

I, Robot - In-Class Writing Prompts

1. Asimov says he wrote these stories in order to get away from the Frankenstein Complex, the worry that our technology (especially robots) would destroy us. But do you think that these stories are ultimately a defense of robots? Or do they show us how robots could still destroy us, even with their Three Laws?
2. Do these Three Laws really make robots safer for people? Asimov goes through a few problems with these laws in his stories, but are there any other problems that you think he leaves out? And why does he wait until the second story to spell out the Three Laws?
3. Several characters respond to robots differently—for instance, Gloria loves Robbie, Gloria's mom, not so much; in "The Evident Conflict," Byerley doesn't seem to trust the Machines, but Calvin does. How do you react to the robots in these stories? Do you sympathize more with Gloria or with her mom in "Robbie"? What about the last story—who do you think is right, Calvin or Byerley? Does it affect your reading to have these different characters respond differently to the robots? Does it make it seem like all of our possible reactions are in the stories?
4. All these questions about robots make us think we should ask about the human characters. Who do you like better in these stories, the robots or the humans? Calvin says that robots are programmed to be good whereas humans are free to be jerks. Do the stories reflect this? Do you like any of these characters more than the others? For instance, do you like Donovan and Powell better than Bogert and Lanning? If you prefer certain characters, why do you?
5. When Asimov collected these stories into one book, he added the frame of Susan Calvin telling her stories before her retirement. Why does Calvin get to be the frame narrator? Are there any stories where her narration just doesn't make much sense? Why do you think the interviewer tells us that she has passed away at the end? Does that affect how you think about this book?
6. Does the Frankenstein Complex still exist—are people still afraid about technology and what it might lead to? Are people still afraid of robots today? If Asimov were alive today, what technology do you think he would want to write about to show us that we shouldn't be afraid?