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| **At a Glance – “The robot left with a disconsolate step”*** **Lesson Objective**: Analyze Asimov’s depiction of relationships between technology and humanity.
* **In the Story:** A little girl named Gloria plays hide-and-go-seek with her playmate, a robot she calls Robbie. Gloria tells him the story of Cinderella, but when Gloria’s mother, Mrs. Weston, arrives, she scolds Gloria for losing track of time and abruptly dismisses Robbie. Later that evening, Mrs. Weston pesters Mr. Weston about Robbie, pushing him to get rid of the robot because she’s worried it isn’t good for Gloria to spend so much time with a machine.
* **Key Questions:** Questions 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 are the most important questions of the day and should not be skipped.
* **Words to Watch For:**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Page** | **Word** | **Meaning in Context**  | **Page** | **Word** | **Meaning in Context** |
| 1 | **recesses** | secret or hidden places | 2 | **resonant** | deep, clear, and continuous in sound  |
| 1 | **profound** | complete; deeply felt | 3 | **ponderously** | in a slow, serious way |
| 1 | **incessant** | continuing without interruption | 4 | **irrefutable** | impossible to prove wrong; indisputable |
| 1 | **dismay** | disappointment | 5 | **alacrity** | promptness or speed |
| 2 | **basest** | lowest or meanest | 5 | **genial** | friendly and cheerful |
| 1 | **pantomime** | to tell through movement rather than words |  |  |  |

* **Homework Options:**
	+ Nightly Reading (pp. 8-9) and questions (attached)
	+ Knowledge Organizer review
	+ Questions from the lesson that were skipped for time
 |
| **Agenda:** * Do Now (10 minutes)
* Explicit Vocabulary and Active Practice (10 minutes)
* Introduce the Unit(1 minute)
* Cycle 1 – Read Aloud or FASE Reading: Pages 1-5 (20 minutes)
* Cycle 2 – FASE Reading or Read Aloud: “Robots in Literature” (20 minutes)
* Cycle 3 – AIR: Pages 5-8 (20 minutes)
* Exit Ticket (10 minutes)
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| **Lesson Plan****Do Now (10 minutes)*** Give students 5-6 minutes to read the text and answer **Q1-Q3**, then review using **Cold Call, share out,** or a **brief discussion**.
* **Q1:** **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?**
	+ *actual or imagined science*; may be based on real, scientific properties and technology but may also be invented to suit the story
	+ *society and individuals*; may have a narrow focus on individual people/relationships or may reflect more broadly on society as a whole
	+ *contains elements that don’t exist in the real world*; science fiction will often include ideas/characters/situations that don’t really exist
		- Examples of each may vary
* **Q2: What’s similar about the way all four authors quoted above view science fiction?**
	+ All four authors see future possibilities and potential changes to human life as the heart of science fiction. They emphasize the importance of “the possible” and see science fiction as a way to explore the impact of imagined change on humanity or society.
* **Q3: Challenge: Write your own definition of science fiction.**
	+ Responses will vary but should capture elements of change, future, and science noted in the article above
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| **Explicit Vocabulary Instruction (10 minutes) — Theorize, Disconsolate** * Teach each word to students, one at a time.
* Read or ask a student to read the example sentence that includes the vocabulary word.
* Shift focus to how the picture demonstrates the word (*while projecting the image*).
* Lead Active Practice questions
 |
| **Introduce the Unit (1 minute)*** **Frame**: Before beginning to read, give students a 1-2 sentence explanation of the new unit*.* You may choose to use or adapt the following language:
	+ *I’m excited to begin our new unit. Over the next few weeks, we’ll be reading eight well-known, highly regarded examples of science fiction. While the situations and events in these stories vary widely, we’ll also notice some ideas and techniques that are common to them all. Our first story, written by Isaac Asimov is called “Robbie.” It tells the story of a young girl named Gloria and her unexpected playmate.*
 |
| **Cycle 1 (20 minutes) — Pages 1-5*** **Read:** **Read Aloud** pp. 1-2, pausing at “steady, resonant ticking” on p. 2. While reading, students should **annotate** any details that connect to the definition of science fiction from the Do Now.
	+ **Potential Annotations**
		- *the distinctive and rhythmic clump-clump of Robbie’s metal feet* (p. 1)
		- *Robbie didn’t answer of course – not in words* (p. 2)
		- *Robbie nodded his head—a small parallelepiped with rounded edges and corners attached to a similar but much larger parallelepiped that served as a torso by means of a short, flexible stalk—and obediently faced the tree.* (p. 2)
		- *A thin, metal film descended over his glowing eyes and from within his body came a steady, resonant ticking*. (p. 2)
* **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q1** in writing. You may wish to have students **Turn and Talk** to share their responses before bringing the discussion whole group.
* **Discuss:** Invite 2-3 students to **share out** responses to **Q1**. You might **Cold Call** strong responses to support pacing.
	+ **Q1: What was the first moment in the story that you realized it must be science fiction? Why was that the moment?**
		- Responses may vary, but could include the moment at the bottom of page 2 when we realize Robbie is made of metal (“the distinctive and rhythmic clump-clump of Robbie’s metal feet”) or the longer description of Robbie at the bottom of p. 2 (“a small parallelepiped…short flexible stalk”). Students should be thinking about the first mention of “real or imagined science” or reference to “elements that don’t exist in the real world.”
* **Read:** Continue reading, using either **Read Aloud** or **FASE Reading**, from the top of p. 3 (“Don’t peek now”) through the section break on p. 5 (“two ugly and *very* cruel stepsisters and—"). Students should continue to **annotate** any elements of the science fiction genre they see in these pages.
* **Write**: Ask students to **Turn and Talk** to respond to **Q2** and write responses to **Q3**.
* **Discuss:** **Share out** responses to **Q2** and lead a **brief discussion** of **Q3.** ***Note****: You might choose to discuss* ***Q3a*** *before students write responses for* ***Q3b****.*
	+ **Q2: Describe the relationship between Robbie and Gloria. How do they communicate?**
		- Robbie and Gloria play together (although Gloria is very bossy). Robbie doesn’t seem to be human, but they still appear to be good friends. Robbie does not seem able to speak, but he can understand Gloria when she speaks aloud and communicates with her through body language and gestures (e.g., pantomime or drawing the letter “C” in the air for Cinderella).
	+ **Q3a: Explain the line above. What is Robbie’s “sacrifice”? How does Gloria “[reward] him”?**
		- In this line, Gloria mocks Robbie for losing the race after he allows her to beat him back to the home tree. His “sacrifice” was to allow her to win (If students are unsure, you may wish to refer back to pp. 2-3: “within ten feet of the goal, Robbie’s pace slowed suddenly to the merest of crawls, and Gloria, with one final burst of wild speed, dashed pantingly past him to touch the welcome bark of the home tree first”). Gloria “rewards him” by making fun of him for losing.
	+ **Q3b: How do these changes impact Robbie’s characterization? What’s emphasized about Robbie in the original? Consider the contrast between Robbie and Gloria.**
		- The altered version removes the word “faithful” and minimizes Robbie’s action, changing from a “sacrifice” to a “favor.” In the original, Robbie is described in glowing, heroic, almost religious terms (he’s “faithful,” making a “sacrifice” despite being treated “cruelly”). The words used to describe Robbie are elevated beyond the level of a game of hide and seek. While Gloria appears petulant and even bratty, ironically “rewarding” Robbie by “cruelly” making fun of him after he sacrificed for her, Robbie seems saint-like, patient beyond the limits of an ordinary person.
* **Revise**: If time allows, give students an opportunity to revise or add on to their thinking for **Q3** using their notes from discussion.
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| **Cycle 2 (20 minutes) – “Robots in Literature”** * **Read:** **Read Aloud** or use **FASE Reading**to read the embedded article, “Robots in Literature.”
* **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q4-Q5**, cueing to **Turn and Talk** for **Q5a**.
* **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion** of **Q4-Q5** to surface the key ideas.
	+ **Q4: 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?**
		- Asimov says one of the stock plots of science fiction is that when someone creates a robot, the robot eventually destroys the creator. He thinks this is dull and predictable and also unlikely to happen since robots would be designed more strategically than this.
	+ **Q5a:** **What does the author mean by “the Frankenstein complex”?**
		- The “Frankenstein complex” refers to the fear of creations rising up and destroying their creators, a fear notably explored in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.
	+ **Q5b: Summarize this quote. What is the author of the article saying about Asimov’s robots?**
		- Asimov’s robots are more likely to *be* harmed or treated cruelly by people who are afraid of them than they are to harm or injure people. The author explains that Asimov’s robots are written to be “friends” to humanity, meant to serve and protect us, rather than enemies who might rise up to destroy us.
* **Read**: Ask students to reread pp. 1-6 independently or with a partner and **annotate** any descriptions of Robbie’s “soul or emotion.” You may wish to **Show Call** strong student annotations before asking students to write.
	+ **Potential Annotations**
		- **Page 2**
			* *the faithful Robbie*
			* *his sacrifice*
			* *Robbie cowered, holding his hands over his face*
		- **Page 3**
			* *Robbie was hurt at the unjust accusation*
			* *He seated himself carefully and shook his head ponderously*
			* *He gazed stubbornly at the sky and shook his head even more emphatically*
			* *Hard-hearted Robbie*
			* *Robbie gave in immediately and unconditionally…nodding his head vigorously*
		- **Pages 4-5**
			* Robbie’s desperation for and love of stories (especially Cinderella even through Gloria has told it “a million times”)
* **Write**: Ask students to write responses independently to **Q6-Q7**.
* **Discuss**: **Share out** responses to **Q6** and lead a **brief discussion** of **Q7**. You may wish to **Show Call** responses to **Q7** that skillfully embed relevant evidence from the article.
	+ **Q6: 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.”**
		- Asimov introduces Robbie playing a game of hide and seek with a little girl. The incongruity of a robot playing a childish game reflects Asimov’s goal to break out of the stock plots of soulless robots, mindlessly destroying humanity. He opens his story instead with a scene of joy in which the robot is depicted as even more faithful, loyal, and patient than the human.
	+ **Q7: 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 previous depictions of robots as “creatures of metal without soul or emotion,” Asimov depicts Robbie as a faithful, caring playmate to a little girl who seems to have deep emotions and a love of fairy tales.
* **Revise**: If time allows, you may ask students to revise or add on to their responses for **Q7**.
 |
| **Cycle 3 (20 minutes) – Pages 5-8** * **Read:** Ask students to use **AIR** to read pp. 5-8, picking up after the section break on p. 5 (“Gloria was reaching”) and pausing at the top of p. 8 (after “‘That’s more than you can say for humans.’”). While reading, students should **annotate** evidence of each character’s perspective on Robbie and note any additional evidence of his “soul or emotion.”
	+ **Potential Annotations**
		- *Robbie listened tensely with burning eyes* (p. 5)
		- *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. 5)
		- *“You may go, Robbie. She doesn’t need you now”* (p. 6)
		- *The robot left with a disconsolate step and Gloria choked back a sob*. (p. 6)
		- “*It’s Gloria and that terrible machine”* (p. 7)
		- *“He’s the best darn robot money can buy* […] *Darn sight cleverer than half my office staff”* (p. 7)
		- *“A child just isn’t made to be guarded by a thing of metal”* (p. 7)
		- *“He just can’t help being faithful and loving and kind. He’s a machine – made so. That’s more than you can say for humans”* (p. 8)
* **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q8** after reading the embellishment on narrative distance.
* **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion of Q8** by taking hands or using **Cold Call** to surface key ideas.
	+ **Q8a: 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.**
		- There is a great deal of narrative distance between the narrator and Mrs. Weston; only her external actions are described (and the inferences one can make from those observations). There’s much less narrative distance between the narrator and Robbie; the narrator relays thoughts and feelings that Robbie himself doesn’t quite seem aware of.
	+ **Q8b: Why might Asimov have chosen to vary the narrative distance in this way? What is its effect on us as readers?**
		- This variation in narrative distance causes us to feel connected to and sympathetic toward Robbie because we understand his emotions and thoughts more clearly. We feel more distant from Mrs. Weston and less understanding of her point of view because we have less access to her perspective. Even though Robbie is not human, the narrator “humanizes” his emotions, describing the way Mrs. Weston makes him feel in ways readers can empathize with.
* **Write**: Ask students to **Turn and Talk** to respond to **Q9a** and write responses to **Q9b.**
	+ **Q9a: Why might Mr. Weston mention Robbie’s price to Mrs. Weston? What might this reveal about his perspective on Robbie?**
		- Mr. Weston may have mentioned Robbie’s price because he’s judges Robbie’s value based on how much money he cost. He thinks Robbie “is the best darn robot money can buy,” and therefore is less interested in getting rid of him than Mrs. Weston is.
	+ **Q9b: What does Robbie mean to each member of the family? How might these differing perspectives introduce conflict in the story?**
		- To Mr. Weston, Robbie is a status symbol, an expensive and useful piece of technology. To Gloria, he is a dear friend. To Mrs. Weston, he’s a threat or something to worry about. This is already leading to conflict as Mrs. Weston wants to get rid of Robbie.
 |
| **Exit Ticket (10 minutes)*** **Q1: How well does this quote apply to the story of “Robbie”?**
	+ Robbie, rather than harming Gloria or the other humans, is more likely to be “victimized” or treated cruelly by them because of their fear of him.
* **Q2: Explain the significance of the word “disconsolate” in this moment. Why might Asimov have described the robot in this way?**
	+ To be disconsolate means to feel deeply unhappy, so unhappy one cannot be consoled. Describing the robot as disconsolate emphasizes his powerful, human emotions (and highlights how devastated he feels when he can’t hear the end of a story he loves). Choosing this word allows Asimov to show that even though Robbie is a “creature of metal,” he does seem to have “soul and emotion.”
 |
| **Homework Answers**1. Robots like Robbie were initially a status symbol, something all the families who could afford would want to buy. Now, Mrs. Weston is feeling anxious that Robbie and Gloria are spending so much time together.
2. She seems biased against Robbie because he isn’t a living being. She calls him a “terrible machine” and worries something could break inside him that changes his behavior and puts her daughter in danger.
3. Mrs. Weston tells Mr. Weston about an ordinance that outlaws robots on the streets of NYC after dark. She’s trying to prove her point that robots are dangerous by pointing out other people have already taken steps limiting their activities.
 |