

Robot relationships

Topic

Artificial intelligence, love, science fiction, what it means to be human

Aims

- To consider whether a human could have a romantic relationship with a robot
- To use this idea to reflect on boundaries and identities
- To understand the trailer for *Her* and a text on the subject in order to inform the debate.
- To learn new language related to the topic and useful phrases presented in the reading text.

Age / level

Teenagers and adults with CEF level B2 and above

Time

1 hour + extension debate (optional)

Materials

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJTU48_yghs *Her* – official trailer
2. Robot Relationships student worksheet

Introduction

In 2017 the V&A Museum in London, in association with the Goethe Institute and the British Council, launched a project where it commissioned 12 artists to imagine Europe 2000 years in the future, and how people would look back on the Europe of today. As part of the project an online interactive quiz 'Collecting Europe' was launched. One of the themes of the quiz was relationships between humans and technology. This lesson takes the Collecting Europe project as a starting point for an exploration of whether a romantic relationship between a human and a robot is possible. Students will discuss this and related questions as they work with the trailer for *Her* and a reading text on the subject. After a focus on useful language from the reading text, students are invited to debate the topic in more depth.

Procedure

Part 1 (15 – 20 minutes)

The first part of the lesson is designed to generate ideas about the future, and to introduce the idea and generate discussion about the idea of humans having a romantic relationship with a robot. Students then watch the trailer for the film *Her*, in which a man has a relationship with his operating system. Students could be asked to watch the trailer for homework if there is no internet access in the classroom.

1. Lead-in (5 – 10 minutes)

- Ask students if they feel positive about the future and to give reasons for their answers.
- How do they think future generations will view us? In 2000 years' time, how will our time be seen?

2. Discussion - a romantic relationship with a robot (5 – 10 minutes)

- Ask students if they could imagine having a romantic relationship with a robot. This is the main theme of the lesson. Students write down the reasons for their answer on the student worksheet and then discuss in pairs. Get some feedback.

3. Trailer for the film 'Her'

- Ask students if they have seen the film *Her*. If they have, ask them to tell each other what it is about?
- If necessary, clarify and explain that the film tells the story of a man who falls in love with his operating system. Tell students they are going to watch the trailer. As they watch, they should note down the ingredients (e.g. personality traits, the situation, feature of the operating system, the relationship, etc.) that they think make it possible for him to fall in love with his operating system.
Link to trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJTU48_yghs
(The transcript for the trailer is included on p.4 of the Student Worksheet.)
- Ask your students to compare notes and then conduct feedback as a brief class discussion.
- Ask students if they have seen any other films with similar themes and discuss.

Part 2 (25- 35 minutes)

The second part of the lesson invites students to read a short text for comprehension and language extension. It also explores the themes of the lesson through a series of discussion questions, allowing students to develop their thoughts and ideas more fully.

4. Reading: Robot romance (15 -20minutes)

- Reading for gist: Ask students to skim the text to find out if the author thinks it is possible for a human and a robot to have a romantic relationship.
(Answer: yes, although it would be difficult to know if the robot reciprocated the feelings.)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students should complete exercise 4, 'True or false', before comparing and checking answers. Answers: 1.T, 2.F, 3.F, 4.F, 5.T, 6.T, 7.F, 8.F Students should complete exercise 5. Ask students to remember or find the useful language from the text. Answers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> ludicrous it doesn't do it for you in our daily lives merging cheating the system at a dizzying rate blurred lines get to know someone gets your sense of humour the only catch
6. Discussion (10 – 15 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can discuss in pairs or small groups. The teacher should listen, participate in the discussion where appropriate and take notes for feedback and correction. The teacher then leads a feedback session.
<p>Part 4</p> <p>In the fourth (optional) part of the lesson, students are asked to debate societal issues about humans having a relationship with a non-human.</p>	
7. Debate (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce the situation: It is the year 4020. Human and robot romantic relationships are now common, but still taboo. Flora (a synthetic human) and Derek (a biological human) are together. Flora doesn't want Derek to tell anyone that she is not a biological human. Derek thinks it is important to tell people and challenge their prejudices. Divide the class in half: one half is Flora and one half is Derek. They should prepare their argument to convince the other that they're right. Pair a Flora with a Derek and give them a limited amount of time to convince the other one they are right. You can extend the debate by repeating the conversation with different partners.
8. Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students if, now they have thought about it, they think it is possible for a

human and a robot to have a romantic relationship. Have they changed their opinions at all during the lesson?

Contributed by

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