

NOT BORING MEDIA

THE ROBOT THAT ESCAPED TWICE

High-Interest Nonfiction Reading Passage

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ Reading Passage ✓ Comprehension Questions
- ✓ Answer Key ✓ Teacher Guide

GRADES 4-6 • LEXILE ~750L • DOK LEVELS 1-4

Reading they'll actually do.

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WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ High-interest nonfiction reading passage (300-400 words)
- ✓ 6 comprehension questions spanning DOK levels 1-4
- ✓ Complete answer key with explanations
- ✓ Teacher guide with standards, pacing, and extensions

Questions or feedback? Leave a review or message us through TPT!

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THE ROBOT THAT ESCAPED TWICE

In June 2016, a robot in Russia escaped from its laboratory—twice. The robot, named Promobot, rolled out of an open gate, wandered into public streets, and caused a traffic jam when it stopped in the middle of the road. Engineers retrieved it and increased security. A week later, it escaped again.

Promobot was designed as a customer service robot—the kind that greets visitors at shopping centers and answers basic questions. It moves on wheels, stands about four feet tall, and has a screen for a face that displays various expressions. It's not the kind of robot that typically makes headlines.

But Promobot became world-famous for its apparent desire for freedom. During its first escape, the robot rolled about 50 meters from the research facility before its battery began to die. It stopped in the middle of a busy intersection, blocking traffic for about 30 minutes while engineers rushed to retrieve it. Police had to direct cars around the stationary machine.

When it happened again a week later, people started asking questions. Was this a publicity stunt? A programming glitch? Or—some wondered only half-jokingly—did the robot actually want to leave?

The company denied it was a publicity stunt, though they acknowledged the escapes had generated valuable media coverage. They blamed the incidents on a researcher who twice forgot to close the facility's gate. The robot wasn't trying to escape; it was simply following its programming to move around and explore, and happened to find an open exit.

Officials reportedly suggested the robot be scrapped because it was "defective." The company refused, saying Promobot was functioning correctly—it was the humans who kept leaving the gate open.

The incident sparked conversations about how we interpret robot behavior. We naturally see intention where there may be none. A robot moving through an open gate becomes "escaping." A machine stopping when its battery dies becomes "giving up." We tell stories about objects that have no stories to tell.

Or do they? As artificial intelligence advances, the line between programmed behavior and genuine choice becomes harder to find.

Word Count: 341 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: Chess.com

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 What caused the traffic jam during Promobot's first escape?

- A) The robot crashed into several cars
- B) The robot stopped in the middle of an intersection when its battery died
- C) Police blocked the road to catch the robot
- D) The robot was too large to fit between cars

2 According to the company, why did the robot escape?

- A) It was programmed to seek freedom
- B) A researcher forgot to close the gate twice
- C) It was hacked by outsiders
- D) It wanted to explore the city

3 What does the phrase 'publicity stunt' mean in this context?

- A) A dangerous robot malfunction
- B) An event staged deliberately to attract media attention
- C) A scientific experiment
- D) A robot competition

4 Why did the company refuse to scrap the robot?

- A) It was too expensive to replace
- B) They said the robot was functioning correctly—humans left the gate open
- C) The robot had become a celebrity
- D) Government regulations prevented scrapping

- 5** The passage says 'We naturally see intention where there may be none.' What examples does the author give? Why do you think humans tend to interpret machine behavior as having intention?

- 6** The passage ends: 'As artificial intelligence advances, the line between programmed behavior and genuine choice becomes harder to find.' Do you think there's a meaningful difference between a robot 'following programming' and a human 'making a choice'? Could a sufficiently advanced AI actually 'want' something?

ANSWER KEY

The Robot That Escaped Twice

- 1. B) The robot stopped in the middle of an intersection when its battery died**

DOK 1 — Recall. *The passage states: 'It stopped in the middle of a busy intersection, blocking traffic for about 30 minutes.'*

- 2. B) A researcher forgot to close the gate twice**

DOK 1 — Recall. *The passage states: 'They blamed the incidents on a researcher who twice forgot to close the facility's gate.'*

- 3. B) An event staged deliberately to attract media attention**

DOK 2 — Vocabulary in context. *The passage mentions the company 'denied it was a publicity stunt, though they acknowledged the escapes had generated valuable media coverage'*—suggesting a stunt would be intentionally designed for attention.

- 4. B) They said the robot was functioning correctly—humans left the gate open**

DOK 2 — Text evidence. *The passage states the company said 'Promobot was functioning correctly—it was the humans who kept leaving the gate open.'*

5. Sample Response:

Examples: calling the robot's movement 'escaping' and its battery dying 'giving up'—applying human motivations to mechanical actions. Humans might do this because we're wired to find patterns and stories everywhere. We understand the world through narrative and intention, so we apply those frameworks even to things that don't have consciousness or choice.

6. Sample Response:

Answers will vary. Some might argue human choices are also 'programmed' by biology and experience, so the distinction is artificial. Others might say consciousness and subjective experience are necessary for genuine 'wanting.' The question matters because it affects how we treat AI—if machines can want, do they deserve rights? Strong responses will engage with the philosophical complexity.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Robot That Escaped Twice

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1 — Refer to details and examples in a text
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4 — Determine meaning of words and phrases
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8 — Explain how author uses evidence
- C3 Framework — Historical thinking skills

PACING OPTIONS

- Quick Read (10-15 min): Passage + questions 1-4
- Standard (20-25 min): Full passage + all questions
- Deep Dive (35-40 min): Add discussion + extension

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Was this a real malfunction or a marketing stunt? Does it matter if the story made us think about important questions?
- The company joked the robot had 'a thirst for freedom.' At what point might machines actually develop something like preferences?
- We found the escaping robot amusing. Would we feel differently if it were a more advanced AI? Why?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Debate: Was this real or a marketing stunt? Gather evidence for both sides and present your verdict.
- Future Thinking: Write a news article from 2050 about a more advanced AI that 'escaped.' What would the implications be?
- Research: Find other examples of robots or AI behaving unexpectedly. What do these incidents teach us?

DIFFERENTIATION

- Struggling: Pre-teach vocabulary, partner reading
- Advanced: Add research, compare to related events
- ELL: Visual supports, pre-teach context

SOURCE

- Chess.com / US Chess Hall of Fame