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

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

## “Robbie” (pp. 9-19) “He was *not* no machine!”

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| **Lesson Objective:** Examine different characters’ perspectives on the humanity of machines. |

**Do Now Quiz (Nightly Reading pp. 8-9)**

**Directions**: Answer the following questions about pp. 8-9 of “Robbie.”

1. Reread this conversation from p. 8:

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| “You’re jumping at shadows, Grace. Pretend Robbie’s a dog. I’ve seen hundreds of children who would rather have their dog than their father.” *“A dog is different, George. We must get rid of that horrible thing. You can sell it back to the company. I’ve asked, and you can.”*  |

Explain this scene. Who or what is Grace Weston referring to as “that horrible thing”? What does she want her husband to do? Why?

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1. According to Mr. Weston, what is true about robots? Is Mrs. Weston reassured by this? Why or why not? **Challenge**: What does she **theorize** might happen?

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| Vocabulary: Precipitously, Prosaic |
| **Word** | **Definition** | **Related****Parts of Speech** | **Situations** | **Image** |
| **precipitously***adverb* | 1. very steeply or suddenly
2. with excessive or careless speed
 | precipitous*adjective* | * The swimmers rushed **precipitously** out of the water when someone shouted, “Shark!”
* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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| **prosaic***adjective* | dull, ordinary, or unimaginative  | prosaically *adverb* | * She believes the noises are made by ghosts, but I think there’s a more **prosaic** explanation.
* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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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. If you were hiking and the trail before you rose **precipitously**, would you continue or turn back? Why?
2. What might a teacher do in response to a **precipitous** drop in students’ homework completion? Why?
3. When might something **prosaic** (e.g., a grocery list or a single shoe) belong in a museum?
4. If a friend wrote a story and the teacher said it was **prosaic**, would that be a compliment? Why or why not?
5. Long ago, **prosaic** simply meant a textmade up of prose (ordinary language) rather than poetry. Poetry was viewed as the more beautiful, imaginative, and emotional type of writing, and prose was considered **mundane** and ordinary. Do you think this is true? Have you ever read prose that was beautiful?
6. Why might a science fiction author include **prosaic** elements in his or her work? **Challenge**: Name one **prosaic** detail in “Robbie.”

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**Pages 9-13**

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| **Adapted from “Dead Technology”** *by Bill Tomlinson, MIT*The role of machines in people’s lives has evolved during this century. In 1921, Karel Capek coined the word “robot,” derived from the Czech word for hard, menial1 labor […] In the 1950s, supercomputers were treated with the utmost respect by their white-lab-coated [technicians]. These days, computers are commonplace and often take the place of companions as people sink vast quantities of time into computer games and the internet. The words and metaphors we use in referring to these machines reflect this shifting emphasis from menial labor to social acquaintance. Everybody knows machines aren’t alive. However, sometimes when a machine breaks, we say it has “died.” What is it about machines that causes them to deserve words that used to be reserved for living things? Although they aren’t alive, machines are now being endowed with the characteristics of living things. Humans have a variety of mental cues that help us recognize living things. For survival reasons, it is important for us to be able to recognize quickly that something is alive. Certain elements provoke a very strong response. For example, people are very good at recognizing faces. Eyes, noses, and mouths seem to pop out of everywhere – clouds, parking meters, houses. When many mental cues fire for recognizing something as alive, but others are triggered pointing to some other category, a cognitive dissonance2 occurs. The mental discomfort caused when an object is life-like, yet not quite perfect, triggers revulsion³ in people rather than a sympathetic response. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818, offers the archetypal4 symbol of technology run amok – it seems alive, and yet is a human construct.Our attachment to our machines may also cause us to attribute human emotions, qualities, and personalities to them. As they become more familiar, machines are growing into the words that are reserved for people, pets, and other living things -- “grumpy,” “tired,” “alive,” “dead.” The distinction between human and machine is blurred in the language we use to refer to each. 1**menial**: lowly, not requiring much skill 2**cognitive dissonance**: mental discomfort caused when one holds multiple contradictory beliefs ³**revulsion**: a sudden pulling or drawing away caused by a strong feeling of disgust4**archetypal**: the original model or pattern; a perfect example  |

1. **Turn and Talk**: According to the author, when might an object “[trigger] revulsion in people rather than a sympathetic response”? Why might this be?



1. Paraphrase this quote from the article: *The words and metaphors we use in referring to these machines reflect this shifting emphasis from menial labor to social acquaintance.*

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**Annotation Task:** As you read, note the “words and metaphors” characters use to refer to Robbie. What do these words show about the “shifting emphasis from menial labor to social acquaintance”?

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| **Notes** |

1. **Turn and Talk**: Explain Mr. and Mrs. Weston’s plan. Why might Mr. Weston have “guiltily” suggested going to see a show in the village on p. 10?



1. Reread these lines from p. 11:

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| *“We may find him soon. We’ll keep looking for him. And meanwhile you can play with your nice new doggie. Look at him! His name is Lightning and he can—”* *But Gloria’s eyelids had overflown, “I don’t want the nasty dog. I want Robbie. I want you to find me Robbie.” Her feelings became too deep for words and she spluttered into a shrill wail.* *Mrs. Weston glanced at her husband for help, but he merely shuffled his feet morosely and did not withdraw his ardent stare from the heaves, so she bent to the task of consolation, “Why do you cry, Gloria? Robbie was only a machine, just a nasty old machine. He wasn’t alive at all.”* *“He was* not *no machine!” screamed Gloria fiercely and ungrammatically. “He was a person just like you and me and he was my* friend*. I want him back. Oh, Mama, I want him back.”*  |

1. How does Mrs. Weston attempt to comfort Gloria? Why might this approach be ineffective? Try to think of multiple reasons. **Challenge**: Include the word **disconsolate** in your response.

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1. Contrast Gloria’s and Mrs. Weston’s perspectives on Robbie, considering the article on p. 4 of your packet. To what extent do each of them view him as a living person? How does the language each uses reveal her perspective?

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1. **Turn and Talk:** On p. 13, Mr. Weston mutters to his wife, “It’s a pity you didn’t think of your little girl’s health before you deprived her of her pet robot.”

What does the underlined phrase reveal?

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| **Notes** |

1. **Stamp**: In one artful sentence, contrast the extent to which each member of the Weston family perceives Robbie as a living being. **Challenge**: Include 1-2 words of embedded evidence to support your thinking for each character’s perspective.

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**Pages 13-16: On Your Own**

**Annotation Task:** Often in science fiction, authors include scientific-sounding or **futuristic** terms, details, or descriptions without explanation (e.g., “visivox show” on p. 10). As you read, note any **futuristic** terms or names Asimov uses. What do these details reveal about the future Asimov imagines?

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| **Notes** |

1. Complete each of the following sentences:
* Gloria “displayed immediate signs of improvement” **after** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* **When** Gloria “displayed immediate signs of improvement,” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Gloria “displayed immediate signs of improvement,” **but** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. **Turn and Talk**: Which of the following technologies do you think existed in 1940, the year “Robbie” was first published?

television radio trains cars internet electricity

1. Isaac Asimov published “Robbie” (originally titled “Strange Playfellow”) in 1940. In what year did he set the story? Describe some of the **futuristic** elements of the setting. What’s potentially **ironic** about reading this story decades *after* the year in which it was set?

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**Pages 17-19**

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| **Personhood**While the defining features of personhood can vary across cultures and contexts, a person is typically defined as a being that has certain capabilities or attributes such as **morality** (a sense of right and wrong), **reason** (the capacity to make sense of or understand things), **consciousness** (awareness of one’s existence and internal feelings), and **self-awareness** (the ability recognize oneself as an individual separate from the environment). As a category, persons are distinguished from pets and property and possess the moral right to make their own life choices |

1. Reread these lines from p. 17:

*To her at that moment, another human being was but an inconsiderable item. She saved her attention for this large thing with the wheels.*

1. **Turn and Talk**: Why does Gloria want to speak to the Talking Robot? Why might another human being seem like an “inconsiderable item” to her at this moment?
2. Consider Mrs. Weston’s motivation in getting rid of Robbie. What’s potentially **ironic** about Gloria’s focus in this line?

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1. Reread this conversation between Gloria and the Talking Robot from p. 18:

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| *“Who—is Robbie?”* *“He’s a robot, Mr. Robot, sir.” She stretched to tiptoes. “He’s about so high, Mr. Robot, sir, only higher, and he’s very nice. He’s got a head, you know. I mean you haven’t, but he has, Mr. Robot, sir.”* *The Talking Robot had been left behind, “A—robot?”* *“Yes, Mr. Robot, sir. A robot just like you, except he can’t talk, of course, and – looks like a real person.”* *“A—robot—like—me?”* *“Yes, Mr. Robot, sir.”* *To which the Talking Robot’s only response was an erratic1 splutter and an occasional incoherent2 sound. The radical generalization offered it, i.e., its existence, not as a particular object, but as a member of a general group, was too much for it. Loyally, it tried to encompass3 the concept and half a dozen coils burnt out. Little warning signals were buzzing.* 1**erratic**: irregular and unpredictable 2**incoherant**: unclear, confusing, or incomprehensible 3**encompass**: include or comprehend |

1. **Turn and Task**: Compare and contrast Gloria’s interactions with the Talking Robot to her interactions with Robbie (pp. 1-9). Consider both how she speaks with them and how she perceives them.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Similar** | **Different** |
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1. What do these similarities reveal about Gloria’s perspective on the robots’ personhood? What do you think accounts for the differences? Consider physical differences between the robots and the articles above.

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1. Reread these lines from the excerpt above:

***The radical generalization offered it, i.e., its existence, not as a particular object, but as a member of a general group, was too much for it****. Loyally, it tried to encompass the concept and half a dozen coils burnt out.*

1. Summarize the line in bold. Begin with the phrase “The robot could not understand…”

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1. What is “the concept”? Why might trying to “encompass” or comprehend this concept cause the robot’s coils to burn out?

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

##### Homeroom: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Class:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Exit Ticket**

1. In the chart below, describe each character’s perspective on Robbie (and especially to what extent Robbie can be considered a person). **Challenge**: Include a short piece of evidence (2-6 words) to describe each perspective.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Gloria** |  |
| **Mrs. Weston** |  |
| **Mr. Weston** |  |
| **Mr. Robot** |  |

1. Reread Mrs. Weston’s quote from p. 12:

*It is really the silliest situation I have ever heard of. Imagine a child pining1 away for the loss of a robot.*

*1****pining****: to yearn or long for something*

Why might Mrs. Weston call this “the silliest situation” she has ever heard of?

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

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

**Homework**

**Directions**: Read the article below and answer the questions that follow.

|  |
| --- |
| **Meet Zora, the Robot Caregiver***Excerpted from The New York Times*By Adam Satariano, Elian Peltier, and Dmitry Kostyukov **This is Zora**It may not look like much — more cute toy than futuristic marvel — but this robot is at the center of an experiment in France to change care for elderly patients.When Zora arrived at this nursing facility an hour outside Paris, a strange thing began happening: Many patients developed an emotional attachment, treating it like a baby, holding and cooing, giving it kisses on the head.Zora, which can cost up to $18,000, offered companionship in a place where life can be lonely. Families can visit only so much, and staff members are stretched. The nurse at Jouarre who oversees Zora controls the robot from a laptop. He often stands out of view so patients don’t know it’s him at the controls.The robot can have a conversation because the nurse types words into a laptop for the robot to speak. Some patients refer to Zora as “she,” others “he.” Zora often leads exercises and plays games.**Robot Nurses** Robotics still has a long way to go before there’s a realistic chance of having a humanoid nurse. Zora doesn’t dispense medicine, take blood pressure or change bedsheets. At Jouarre, Zora was viewed by some as a superfluous tool that just “keeps the patients busy,” according to a nurse, Sophie Riffault.Another nurse, Nathalie Racine, said she wouldn’t let a robot feed patients even if it could. Humans shouldn’t delegate such intimate moments to machines. “Nothing will ever replace the human touch, the human warmth our patients need,” she said.The experience at Jouarre provides a window into a future when we will rely more on robots to help care for loved ones as they age.Zora Bots, the Belgium-based provider of the robot at Jouarre, says it has sold over 1,000 of the robots to health care facilities around the world, including in the United States, Asia and Middle East. It is part of a growing emphasis on robotics focused on care. A robot dog made by Sony has been marketed as a companion for older adults.“We need to help with loneliness,” said Tommy Deblieck, the co-chief executive of ZoraBots.**A Growing Need**Giving robots more responsibility to care for people in the twilight of their lives may seem like a dystopian prospect, but many see it as an inevitability.In nearly every country, the population of older adults is rising. The number of people over 60 will more than double to 2.1 billion by 2050, according to the United Nations.The figures point to an emerging gap. There simply won’t be enough people for the required health care jobs. Proponents argue new technology must be created to help fill the void. **Friends with Zora**Staff members have been continually surprised by how attached patients have become. One nurse, Mickaël Feret, said some patients get jealous of others spending time with Zora.Patients have told the robot things about their health they wouldn’t share with doctors. A woman who had bruises on her arms wouldn’t tell hospital staff what had happened, but shared with Zora that she’d fallen out of bed while sleeping.“It puts some cheerfulness in our lives here,” says Marlène Simon, 70, who underwent a tracheotomy and has been in the hospital for more than a year. “We love her, and I miss her when I don’t see her. I actually think about her quite often.” |

1. What is the purpose of the section called “A Growing Need”?
	1. To explain why patients become connected to Zora
	2. To emphasize why robots like Zora may become more common in the future
	3. To contrast different reactions patients and nurses have to Zora
	4. To summarize the main idea of the article
2. Why might the patients at Jouarre grow so attached to Zora? Try to think of multiple reasons.

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1. Consider this quote from the article: *“Nothing will ever replace the human touch, the human warmth our patients need.”*

What character in “Robbie” would be most likely to agree with this statement? Why?

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