



# THE PARADOX OF VERTICAL FLIGHT

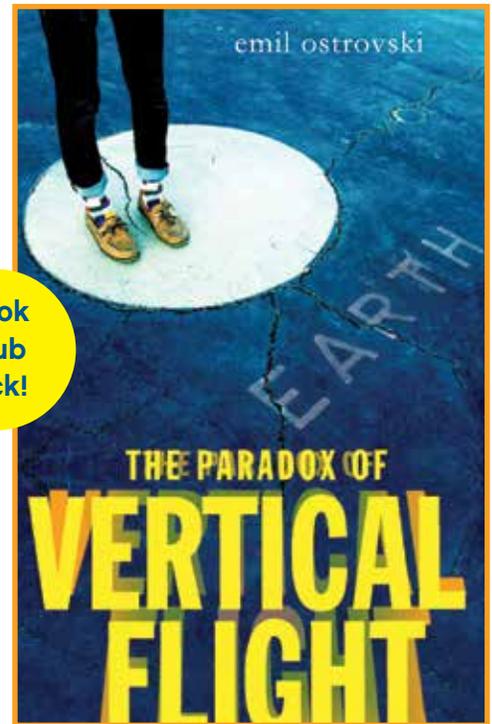
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## ABOUT THE BOOK

On the morning of his eighteenth birthday, philosophy student and high school senior Jack Polovsky is somewhat seriously thinking of suicide when his cell phone rings. Jack's ex-girlfriend, Jess, has given birth, and Jack is the father. Jack hasn't spoken with Jess in about nine months—and she wants him to see the baby before he is adopted. The new teenage father kidnaps the baby, names him Socrates, stocks up on baby supplies at Walmart, and hits the road with his best friend, Tommy, and the ex-girlfriend. As they head to Grandma's house (eluding the police at every turn), Jack tells baby Socrates about Homer, Troy, Aristotle, the real Socrates, and the Greek myths—because all stories spring from those stories, really. Even this one.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Jack kidnap Socrates, and what does he plan to do? What would you do in Jack's situation?
2. Why is it important to Jack that he take Socrates to see Bob?
3. What do Jack, Tommy, and Jess learn about living along the way to Bob's? What do they learn about one another? How does each change?
4. Friendship, family, and time are strong themes in the story. How does each theme develop over the course of the novel? What does the novel say about relationships? Did you connect with any one of these themes more than the others?
5. At one point in the story, Jack ponders infinity. Jack imagines his son's response, "But I think you need to *believe* in a last ceiling, a ceiling to end all ceilings, a ceiling that *limits* the unlimited, and renders the universe comprehensible" (p. 86). Why does the idea of infinity trouble Jack? Do you agree or disagree with this perspective? Why or why not?
6. Jack knows his time with Socrates is limited, and there is a sense of desperation around their time together. What does Jack hope time will give them while they are together?
7. The story offers plenty of opportunities for philosophical discussions about themes like free will, determinism, and good and evil. Is there a philosophical topic, passage, or scene that you find especially compelling? Why?
8. The story contains mythological references—or motifs—such as the Golden Fleece, Troy, and Daedalus. How do these motifs advance the story's plot? In what way are they symbols and/or metaphors?
9. One of Jack's questions is about the meaning of life, or our purpose on the planet. Tommy says to him toward the end of their trip, "I've been thinking and, well, yeah, the quest keeps you together, keeps you young, but, you know, the quest can't go on forever. It can't be never-ending" (p. 231-232). What point do you think he's trying to make about relationships and life? Do you feel similarly? What does the story suggest about the purpose of life?
10. Jack takes his son to a diner for graduation, where he tells him about stealing him from the hospital. As they drive home he says, "We'll never really know *anything* for certain. There's always more 'why's, more questions'" (p. 252). What does this statement say about Jack's character and way of viewing the world? Do you agree or disagree? Why?



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