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

**Homeroom**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ **Class: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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

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| **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.

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| **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 AsimovScience fiction reaches into the future, the past, the human mind. It reaches out to other worlds and into other dimensions. – Octavia ButlerI 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 improbable1 possibilities.* – Miriam Allen de Ford1**improbable**: not likely to be true or to occur |

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?

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| Notes |

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

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1. **Challenge**: Write your own definition of science fiction.

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| 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  | theory*noun*theoretical*adjective* | * Many scientists **theorize** about the possibility of life on other planets.
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| **disconsolate***adjective* | unable to be consoled or comforted; dejected or unhappy  | disconsolately*adverb* | * The team returned home **disconsolate** after three losses to their biggest rivals.
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| Vocabulary Active Practice |
|  **As we apply our new word knowledge, be sure to use the vocabulary word in your answer!**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.
2. Imagine a friend of yours appears **disconsolate**. Would you try to console them anyway? Why or why not?
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**”?
4. What do you **theorize** cell phones will be like ten years from now? Why is that your **theory**?

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**Pages 1-5**

**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.

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| **Notes** |

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

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1. **Turn and Talk**: Describe the relationship between Robbie and Gloria. How do they communicate?

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



1. Reread these lines from p. 2:

*Gleefully, she turned on the faithful Robbie, and with the basest1 of ingratitude, rewarded him for his sacrifice by taunting him cruelly for a lack of running ability.*

 1**basest**: lowest or meanest

1. Explain the line above. What is Robbie’s “sacrifice”? How does Gloria “[reward] him”?

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1. Consider the changes in bold.

*Gleefully, she turned on* ***Robbie****, and with the basest1 of ingratitude,* ***returned his favor*** *by taunting him cruelly for a lack of running ability.*

1**bases**t: lowest or meanest

How do these changes impact Robbie’s characterization? What’s emphasized about Robbie in the original? **Challenge**: Consider the contrast between Robbie and Gloria.

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| **Notes** |

**Additional Insights**

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**Cycle 2**

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| **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 detrimental1 to human interests. In a 1964 introduction to a collection of robot stories, Isaac Asimov protests against the horrific, pessimistic2 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 victimized3 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. 1**detrimental**: obviously harmful, damaging2**pessimistic**: tending to believe the worst will happen3**victimized**: singled out for cruel or unjust treatment  |

1. 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?

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1. Reread this line from the article above:

*The robots of his stories, Asimov concludes, were more likely to be victimized3 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.*

1. **Turn and Talk**: What does the author mean by “the Frankenstein complex”?
2. Summarize this quote. What is the author of the article saying about Asimov’s robots?

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**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.

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| **Notes** |

1. 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.”

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1. 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.

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##### Revision

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**Pages 5-8: On Your Own**

**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.”

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| **Notes** |

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| **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.  |

1. Consider these lines from p. 5:

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| **Mrs. Weston** | **Robbie** |
| *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.*  | *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.* |

1. 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.

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1. Why might Asimov have chosen to vary the narrative distance in this way? What is its effect on us as readers?

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1. Reread this conversation between Gloria’s parents:

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| *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.”*  |

1. **Turn and Talk**: Why might Mr. Weston mention Robbie’s price to Mrs. Weston? What might this reveal about his perspective on Robbie?
2. What does Robbie mean to each member of the family? How might these differing perspectives introduce conflict in the story?

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**Exit Ticket**

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”?

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1. 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?

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**Homeroom**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ **Class: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**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?

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1. 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?

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1. 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?

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