

I, ROBOT

Isaac Asimov | Summer Reading

Discussion Preparation Packet

Science Fiction & Dystopia | Grade 12

About This Assignment

Published in 1950, *I, Robot* is not a novel in the traditional sense; it is a collection of nine linked short stories framed as the memoirs of Dr. Susan Calvin, a robopsychologist at U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men, Inc. Together, the stories trace the evolution of robotic intelligence from a simple robot who cannot lie, to positronic brains that out-think their creators, to machines that quietly govern human civilization for its own good.

At the center of every story is a single question asked in different ways: What happens when you program something to be good? Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics which are designed to make robots perfectly safe and obedient, become the source of every problem in the book. Robots follow the rules exactly and catastrophically. They find loopholes. They evolve. The Laws, meant to guarantee safety, instead generate a kind of machine ethics that humans cannot fully predict or control.

Complete all four parts of this packet before the first day of school. Bring it with you — it will be used during our Socratic seminar and collected afterward.

English Teacher: Ms. Monroe jemonroe@bhprsd.org	Grade: 4 Accelerated English
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Academic Honesty Policy

This is an independent assignment. Read it carefully.

No AI. Ever.

Do not use ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, or any other AI tool to generate answers, not to "check" your answers, not to summarize the stories. This includes AI features built into Google Docs, Word, or your browser. Yes, we are aware of the irony of banning AI on an assignment about robots. Do it anyway and receive a zero.

No collaboration.

Do not work on this with classmates, siblings, tutors, or anyone else. Your responses must be entirely your own. Comparing answers, dividing questions, or sharing notes all count as violations.

Consequence: A grade of zero with no opportunity to make up the assignment.

We will know. AI-generated responses have recognizable patterns, and we are familiar with them. More importantly, this packet feeds directly into your Socratic seminar grade. If you did not genuinely read and think through these questions yourself, it will be apparent the moment the

conversation starts. Students who cannot speak to the text in the seminar, who cannot cite a specific story and passage, build on a classmate's point, or defend their written answers — will receive a failing seminar grade in addition to a zero on this packet. There is no recovery option.

The only way to succeed on this assignment is to read the stories, think for yourself, and write in your own words. That is also the only way to be ready for the seminar.

Part 1 — The Three Laws

Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics are the engine of every story in this collection. Before anything else, write them out from memory after finishing the book — do not look them up first:

Law 1: _____

Law 2: _____

Law 3: _____

Now look them up and check your version against the original. Were you close? Did you get the order right? What, if anything, did you misremember or simplify?

Choose the story where the Three Laws create the most interesting problem. What was the conflict, and which Law (or interaction between Laws) caused it? Cite a specific passage:

Asimov designed the Laws to make robots perfectly safe. What does the book collectively argue about the possibility of writing Rules that guarantee good behavior — in robots or in any system?

Part 2 — Choose Your Story

Choose the one story from the collection that you found most compelling, most troubling, or most relevant to the world right now. Circle or underline it:

Robbie	Runaround	Reason	Catch That Rabbit
Liar!	Little Lost Robot	Escape!	Evidence
Evidence The Evitable Conflict			

In 3–4 sentences, summarize the central conflict of your chosen story in your own words — do not quote the plot summary:

What does this story argue about the relationship between humans and machines? Find the moment that most clearly states or implies that argument (cite page number):

Why does this story feel relevant now, in 2026? Be specific — name a real technology, company, policy debate, or event that connects to it:

Part 3 — Your Seminar Positions

Answer each question before the seminar. Every response must cite a specific story title and page number. Answers without textual evidence will not receive full credit.

Question 1: Are Asimov's robots moral agents, or very sophisticated tools?

A moral agent is something capable of making genuine ethical choices — and being held responsible for them. Asimov's robots follow rules, find loopholes, develop workarounds, and in some stories appear to reason about right and wrong. Does that make them moral? Or are they just executing code at a level of complexity we mistake for ethics? Find a moment in the text where this question is hardest to answer.

 **Cite a specific story & page:**

Question 2: What does Susan Calvin reveal about what it means to understand something — or someone?

Dr. Calvin is the most important human character in the book. She understands robots better than anyone, relates to them more easily than to people, and consistently sees them as more rational and more trustworthy than humans. What does Asimov want us to think about her? Is she a hero, a cautionary figure, or both?

 Cite a specific story & page:

Question 3: By the end of 'The Evitable Conflict,' the Machines are running the world. Is that a utopia, a dystopia, or something Asimov refuses to resolve?

The Machines have eliminated war, poverty, and inefficiency — but humans no longer make meaningful decisions about their own civilization. Stephen Byerley calls it 'the final end.' Is it? Consider how this ending sits alongside the rest of the book. Has Asimov been building toward this conclusion, or does it surprise you? What does it say about autonomy, safety, and the cost of being taken care of?

 Cite a specific story & page:

Part 4 — Your Seminar Question

Write one open-ended question you genuinely want the class to discuss. It should be grounded in the text and connect to at least one theme from our Science Fiction & Dystopia course: consciousness, humanity, power, technology, ethics, or the future.

What moment in the book made you want to ask this question? (Story title & page)

Briefly sketch two different positions a classmate might take in response:

Position A:

Position B:



Speak at least twice



**Cite a story title & page at
least once**



**Respond directly to a
classmate at least once**