*Time Zero*

An In-Depth Study Suitable for grades 7-12

This customizable guide is organized by literary elements, student activities, text-centric questions, annotation, literary criticism, and analysis. The goal of this resource is to encourage students (of all levels) to connect with the themes, conflicts, and stylistic elements of *Time Zero* on the page and beyond. Special emphasis is paid to elements of courage, integrity, self-discovery, and critical thinking.

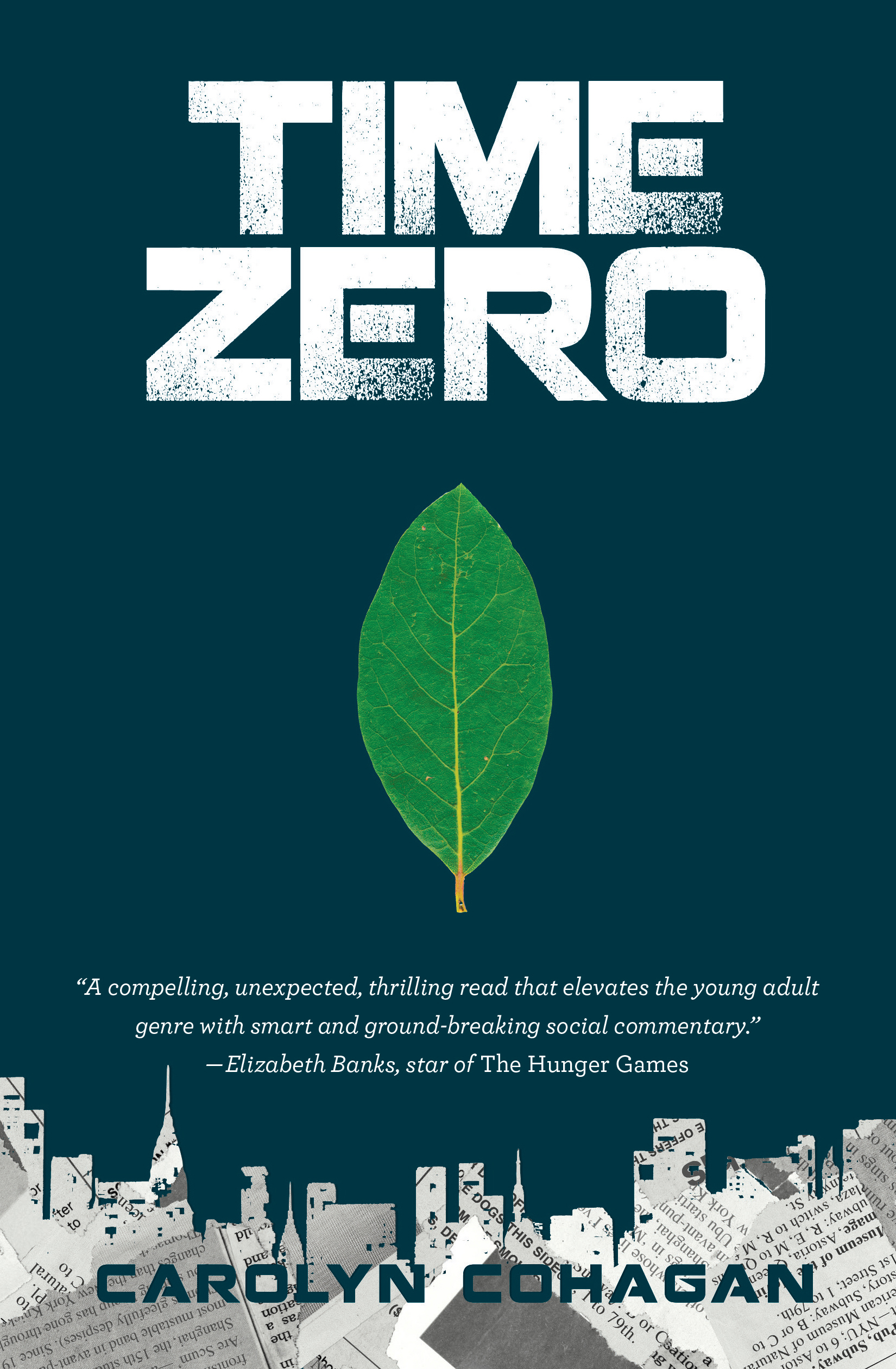


Table of Contents

1. Pre-Reading Activities
2. Characterization and Point of View
3. Structure, Plot, and Pacing
4. Genre and Setting
5. Analyzing Style: The Author’s Craft
6. Individual and Collaborative Activities: Guided Annotation, Literary Criticism, Thematic Statements, and Creative Interpretations
7. Post-Reading Activities: Taking the Text Beyond the Page

**Pre-Reading Activities**

**Pre-Reading Activity One: Teacher Notes**

In this activity, students will analyze themselves as readers with emphasis on what they bring to the page and on how their perceptions affect their interactions with the piece. Introduce this lesson via a group discussion by asking students to name books that have been loved for generations. Offer examples such as *The Giving Tree*, *Little Women, The Outsiders*, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, Pride and Prejudice*, and *Charlotte’s Web* to spark the conversation. Ask them why these texts, and their examples, continue to resonate with readers. List their reasons and point out elements of universal theme- growing up, love, loss, friendship, fear, overcoming obstacles, etc.- as something every person can relate to. Then, ask students to name a work (novel or movie) they like/dislike that is popular/scorned by others. This discussion should serve as a springboard to Activity One, The Reader The Mirror, as students analyze what textual elements attract them to a work and how those elements contribute to the craft of writing.

**Name (s): ­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*The Reader The Mirror*

Have you ever wondered why some books are loved by millions while others find their niche within certain groups of fans? In this activity, we will explore what we, as readers, bring to the page and how that affects our interpretation of the work. This activity may be completed individually or with a partner.

1. What types of characters, events, and genres are you drawn to in books and on film? What do they have in common? Why do you like reading/watching stories with these elements?
2. Is the reader a *crucial* element of any novel? Explain why or why not using real-world examples.

**Pre-Reading Activity Two: Teacher Notes**

Introduction to themes in *Time Zero* asks students to explore their associations with the themes and topics they will soon encounter in their reading. This activity will serve as a comparison tool to measure their growth in depth of understanding once the *Time Zero* unit is complete.

**Name-\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*At First Glance: Themes and Topics in* *Time Zero*

1. What is your first impression of the title, *Time Zero*? What predictions can you make based upon the title alone? What **mood** (refer to glossary of literary terms if necessary) is conveyed by the title and cover?
2. What is individuality?
3. How is individuality expressed?
4. Is it possible to retain individuality and conform to the rules of a government or society?
5. What is conformity? Are there times when it is necessary?
6. Are there times when refusal to conform can threaten society as a whole?
7. Using your knowledge of American and World History, list examples of when conformity threatened our society and rebellion benefitted it.
8. Working alone or with a partner, briefly describe a fictitious scenario in which one would have to break a law to do what is right.
9. What do the following elements have in common: brainwashing, suppression, isolation, and poverty? How could a government use these elements to control its citizens?

**Characterization and Point of View: Teacher Notes**

The following activities will give an overview of characterization and point of view through in-depth critical thinking. Through analysis of these elements’ roles as literary devices within both *Time Zero* and fiction as a whole, students will gain a deeper understanding of the craft of writing.

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*Mina Clark: A Dynamic Protagonist*

**Dynamic** characters grow and change throughout the course of the novel whereas **static** characters remain the same.

1. Describe Mina at the onset of the novel. Cite specific examples of her attitudes, thoughts, and feelings about her family, her “Offering”, The Prophet, and the extremists that govern her community.
2. How does Mina’s backstory influence the choices she makes within the first twenty-five pages of the novel?
3. How does Cohagan, the author, entwine this information into the story? Why do authors often choose to reveal information through **flashback**? Cite an example from another media, such as film or theatre, in which this technique intensifies suspense.
4. Which character do you feel has the most influence on Mina at the beginning of the novel? Why? Please list a quote supporting your opinion.
5. Is there a minor character that influences Mina’s attitudes or beliefs about the government? How does this character give us insight into Mina?
6. How does Mina act when she is alone? Please cite three examples.
7. How does Mina’s family describe her? What do they feel are her strengths and weaknesses? What influences their opinions? Would you feel the same or differently if you were in their shoes?
8. Describe Mina’s treatment by the Twitchers and Matrons. Is it normal or does something in her persona incite their suspicions?
9. How would you describe Mina to a friend who had not read *Time Zero*?
10. Who is Mina’s support system? Who are her enemies? How do these elements change over the course of the novel? As we grow, do our support systems expand, or do they remain stagnant?
11. Just like literary characters, people have comfort zones. Is there anything to be gained by stepping out of your comfort zone?
12. Why did Cohagan push her characters out of their comfort zones and challenge them to question the laws of Uncle Ruho and his government? What do we learn about ourselves and about literary characters when we/they are challenged?
13. Select two dynamic characters from *Time Zero*. Using quotations from the text, create a chart documenting their highs (successes) and lows (failures/defeats). How did these experiences change their characters?

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*Characterization via Antagonists- A Group Discussion*

The origin of the word **antagonist** is the same as the word **antagonize**. Cohagan chooses to have multiple antagonists. Why do you think she made this choice? Is it more daunting to face a society of antagonists verses a single foe?

Describe Cohagan’s futuristic Manhattan. What elements add to the **realism** of her creation? Cite three images or examples (such as the beheaded Statue of Liberty) that will stay with the reader after the final page.

Briefly list the roles and sects in Cohagan’s society. Which role do you feel bears the most abuse? How do these roles and sects benefit the government? What advantage might he see in keeping certain groups powerless? Is this possible in the real world or merely a fictional concept?

Cohagan paints a chilling picture of a vacant Barnes & Noble store. What does the suppression of knowledge say about a government? Brainstorm or research a list of banned books. What do these texts have in common? Consider the following scenario: Two books, one containing detailed instructions on how to make, conceal, and diffuse bombs in public places, and one detailing why becoming a devout vegan is the only way to please God, are published to great public outcry. Can you make a case to ban one and not the other? Do they share parallels? Is either in violation of the first amendment? Support your claims with research and cite parallels within *Time Zero*.

**Name(s):\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*Dissecting the Scene: A Small Group Activity*

As a group, select a passage from *Time Zero* that includes at least one character for every member of your group. In general, novels written for young adults feature main characters who are children or young adults themselves. Adult characters usually play secondary roles in this genre. Do you think that trend is an element of craft or a commercial interest aimed to sell books to teens?

1. What do the young characters in this scene have in common aside from age?
2. What do the adult characters have in common aside from age?
3. Is there a character in this scene, or in the work as a whole, who acts older than his/her actual age? Younger?
4. Which adult character is the most important to the novel’s plot? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
5. Explore the **pacing** of the scene. What propels the action along? Is it the dialogue? The conflict? Does the author’s use of descriptive details impact the pace of the scene? Explain below using quotations from the scene.

***Voice: A Crucial Component of Cohagan’s Time Zero***

***Group Discussion***

In literature, **voice** is defined as the style and personality with which a character speaks and thinks. Ask students to list three main or favorite characters from *Time Zero*. Then, ask them to list three words describing that character’s voice and provide a supporting quotation. As a class, randomly select a chapter and re-write the first line to fit a different narrative voice. For example, change the mood, descriptive elements, or emotions of one of Mina’s opening lines to mirror Juda’s voice. Are there any characters in this novel who have very similar voices? Who are these characters and how do they relate to the action of the novel? What is Cohagan trying to accomplish with this choice? Do the characters’ voices mirror their society?

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*Voice and Me- Text to Self Connections*

Which character in *Time Zero* is most like you? Why? Explain what the author did, stylistically, to strike a relation between you and the character. Which elements of Cohagan’s characterization accomplished the connection?

Is there a character who seems the wisest to you? Does that character remind you of someone in your life?

Is there a character you aspire to be more or less like? Explain.

**Structure, Plot and Pacing**

**Structure, Plot, and Pacing: Teacher Notes**

Use the following activities to help students analyze and examine elements of structure, plot, and pacing.

*Plot and Structure: Elements in Action*

**Plot** and **Structure** can be described as two horns on the same goat. Each is dependent on the other, but each exists separately to serve an individual purpose.

**Plot** is what happens in the story whereas **Structure** is how the story is organized

Consider this example from *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan

**Plot**: A girl grows up privileged and adored in Mexico. Tragedy soon strikes, and she and her mother are forced to flee to the United States. There, she is no longer royalty and must adapt to hard labor and a life without any of the comforts she once knew. She struggles to accept this new fate, but then her mother’s illness forces her to grow up. After much struggle, she matures and becomes responsible. By the end of the novel, she is happy again and has learned to adapt to her new circumstances.

**Structure:** The novel takes place over the year in the life of Esperanza and her family. It begins and ends on her birthday. It also begins and ends with the image of two people putting their heads to the ground to listen to the Earth’s heartbeat. Each section of the novel is named after the crop being harvested at the time the chapter takes place. Once Esperanza becomes a laborer working in the fields, this structure strengthens the idea that her life and the lives of those around her are intertwined with the crops on which their survival depends.

One of the most important elements in any plot is **conflict**. Cohagan’s *Time Zero* beautifully marries several conflicts that force her characters to change and grow to overcome the obstacles they encounter. While there are several types of conflict, the four most common are:

\*Man vs. Man- A character struggles with another person (or people).

\*Man vs. Self- A character struggles with his or her own emotions, thoughts, and feelings that create the problems in the story.

\*Man vs. Nature- A character struggles with something in nature, such as the wilderness or weather.

\*Man vs. Society- A character struggles against the beliefs, behaviors, and traditions of his or her society.

Re-visit the opening scene of *Time Zero*. Why do you thing Cohagan chose to open the novel this way? What does the reader immediately learn about Mina and the conflicts she faces? List examples and quotations that represent the four most common types of conflicts listed above.

*Plot and Structure Project*

Working as an individual or as a group, select one of the following projects to explore plot and structure in *Time Zero*.

Option 1- Write a series of five tweets. In the first four, offer a quick insight into what happens in the beginning, the middle, and then the end of the novel. In the last tweet, give your overall impression of the novel. Each tweet must be 140 characters or less.

Option 2- If you were a character in the novel, which plot event would be the most challenging to you? The most enjoyable? The most frustrating? Why? Illustrate your response with quotations from the text.

Option 3- Fast-forward five then ten years into the future after *Time Zero*’s ending. Create a chart in which you imagine the lives of Mina, Juda, and two others of your choosing at various points (1 year, 5 years, 10 years, etc.) in the future.

Option 4- What elements of *Time Zero* remind you of the events from a different novel or film. Write a paragraph comparing the two pieces of art.

Option 5- What one event from *Time Zero*’s plot is something you have never seen before in a book or film? Write about that part of the plot and explain its novelty.

*Pacing: The Heartbeat of a Novel*

*A Guided Discussion*

The term **pacing** refers to how quickly a story’s plot unfolds. Pacing serves to keep the reader interested and maintains the author’s desired **tone**. Have students jot down their favorite action movie or thriller, then slow the pace to a crawl. The results will be quite humorous. In reverse, have them speed up a favorite love story or saga to the pace of the *Fast and Furious* franchise. To delve deeper into the craft, guide students through Cohagan’s pacing of *Time Zero* using the following analysis.

1. What plot events represent **rising action** in *Time Zero*? Choose one example of concentrated action and pinpoint what element (action, dialogue, conflict, mood) is determining the pace of the scene.
2. How does Cohagan’s use of sentence structure affect the pacing of her scenes? Choose one fast-paced scene and one slower scene and compare and contrast the length, diction, and imagery Cohagan uses to control the speed of the scene. Note how her shifts in focus impact the rhythm of the scene much like a strategic pause impacts the emphasis of our daily speech.

Effective pacing is never an accident. Just as composers and songwriters marry bars of music and lyrics to create desired beats and cadences, authors such as Cohagan rely on sentence structure, detail, imagery, and point of view to pace their stories.

Genre and Setting

**Genre and Setting- Teacher Notes**

*Time Zero* is set in futuristic Manhattan under the tyrannical rule of Uncle Ruho, a descendent of The Prophet. The following activities will help students analyze the effect of this setting on the work as well as its role in the dystopian genre.

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Genre and Sub-Genre**

**Genre** means “kind”, as in what *kind* of dog is that? *Time Zero* is considered dystopian. In general, this genre is either set in the current day or far off into the future. For a novel to be considered post-apocalyptic verses dystopian, the end of the world must have already taken place. The end of the word can be anything from war to disaster to, as in *Time Zero*, a political coup or regime change. Dystopian fiction is a sun-genre of apocalyptic fiction in which characters are trying to survive the end of the world or similarly threatening circumstances.

1. What motivation might an author have for choosing the dystopian genre? Is it easier to consider “what if” questions when the setting is fantastical or different from the reader’s reality?
2. What is this genre’s appeal? Why do so many books, films, and paintings depict the end of the world and life after the end of the world? What are the most commonly depicted threats to free societies (government upheaval, natural disasters, etc.)? What parallels do these threats share?
3. Is man obsessed with his mortality and the continuation of his legacy? Should your generation disappear tomorrow, would you want to be remembered? Is this the appeal of social media? Make a case supporting your opinion using examples ranging from mythology and modern-day texts.

**Analyzing Style: The Author’s Craft**

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Dissecting Style Element by Element**

Much like our choice of fabrics, accessories, cuts, and patterns determines our fashion style, the summation of an author’s syntax choices defines his or her writing style.

The technical definition of **style**, as it applies to literature and writing, is the author’s diction (word choice), sentence structure, use of figurative language, and tone. Style varies from author to author and centers around each individual’s technique.

Please refer to pages 1-25 of *Time Zero* for the following exercise. Provide textual evidence in your responses.

Element One- Sentence Structure:

Are Cohagan’s sentences long or short?

Do they rely on subordinate clauses, or are they fragments?

When their length changes, what is accomplished?

Is Cohagan’s word-order straightforward or unconventionally crafted?

Element Two- Pace:

Does Cohagan focus on lengthy, detailed description, with emphasis

on setting and atmosphere, or does she focus on action and plot progression?

Element Three- Expansive/Conservative Diction:

Are the sentences tight and concise, or elaborate and lengthy?

When Cohagan shifts modes, what is her **motivation**? What effect does it have on the text?

Element Four- Vocabulary:

Are Cohagan’s words simple or fancy? Is the narration technical, flowery, colloquial, cerebral, obscure, etc.? What might be her reasoning for this choice?

Element Five- Figures of Speech:

How extensive is Cohagan’s use of **metaphors**, **similes**, and/or **symbols**?

Cite an example of Cohagan’s use of **metonymy**. What does this usage add to the piece? How does it further define the reader’s impression of The Prophet and his government?

Element Six- Use of Dialogue:

Does Cohagan rely primarily on dialogue to tell the story?

How often does she use dialogue as narration verses **internal monologue** in these pages? An estimation is acceptable. Please provide textual evidence.

Element Seven- Point of View:

Choose one to three paragraphs within these pages and shift the point of view from first-person to another of your choosing. Possibilities include: second person, third person, limited omniscient, multiple, inanimate, and free indirect discourse.

Element Eight- Character Development:

How does Cohagan introduce her characters? How extensive are their backstories?

Are the majority of the characters dynamic or **static**?

Do Cohagan’s characters share a function and **motivation** or are they diversified? How does this serve the story’s pacing?

Element Nine- Tone:

What is Cohagan’s attitude? What is the **mood** of the story? Remember, tone refers to how the author feels about a subject and mood refers to what feelings the piece evokes within its reader. Cite an example in which Cohagan’s tone is visible in the story.

Element Ten- Paragraph and Chapter Structure:

How are the paragraphs and chapters organized?

Are they short bursts or blocks of information spanning several pages?

Does the organization propel or slow the plot?

Element Eleven: Chronology

How has Cohagan ordered the events of *Time Zero*? Are they in order of occurrence, told in flashback, or a mixture of the two styles?

Does her chronology give the piece a fast, average, or slow structural rhythm?

Element Twelve: Allusions

How and how often does Cohagan refer to other texts, myths, symbols, famous figures, historical events, etc.?

Element Thirteen- Experimentation

Are there any instances in which Cohagan relies on unusual techniques, such as stream of consciousness, mixing styles and genres, unusual layouts, deviations from the grammatical standard, odd or unreliable narrators, unstable perspectives, **aporia**, etc., in her narrative?

Element Fourteen- Metafictional Techniques:

Does Cohagan call attention to her own process of narration?

Are her narrator’s, Mina’s, position, role, and thoughts, as a storyteller mentioned explicitly in the text? What function does this serve?

**Individual and Collaborative Activities: Guided Annotation, Literary Criticism, Thematic Statements, and Creative Interpretations**

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Guided Annotation:

*Consider the passage from Time Zero below. Pay particular attention to the stylistic elements and the way Cohagan’s writing choices affect the meaning of the passage.*

Thirty minutes later, I still haven’t talked to one potential suitor. Mother will be very annoyed, but all the candidates are lingering on the edges of the room, seeming even more anxious than I am. I’m not allowed to initiate conversations with men, so what can I do?

*How do these lines define Mina’s role in the Prophet’s society? What parallels can you draw to American society at the present? Have we evolved beyond valuing women as mere objects? What do the popularity of reality television shows like The Bachelor and Married at First Sight imply about American culture?*

*Mina is not allowed to initiate conversation with the opposite sex. What is the perceived danger in a woman addressing a man? How does this law exemplify the threat of free thinking and empowerment?*

*Cohagan has delicately woven Mina’s mother’s expectations into this scene. Will Mina face consequences should she not be spoken to by eligible bachelors? What control does she have over her circumstances in this scene? Should she push boundaries and flirt to garner a suitor’s attention, will she have more or less power over her destiny? Is she an individual in this scene or playing a pre-assigned role? How does Cohagan show us her individuality in the face of conformity?*

Mother is busy with Grandma and Grandpa Silna, her parents, and as much as I don’t enjoy standing alone, I really don’t feel like seeing them right now. Grandpa Silna is very stern and never has much to say beyond quoting the Book, and Grandma Silna says even less. She just stares at the ground, nodding at whatever her husband says. Come to think of it, it’s pretty amazing that she produced my aunties, who never stop talking.

*Is Mina’s reaction to her grandparents common among teens or is it specific to her circumstance? How do her mother and grandmother’s actions in this scene deepen the reader’s understanding of women’s roles in Uncle Ruho’s Manhattan? What is “The Book”? How is Cohagan embracing irony by calling the ruling law “The Book” when Barnes and Noble stores, libraries, and other institutes stand vacant and abhorred?*

I decide to get some food while I can. I grab some slices of cheese and bread and stand in a quiet corner, putting small pieces of each under the veil and into my mouth. I’ve always hated eating with the veil on. Thank goodness I don’t have to wear it when it’s just my family.

*How does Mina’s veil mirror other societies in which conservative women’s dress is mandated? What is the logic behind covering women’s flesh? What is the logic behind such laws? If the sight of a woman’s body incites men to immoral activity, why are women considered the weaker sex? Can a woman gain power by concealing her body? Can she lose power by revealing it? What role do those who do both play in our society? Consider the adage ‘sex sells’. Is this adage accurate? Defend your stance using examples from present-day and past ad campaigns.*

I’ve managed to eat a small amount when Dekker comes sauntering up.

He’s got a pastry in each hand. “I’d offer you one of these, but I doubt you could fit them under the ol’ ‘shower curtain.’” He gestures at my veil.

*Is Dekker taunting Mina? If so, is it intentional or only obvious to a reader from a first-world background?*

“How’s the Lyceum, Dekker?” I ask.

*Lycee is the French word for high school. Lyceum is a term meaning “a literary institution, lecture hall, or teaching place.” What effect does this term have on the reader’s understanding? How is it ironic that the school where Dekker studies was once the Metropolitan Museum of Art?*

Looking at him, his smooth skin and blue eyes, his short little brown beard, I think he could almost be handsome, if he didn’t look so put-out all the time.

“You heard Mother. I’m a top student.”

He turns away from me, wiping his hands on his tunic.

*What do Dekker’s physical actions imply about his respect for women? Would he wipe his hands on his clothes if he had to clean them himself? How are the themes of privilege and entitlement reflected here?*

He’s lying, and I know it.

*How does Mina know he’s lying? How does Cohagan communicate the fact to her readers?*

And after all these years of his being such a creep, I really shouldn’t care. But it hurts my heart, because when we were little, Dekker and I were best friends. We did everything together, and he thought I was the funniest person on the planet.

*Why might Mina’s parents have supported this friendship whilst knowing it had no choice but to fizzle when Dekker took his “rightful” place in The Prophet’s society? How is it similar and different from an arranged marriage? Is Mina lucky to have had affection for him or does that make the interaction more painful?*

All I had to do to make him laugh was fall down. I was great at it. He would say, “Play dead,” and, no matter what I was doing, I would freeze and fall over, and he would bust a gut laughing.

*How does this element prove that Mina is a product of her society? What does her submissiveness imply?*

All day long we talked and made up games, and neither of us could fall asleep if we weren’t in the same room.

And then Dekker turned six and was sent to school. He cried when my parents said I couldn’t go with him, and I promised we would still play like always as soon as he got home.

*How is this separation crucial to Cohagan’s development of Mina as a character? What must be being taught at “school” to cause such a shift in Dekker?*

*Time Zero is a work of fiction, but what statement is Cohagan making about the need to educate girls? Can you provide modern day examples of women championing education for girls worldwide? Why is this cause important on a global scale?*

But when he walked through the door on his first day, he had changed. He didn’t want to play with me. He didn’t even want to talk to me anymore. And he wouldn’t tell me why. Finally, at dinner, he told Father to explain to me that his Teacher had educated him in the ways of the female, and that girls were worth half as much as boys, and that women were the cause of all evil on Earth.”

*The relatable language, use of dialect, and point of view brings readers into Mina’s society and evokes empathy for her plight. This style creates an engaging pace and places readers front and center with the realities of tyranny.*

Essay Questions

1. Explain how Uncle Ruho and his government keeps their subjects under control. What methods are used to prevent citizens from organizing and communicating with each other? Why are these tactics successful? Drawing parallels between present and past societies, what statement is Cohagan making about the following themes- education, censorship, and rebellion.
2. Support or refute the following statement using textual evidence to support your stance-

Time is arguably a character itself in *Time Zero*. Explore the role of past, present, and future as it relates to the themes of knowledge and literacy.

1. In *The Communist Manifesto,* Karl Marx states “The history of all hitherto

Existing society is the history of class struggles.” Explore this statement as it applies to Cohagan’s futuristic Manhattan. Support your position with evidence from the text and present-day history.

1. Can religion be used as an instrument of oppression and persecution? Cite examples from both American and European History to support your stance. Many vetted resources are available on Carolyn Cohagan’s website: www.timezerobook.com

Passages for Annotation

1. “But when he walked through the door after his first day, he had changed. He didn’t want to play with me. He didn’t even want to talk to me anymore. And he wouldn’t tell me why. Finally, at dinner, he told Father to explain to me that his Teacher had educated him in the ways of the female, and that girls were worth half as much as boys, and that women were the cause of all evil on Earth.” (Cohagan, 719).

What role does the author’s use of point of view play in the efficacy of this passage? Mina is understandably hurt and grieving for her playmate and beloved brother. Should you flip the perspectives, how is Dekker likely feeling? What has his new “knowledge” of the ways of women brought to his dynamic within the family? Maturation and coming of age are not only universal themes, but something everyone must progress through during the course of their lives. How do the ritualized education and brainwashing present in Dekker’s instruction translate to feelings of betrayal by and mistrust of the females in his life? Explain why or why not this mistrust would be valuable to the government.

1. “I’m supposed to ignore the implications of this remark. A new bride has to be as pure as a downy chick emerging from its shell, but the rule doesn’t apply to the groom. On the contrary, society expects him to enjoy his freedom before he shackles himself to one girl. Propriety usually forbids the discussion of any such activity around the bride, but I think propriety was thrown out tonight with the remaining champagne.” (Cohagan, 162).

What is the significance of the title ‘Answering to Mr. Asher’? What does this tell the reader about the balance of power at play? In what ways does the character arc of Mina’s character grow from this scene? Does her understanding of her role in society help or hinder her? Is she using Mr. Asher’s bias against her sex to manipulate him? Explain. Notice Cohagan’s use of the term ‘shackles’. When and why are wives referred to in this way? What does this image (restraints, ‘ball and chain’, permanence) say about the institution of marriage? Are these opinions still held today? Where do traditions such as stag and bachelorette parties register on this scale? What determines a tradition as ‘archaic’ and what imbeds it in the fabric of a society? Where do education and religion come into play in approving or perpetuating societal expectations? When Mina says brides are expected to be as pure as a downy chick emerging from its shell, is she being at all satirical? Is such purity attainable or an impossible ideal? What is the difference between physical and emotional purity? Where do such double standards regarding men and women’s behavior prior to marriage exist in our culture? Where do they originate? Have such standards changed in modern times? Explain Mr. Asher’s threat of sending Mina to the Tunnel. Draw historical and modern parallels.

1. “’How do you help women? I mean besides taking them out of bad hospitals? […] The Laurel Society exists to help women in any way we can. We give shelter to those who are fleeing cruelty or violence, and we help single mothers struggling to survive.’” (Cohagan, 273).

What is ‘laurel’? Notice Cohagan’s mastery of symbolism throughout the text. Briefly explain how and why the choice of the names ‘Juda’ and ‘Ayan’ are symbolic. Do organizations like the Laurel Society exist in real life? Choosing an example of such an underground assistance like The Underground Railroad or The White Rose Society, draw parallels between the risks and heroism present within each. As Ayan explains how they remain undetected via the use of Twitcher uniforms, etc., how does Mina react? Is knowing you might never leave a safe haven trading one prison for another, or does safety trump all? Citing examples from the text, explore the relationship of gender to rebellion within Cohagan’s world. How do the boys and men rebel differently than the girls and women? Are traditional roles of hunter/gatherer vs. nurturer/care-giver still seen within the respective genders’ bucking authority? Can progress and equality occur without rebellion?

1. “The Primer was crisp and brittle with age, and Nana handled it as if it were made of cobwebs and might blow apart at any moment. I had so many questions, but I didn’t speak. I sensed that, for Nana, this moment was sacred” (Cohagan, 19).

The author’s use of flashback to reveal the meaning behind the novel’s title, as well as the resounding theme of the work, is a structural success. What does *Time Zero* mean? Note the cyclical shape of the letter ‘0’/number zero. How does oral tradition (the passing of knowledge from one generation to another) empower and threaten the government? What is the difference between the knowledge Nana passes to Mina and the lessons institutionalized by the government teachings? What does this flashback show the reader about Mina? What conclusions can you draw about Nana as a young woman? Is it possible to respect your ancestors while correcting and acknowledging their mistakes? Is there a difference between acceptance and inaction? Explore and research recent debates over Civil War Confederacy statues to propose an answer to this question.

1. Review Mina’s reaction to Mrs. Asher. What is the significance of her perfume, jewelry, and dress to Mina? How do these things further develop the reader’s understanding of Mina’s relationship with Nana? Does Mina see Mrs. Asher as a sort of mentor or as another overseer? Why? In what ways are respect woven into Mrs. Asher’s interactions with other women? How is the presence of the guard significant? In what ways does she appear to be testing Mina? The concept of ‘trust’ is of utmost importance to the scene and arguably becomes a character in itself. In what way could each Mina and the Ashers’ be each other’s undoing? How are power and trust related?
2. Briefly review the Biblical significance of stoning. Is this method of execution a bygone of Biblical times or does it still exist in parts of the world today? In what ways is Cohagan portraying government repression by using such barbaric punishments within the society of *Time Zero*?

1. Research and read the short story “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson. Both authors make strong metaphorical statements about stoning, ritual, and mob mentality. Citing examples from both, create a thematic statement about fear and humanity.