

Name: Lesson 1

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Homeroom: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

### “Robbie” (pp. 1-9) “The robot left with a disconsolate step”

Lesson Objective: Analyze Asimov’s depiction of relationships between technology and humanity.

#### Do Now

Directions: Read the text below and answer the questions that follow. (5-6 mins)

Science fiction is a literary genre that deals primarily with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society and individuals and contains elements that don’t exist in the real world. It can be hard to define science fiction precisely; many writers have come up with their own definitions:

Science fiction can be defined as that branch of literature which deals with the reaction of human beings to changes in science and technology. – Isaac Asimov

I define science fiction as the art of the possible [... Science fiction] is the history of ideas, and they are always ideas that work themselves out and become real and happen in the world. – Ray Bradbury

Science fiction deals with improbable<sup>1</sup> possibilities. – Miriam Allen de Ford

<sup>1</sup>improbable: not likely to be true or to occur

#### Turn+Talk

1. Choose one of the underlined phrases in the definition above and reflect on what it means. Challenge: What examples of this have you seen in other works of science fiction? (2-3 mins to review)

#### Notes

actual or imagined sci = real sci. plus not-yet-real or imagined  
Society + indivs = whole cultures/worlds or individual people  
contains elems... = imagined elems, creativity

#### Take Hands

2. What’s similar about the way all three authors quoted above view science fiction?

focus on future (possibilities; changes)

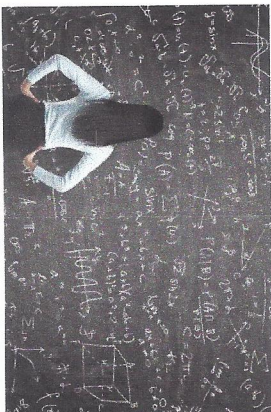

believe that elems. of imagined sci can one day become real/ultimately possible

3. Challenge: Write your own definition of science fiction. Show Call – or show mine if necessary

SciFi brings imagined elements of science to life

(4 min)

Vocabulary: Theorize, Disconsolate

Word	Definition	Related Parts of Speech	Situations	Image
theorize verb	to form a theory about what is true or real; to speculate (have opinion/make a guess about what might happen)	theory noun theoretical adjective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many scientists theorize about the possibility of life on other planets.</li> <li>Take BID - Why's life on other planets a <u>theory</u>?</li> </ul> <p>T&amp;T: How does this image capture the meaning of <u>theorize</u>?</p>	
disconsolate adjective	unable to be consoled or comforted; dejected or unhappy	disconsolately adverb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The team returned home disconsolate after three losses to their biggest rivals.</li> <li>T&amp;T: Why might you be disconsolate if you lost to your rivals, rather than just "sad"?</li> </ul> <p>I share outs</p>	



(6 min)

### Vocabulary Active Practice

\* Make sure students use the word in their responses!!

As we apply our new word knowledge, be sure to use the vocabulary word in your answer!

30 sec to think → T+T → 2-3 share outs

1. What might you theorize had happened if you saw a puddle of spilled milk, a broken bowl, and an open window in your kitchen? Challenge: Try to think of a second theory to explain these events.

- cat jumped in window + tried to drink
- gust of wind knocked over bowl

2. Imagine a friend of yours appears disconsolate. Would you try to console them anyway? Why or why not?

Y- true friends always try to help despite challenges

T+T Cold Call - try to get a Y and a N  
N - you might know your friend needs time to process/you will be there later for them

3. The word disconsolate combines the Latin word consolari ("to console") with the prefix dis-, indicating opposite or absence. How might this etymology help us recall the definition of the word "disconsolate"?

↳ not able to be consoled or cheered up

↳ study of words + historical meaning

Take Hands

4. What do you theorize cell phones will be like ten years from now? Why is that your theory?

Stop + Jot, T+T

- implanted in brains bc we rely on them so much!! 😊

Pages 1-5 25 min

Annotation Task: Recall this definition from our Do Now:

Science fiction is a literary genre that deals primarily with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society and individuals and contains elements that don't exist in the real world.

As you read, note any details that connect to the underlined phrases. **Read Aloud (5 min)**

Notes

actual or imagined - robot made of metal feet; robot nodded head

society + indivs - Robbie plays w/ Gloria; Gloria holds R's "hard metal finger" like 2 kids playing tog.

elems that don't exist -

1. What was the first moment in the story that you realized it must be science fiction? Why was that the moment?

**Turn + Talk (1 min)**  
 made of metal / didn't answer in words or parallelepiped head

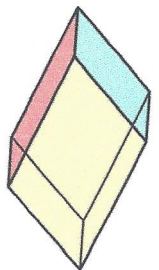
↓  
 assumed humans were playing together, but not!

**Read Aloud rest of text (6 min)**

2. **then 1-2 share outs (2 min)**  
 Turn and Talk: Describe the relationship between Robbie and Gloria. How do they communicate?

- R plays w/ G; G teases R but wants to keep playing
- R does what G says, so R understands humans  
 They communicate through movement + pantomime

Note: A parallelepiped is a three-dimensional shape formed by six parallelograms



**Key**  
 3. Reread these lines from p. 2:

Gleefully, she turned on the faithful Robbie, and with the basest<sup>1</sup> of ingratitude, rewarded him for his sacrifice by taunting him cruelly for a lack of running ability.

<sup>1</sup>basest: lowest or meanest

a. Explain the line above. What is Robbie's "sacrifice"? How does Gloria "[reward] him"? (1 min)

**Stop + Jot during reading**

↳ letting G. win      ↳ teases R. for not being able to run fast.



**Cold Call:** What are the differences bt this sent. and the original in Q1a?

b. Consider the changes in bold.

Gleefully, she turned on **Robbie**, and with the basest<sup>1</sup> of ingratitude, **returned his favor** by taunting him cruelly for a lack of running ability.

(the faithful) is missing

(rewarded him for his sacrifice)

<sup>1</sup>basest: lowest or meanest

**Silent Solo (2 min)**

How do these changes impact Robbie's characterization? What's emphasized about Robbie in the original?

Challenge: Consider the contrast between Robbie and Gloria.

Original: Asimov chooses to describe R as "faithful" and willing to "sacrifice" for G.

which makes R. seem much nicer, even saintly

R. appears to be a better "person" than G. - more considerate, caring than Gloria, who brattily teases R.

these words have religious overtones - faith/belief giving up self for others

**Brief discussion (3-4 min)**

Notes **BD** Qs: What does it mean to be faithful?

When/where do we usually hear the word faithful? the word sacrifice?

Is Gloria faithful?

**Silent Solo - Show Call if time (3 min)**

Additional Insights

~~Revise your ideas above, based on what we discussed about the words "faithful" and "sacrifice."~~ Begin your sentence with "Although Robbie..."

Although Robbie is a robot, he seems to be more caring and compassionate than Gloria.

Although Gloria taunts and teases Robbie, he rises above that by showing a heroic, caring side of his personality.



Cycle 2

(20 min)

Annotation Task: As we read, underline details about the first robots in literature.  
How does Asimov feel about this portrayal?

FASE (4 min)

## Robots in Literature

adapted from "The Frankenstein Complex and Asimov's Robots" by Gorman Beauchamp

In 1818, Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* about a scientific creator and his out-of-control, monstrous creation, a living being created out of spare human parts. Some call *Frankenstein* the first true science fiction story; when Dr. Frankenstein created his monster, the idea that men could create other men was born.

Just over a century later, Karl Capek, in his play *R.U.R.*, carried forward the Frankenstein myth, but with a significant variation: instead of trying to create humans, an engineer named Rossum creates the first robots (a word coined by Capek which means "forced labor" in his native Czech). A pattern emerges in these stories that still informs much of science fiction: the robot, a symbol of modern technology, takes on a will and purpose of its own, independent of and detrimental<sup>1</sup> to human interests.

In a 1964 introduction to a collection of robot stories, Isaac Asimov protests against the horrific, pessimistic<sup>2</sup> attitude toward artificial life established by Mary Shelley, Karel Capek, and their numerous followers:

*One of the stock plots of science fiction was that of the invention of a robot—usually pictured as a creature of metal, without soul or emotion. Under the influence of the well-known deeds and ultimate fate of Frankenstein and Rossum, there seemed only one change to be rung on this plot: —Robots were created and destroyed their creator; robots were created and destroyed their creator; robots were created and destroyed their creator —*

*In the 1930s I became a science fiction reader, and I quickly grew tired of this dull hundred-times-told tale. [...] As a machine, a robot will surely be designed for safety, as far as possible. If robots are so advanced that they can mimic the thought process of human beings, then surely the nature of those thought processes will be designed by human engineers and built-in safeguards will be added.*

*Will all this in mind I began, in 1940, to write robot stories of my own—but robot stories of a new variety. Never, never was one of my robots to turn stupidly on his creator.*

The robots of his stories, Asimov concludes, were more likely to be victimized<sup>3</sup> by men, suffering from the Frankenstein complex, than vice versa. [...] His robots are our friends, devoted to serving humanity, not our enemies, intent on destruction.

<sup>1</sup>detrimental: obviously harmful, damaging

<sup>2</sup>pessimistic: tending to believe the worst will happen

<sup>3</sup>victimized: singled out for cruel or unjust treatment

4. A stock plot refers to a plot or storyline that is reused again and again and is therefore predictable. Describe what Asimov sees as a "one of the stock plots of science fiction." How does he feel about this stock plot?

*Silent Solo (2 min)*  
A. sees that "stock plot" = soulless, emotionless robots destroy creators

A. feels that, if robots can think like humans, the humans who design them will make sure this destructive tendency will be considered and will prevent it from happening/guard against it/make it safe.

A. is also bored with the traditional "stock" plot, and will make robots = friends.



5. Reread this line from the article above:

The robots of his stories, Asimov concludes, were more likely to be victimized<sup>3</sup> by men, suffering from the Frankenstein complex, than vice versa. [...] His robots are our friends, devoted to serving humanity, not our enemies, intent on destruction.

*Knowledge feed to save time: if*  
a. Turn and Talk: What does the author mean by "the Frankenstein complex"? *means fear of creations (monsters or robots) destroying humans*

*2 min*  
b. Summarize this quote. What is the author of the article saying about Asimov's robots?

*Asimov's robots are designed to be friendly counterparts to humanity. They will not attempt harm on humanity ... in fact, humans are more likely to hurt the robots.*

*Take hands - then Stamp. Teacher summarizes if stu. struggle.*

*(2 min) Silent Solo - see section in text*

Annotation Task: Emotions are often assumed to be the difference between people and machines. Consider the description of robots as "[creatures] of metal, without soul or emotion." Reread pp. 1-6 and note any descriptions of Robbie's emotional state. Does he appear to have "soul or emotion"?

Note: Pay particular attention to the adverbs the narrator uses to describe him.

Notes

*key*  
6. How does Asimov introduce Robbie on pp. 1-2? Why might he have done so? Consider Asimov's goal to write "robot stories of a new variety."

*Stop + Jot*  
*R. is playing a childish game with a little girl. He seems to possess emotions, values, humanity and can be hurt/manipulated by Gloria.*

*BID: Who seems like a better friend? Why? Why might Asimov show us this?*

*A. was bored by stock plots of emotionless robots destroying their creators; he wants to show robots as friends who serve humanity.*

*brief discussion*  
*(3 min)*

Silent Solo: (3 min)



7. Beginning with the word "Unlike," describe how Asimov's depiction of Robbie differs from the typical portrayal of robots in science fiction. **Challenge:** Embed a quote from the passage above.

Unlike the traditional stories where robots harm humanity, "Robbie" highlights A's belief that robots will befriend humans, so he makes Robbie into a child's faithful playmate.

Revision

if pacing allows

Unlike the traditional stories where robots "destroy their creator," "Robbie" highlights A's belief that robots will possess "built-in safeguards" and become "our friends, devoted to serving humanity" and used as a faithful playmate for Gloria.



Pages 5-8: On Your Own **FASE** - Before we read, jot a note - what is Gloria's perspective on R.? What does she think about him?  
 Annotation Task: As you read, note each human character's perspective on Robbie and continue to annotate any evidence of Robbie's "soul or emotion."  
 While reading, pause to jot note on the Westons' perspectives - see stopping points in text.  
 (8 mins) = read + notes

**Notes**  
 Gloria - wants R. around as companion  
 Mrs. W - doesn't like/trust R.  
 Mr. W - R = expensive toy; built for a purpose

**Say:** Narrative distance refers to the proximity or distance between the story's narrator and the characters being described. For example, a narrator who relays both the conscious and unconscious thoughts of a character creates the smallest possible distance between narrator and character; a narrator who only reports the external, observable actions of a character creates the largest possible distance. Authors can manipulate narrative distance, using it like a camera to zoom in on a character's point of view to create closeness between characters and readers.  
**Say:** Narrators who describe a char's thoughts + actions = close  
 narrators who only describe char's actions = more distant  
 (1 min)  
 Summarize for students: can't/doesn't get close, can see inside

8. Consider these lines from p. 5:

Mrs. Weston	Robbie
<p>It was the high-pitched sound of a woman who has been calling not once, but several times; and had the nervous tone of one in whom anxiety was beginning to overcome patience.</p> <p>just describing actions</p> <p><b>BID</b> - Are these descriptions inside Mrs. W- her thoughts - or outside - her actions? Capture note</p>	<p>Robbie obeyed with alacrity for somehow there was that in him which judged it best to obey Mrs. Weston, without as much as a scrap of hesitation [...] Gloria's mother [...] was a source of uneasiness to Robbie and there was always the impulse to steal away from her sight.</p> <p>inner thoughts</p> <p>Are these descriptions something we can see outside R. - or do we need to be inside his head to "see" them? Add note</p>

a. Contrast the narrative distance in these two excerpts. Does the narrator relay the external, observable actions or internal, unconscious thoughts of each character? Explain your thinking.

Narrator is distant or more separated from Mrs. W. because nar. only describes what Mrs. W does; nar. is closer to R. because nar. describes R's thoughts, feelings, impulses.

b. Why might Asimov have chosen to vary the narrative distance in this way? What is its effect on us as readers?  
**BID:** How might we feel about R. if we know his thoughts + feelings?

As readers, we follow the narrator's lead (because the narrator guides us through the story.) So, readers gain more sympathy/insight into R's thoughts + feelings. We might grow to understand R. better.



9. Reread this conversation between Gloria's parents:

The paper rustled to the floor and Weston turned a weary face toward his wife, "What is it dear?"

"You know what it is, George. It's Gloria and that terrible machine."

"What terrible machine?"

"Now don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about. It's that robot Gloria calls Robbie. He doesn't leave her for a moment."

"Well, why should he? He's not supposed to. And he certainly isn't a terrible machine. He's the best darn robot money can buy and I'm damned sure he set me back half a year's income. He's worth it though - darn sight cleverer than half my office staff."

a. Turn and Talk: Why might Mr. Weston mention Robbie's price to Mrs. Weston? What might this reveal about his perspective on Robbie? *Mr. W = more open to keeping Robbie around, but perhaps*

*T+T because he views R as an object/symbol of his wealth/success.*

*Recall our notes from p. 9 of packet*

b. What does Robbie mean to each member of the family? How might these differing perspectives introduce conflict in the story? *If pacing allows.*

*G = faithful playmate*

*Mrs. W. = untrustworthy; terrible machine*

*Mr. W. = valuable object*

*↓ If everyone has a different perspective, that might set up conflict - their opinions will clash; they might be pitted against one another; Mrs. W. might want R gone, which could irritate Mr. W and upset G.*



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Exit Ticket 8-10 mins

1. Recall the quote from the article on Asimov:

The robots of his stories, Asimov concludes, were more likely to be victimized by men, suffering from the Frankenstein complex, than vice versa. [...] His robots are our friends, devoted to serving humanity, not our enemies, intent on destruction.

How well does this quote apply to the story of "Robbie"?

R. is "victimized" by Gloria when she taunts Robbie and Mrs. Weston when she calls R. a "terrible machine." Robbie, however, is friendly to Gloria, and a "devoted" playmate.

2. On p. 6, after being scolded and dismissed by Mrs. Weston, the text states, "The robot left with a disconsolate step and Gloria choked back a sob."

Explain the significance of the word "disconsolate" in this moment. Why might Asimov have described the robot in this way?

↳ unable to be consoled/comforted

Since Asimov describes R. as "disconsolate," we see the depths of R's emotions and how desperately R. longs to be a companion to Gloria. Asimov may want us to sympathize with Robbie, showing us that robots can befriend + serve humanity. A. is pushing against the traditional view of robots as destructive to humanity.

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## Homework

Nightly Reading: "Robbie" pp. 8-9 (from "But something might go wrong..." to ... "We're keeping Robbie!")

### Annotation Focus:

- How does Mrs. Weston feel about Robbie? What does she want Mr. Weston to do?
- How does Mr. Weston respond?

1. Why did the Westons purchase Robbie initially? How has Mrs. Weston's perspective on Robbie changed?

*They originally purchased R. as a status symbol, something fashionable so the neighbors would take notice. Now, Mrs. W. fears something will go wrong w/ R. and he might harm them.*

2. When Mr. Weston tells Mrs. Weston to "pretend Robbie's a dog," Mrs. Weston replies, "A dog is different." What might she mean by this?

*Mrs. W might mean a dog is "alive" and more like humans. She seems to think R. is untrustworthy because he's a machine.*

3. An ordinance is a law or rule enacted by a city. What ordinance does Mrs. Weston tell Mr. Weston about on p. 9? Why might she have mentioned this ordinance?

*Mrs. W. says an ordinance has been passed to keep robots off the street at night. She might be trying to support her feelings that R. is a cause for fear; might be trying to convince Mr. W. that others believe that robots are dangerous/untrustworthy, too.*