. Gabrielle Zevin noted on her website that one evening this sentence popped into her head: "Elizabeth Hall woke in a strange bed in a strange room with the strange feeling that her sheets were trying to smother her." This became the impetus for the novel *Elsewhere*. Using this sentence, write an outline for a different version of the novel.
4. Much of Liz's initial anger at finding herself in *Elsewhere* is that her future plans are canceled and she will age in reverse. List at least five future events that you anticipate most eagerly.
5. This novel is divided into five parts, including a prologue and an epilogue. In an essay, explain what function each part serves.

## Vocabulary Test

Match each vocabulary word in the left-hand column from Elsewhere with its definition in the right-hand column. Place the letter of your answer in the space provided.

- |                      |                         |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| _____ 1. reverie     | A. laughter             |
| _____ 2. digress     | B. status               |
| _____ 3. tome        | C. desolate             |
| _____ 4. gist        | D. avoid                |
| _____ 5. treacherous | E. dream                |
| _____ 6. bleak       | F. hassled              |
| _____ 7. tepid       | G. infamous             |
| _____ 8. surly       | H. main idea            |
| _____ 9. rapt        | I. lukewarm             |
| _____ 10. eschew     | J. sad, depressed       |
| _____ 11. vacant     | K. stray from the point |
| _____ 12. rampant    | L. empty                |
| _____ 13. harried    | M. enthralled           |
| _____ 14. elegant    | N. dangerous            |
| _____ 15. melancholy | O. abrupt               |
| _____ 16. prestige   | P. ambiguous            |
| _____ 17. obscure    | Q. spooky, eerie        |
| _____ 18. mirth      | R. widespread           |
| _____ 19. macabre    | S. book                 |
| _____ 20. notorious  | T. stylish              |

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blanks provided.

- |                   |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|
| A. Lucy           | F. Zooey         |
| B. Elizabeth Hall | G. Aldous Ghent  |
| C. Thandie        | H. Olivia        |
| D. Curtis Jest    | I. Amadou Bonamy |
| E. Betty          | J. Owen Welles   |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. the former rock musician turned fisherman  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2. the acclimation counselor  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 3. the former fireman who was married to Emily  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Liz's mother  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Liz's best friend on Earth  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 6. the fifteen-year-old girl killed in a hit-and-run-accident  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Liz's grandmother  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Liz's pug dog  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 9. the taxi driver  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Liz's roommate on the Nile

### Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Thandiwe (Thandi) Washington was shot to death.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Liz had always been very close to her maternal grandmother, largely because her grandmother had sewed all of Liz's clothes when Liz was in elementary school.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Late in the novel, Liz learns that the ship captain, an elderly man, is really Owen's grandfather.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Liz arrives in Elsewhere with her new driver's license and is eager to show off her driving skills.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Yetta Brown sends Liz to watch a movie about Elsewhere, but Liz dozes through much of it.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Liz's last words were "I am sorry, Mom and Dad."  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Liz is astonished to learn that she speaks and understands "Canine," the language of dogs, fluently.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Liz adopts a recently deceased dog named Sadie.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 9. To make sure that her father gets the golf clubs that she bought for his birthday, Liz communicates with her brother Alvy through the "Well."  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Owen's wife Emily arrives in Elsewhere, having died of the flu.

### Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

Briefly explain why each quote is important in the novel.

1. "In the end, the end of a life only matters to friends, family, and other folks you used to know," the pug whimpers miserably.
2. "Dead," Aldous says, "is little more than a state of mind. Many people on Earth spend their whole lives dead, but you're probably too young to understand what I mean."
3. "People, you'll find, aren't usually all good or all bad."

4. "I've been here before. And the truth is, intimacy doesn't have all that much to do with the backseats of cars. Real intimacy is brushing your teeth together."
5. If you are going to forgive a person, Liz decides, it's best to do it sooner rather than later.

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. What is the novel's primary theme or message about life?
2. Provide three details from the novel that show that *Elsewhere* is a fantasy, not a realistic novel.
3. Explain the meaning of at least three of the following symbols from the novel: water, the snow globe, Liz's two watches, Liz's stitches, Owen's tattoo, Betty's garden.
4. Trace how Liz changes as the novel progresses. Describe what she is like in the beginning of the novel when she arrives in *Elsewhere* and what she comes to realize by the time she has spent several years there.

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## Comprehension Test B

**Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)**

Give a reason to complete each sentence.

1. In the novel's Prologue, Lucy, Liz's beloved pug dog, is upset because \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The passengers are excited when they arrive at Elsewhere because \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Liz had never before met her maternal grandmother Betty because \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Liz is despairing, intractable, sullen, and furious when she arrives on Elsewhere because \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Liz becomes obsessed with watching her friends and family back on Earth because \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Liz dives down to the Well the first time to \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Liz sobs uncontrollably when the stitches behind her ear disappear because \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Emily cannot have a dog in her house because \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Liz decides to exercise the Sneaker Clause because \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Zoey sends Liz a message in a bottle to \_\_\_\_\_.

**Part II: Matching (30 points)**

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blanks provided.

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Slim                 | A. Liz's beloved younger brother                 |
| _____ 2. Amadou Bonamy        | B. the rock musician turned fisherman            |
| _____ 3. Owen Wells           | C. the cab driver who struck and killed Liz      |
| _____ 4. Alvy                 | D. Liz's mother                                  |
| _____ 5. Olivia               | E. Thandi's boyfriend on Earth                   |
| _____ 6. Curtis Jest          | F. the former fireman who falls in love with Liz |
| _____ 7. Zoey                 | G. Liz's best friend on Earth                    |
| _____ 8. Steve Detroit        | H. the novel's main character                    |
| _____ 9. Elizabeth Marie Hall | I. Liz's make-believe boyfriend                  |
| _____ 10. Aldous Ghent        | J. the acclimation officer who helps Liz         |

**Part III: Identification (20 points)**

Explain why each is important in the novel.

1. the snow globe
  
  
  
  
2. Liz's pocket watch
  
  
  
  
3. Betty's garden
  
  
  
  
4. the cashmere sweater
  
  
  
  
5. the Egyptian pyramids

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. What makes Liz such a realistic character? Isolate and analyze at least three of her traits.

2. Explain the novel's central theme: How it is possible to grow up as you grow younger?
3. Reviewing *Elsewhere*, the critic for the Buffalo News wrote: "Zevin offers a dazzling, original novel about anger and forgiveness, about love and healing, about life and death and the meaning of everything." Agree or disagree with this assessment, using specific examples from the novel to make your point.
4. What role does the novel's setting play in the story? Why is the setting so important in this novel?



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## Answer Key

**VOCABULARY**

- |      |       |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. C  | 11. L | 16. B |
| 2. K | 7. I  | 12. R | 17. P |
| 3. S | 8. O  | 13. F | 18. A |
| 4. H | 9. M  | 14. T | 19. Q |
| 5. N | 10. D | 15. J | 20. G |

**COMPREHENSION TEST A****Part I: Matching (20 points)**

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. B  |
| 2. G | 7. E  |
| 3. J | 8. A  |
| 4. H | 9. I  |
| 5. F | 10. C |

**Part II: True/False (20 points)**

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F  |
| 2. F | 7. T  |
| 3. F | 8. T  |
| 4. F | 9. F  |
| 5. T | 10. T |

**Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)**

- In the prologue, Lucy the pug serves as a speaker for the author, who believes that our lives have meaning because of those we affect. For everyone else, our death is just another death. This is one of the novel's primary themes, as Liz forges new relationships in Elsewhere and touches the lives of others who will mourn her when she is Released.
- The author states one of her primary themes outright in this passage: we must make the most of the time we have been given by living consciously and deliberately.
- In this scene, Liz wonders why Amadou did not stop when he hit her with his cab. Betty counsels her that people are a mix of good and bad. Liz finds this is just the case when she meets Amadou years later when he arrives in Elsewhere.
- Owen's wisdom helps Liz realize that love and closeness take time and effort to develop, as they are built from many daily encounters and shared routines.
- Liz realizes that we may not have a second chance to tell someone that we love them, to do a good deed, to apologize for a misstep. She has matured.

**Part IV: Essay (40 points)**

Answers will vary.

**COMPREHENSION TEST B****Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)**

- her mistress Liz has died at age fifteen.
- they hope they will see people they love who have died.
- Betty died of breast cancer before Liz was born.
- she feels that she has died too soon and will miss too much of her life, such as going to college, getting married, or living on her own.
- she misses everyone and feels cheated.
- try to make sure that her father receives the cashmere sweater that she had bought for his birthday, which she has hidden in her room.

7. the stitches are her last tangible link to her life on Earth.
8. she is allergic to dogs.
9. she is upset that she and Owen cannot be together because Emily, Owen's wife on Earth, has come to Elsewhere and Owen still thinks he loves her.
10. invite Liz to her wedding.

**Part II: Matching (30 points)**

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. B  |
| 2. C | 7. G  |
| 3. F | 8. I  |
| 4. A | 9. H  |
| 5. D | 10. J |

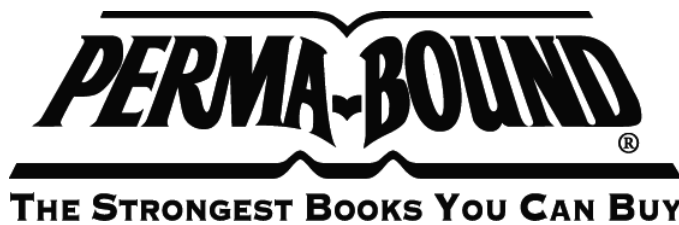
**Part III: Identification (20 points)**

1. The snow globe represents Liz's past life on Earth, which is now over.
2. Liz's pocket watch represents time, and how fast it goes. It also represents links to family and heritage.
3. Betty's garden shows that Betty can nurture plants, suggesting that she will be able to nurture Liz and help her mature and get acclimated to life on Elsewhere.
4. The cashmere sweater stands for love and sacrifice, as Liz spends a great deal of her money on it to please her father, whom she loves very much. He is destroyed when she dies, showing that he loved her deeply as well.
5. The Egyptian pyramids symbolize death and the hope of an afterlife.

**Part IV: Essay (40 points)**

Answers will vary.





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