



ELA GRADE 6

SPRING BREAK LEARNING

MARCH 10-14

2025

**The Office of
Literacy**

Spring Break Learning Guide



STUDENT RESOURCES

The materials contained in this packet provide students with additional practice reading, speaking, listening, and writing about text. Students can return the completed packet to their teacher for review.



MyPerspectives

Texts and Tasks

Modern Technology

Technology has become an important part of our lives, creating solutions but also new problems.



Dog Receives Prosthetic Legs
Made by 3-D Printer

Discuss It How does modern technology help us solve problems in new ways?

Write your response before sharing your ideas.



2023 Spring Break Academy 6th Grade Standards and Academic Vocabulary

Reading Standards: *The Fun They Had* by Isaac Asimov

- 6.RL.KID.1** Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw logical inferences; cite textual evidence to support conclusions.
- 6.RL.KID.2** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary
- 6.RL.KID.3** Describe how the plot of a story or drama unfolds, as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- 6.RL.CS.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including allusions to other texts.
- 6.RL.CS.5** Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.
- 6.RL.CS.6** Explain how an author establishes and conveys the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

Literary Elements (Academic Vocabulary): *The Fun They Had* by Isaac Asimov

Character: a personality in a literary work

Inference: a logical assumption based on observed facts from the text and one's own prior knowledge and/or experience

Narrator: the individual who relates or tells the story

Structure: the arrangement of and relationship between the parts or elements

Dialogue: conversations between two or more persons/characters

Plot: the sequence of events in a story

Exposition: provides important background information and introduces the setting, characters, and conflict (in some cases)

Rising action: the action that leads to the climax used to build suspense

Climax: the highest point of tension/interest in the plot

Falling action: the part of the story after the climax, when the excitement grows less

Resolution: the part of the story where the writer explains many details readers might still be curious about

Setting: where the story takes place

External conflict: the struggle between a character and an outside force, such as another character, a natural disaster, etc.

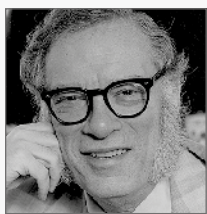
internal conflict: a character's struggle with his or her own feelings or beliefs

Point of View (literary): the narrator's position in relation to the story being told

Theme: unifying or dominant idea



About the Author



Isaac Asimov (1920–1992) became a science-fiction fan after reading fantastic stories in magazines. Asimov’s father discouraged his son’s early interest, and described the magazines he loved as “junk.” Still, Asimov’s interest in science fiction continued, and he started writing his own stories at age eleven. At first, his stories were rejected, but Asimov developed into a visionary writer and became one of the most influential science-fiction authors of the twentieth century.

STANDARDS

Reading Informational Text
6.RL.RRTC.10 Read and comprehend a variety of literature throughout the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with a gradual release of scaffolding at the high end as needed.

Language

6.L.VAU.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on 6th grade-level text by choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
 a. Use context as a clue to the meaning of a word or a phrase.

The Fun They Had

Concept Vocabulary

As you perform your first read of “The Fun They Had,” you will encounter these words.

sorrowfully loftily nonchalantly

Context Clues To find the meanings of unfamiliar words, look for clues in the context, which is made up of other words and phrases that surround the unknown word. There are different types of context clues that may help you as you read. Consider these examples:

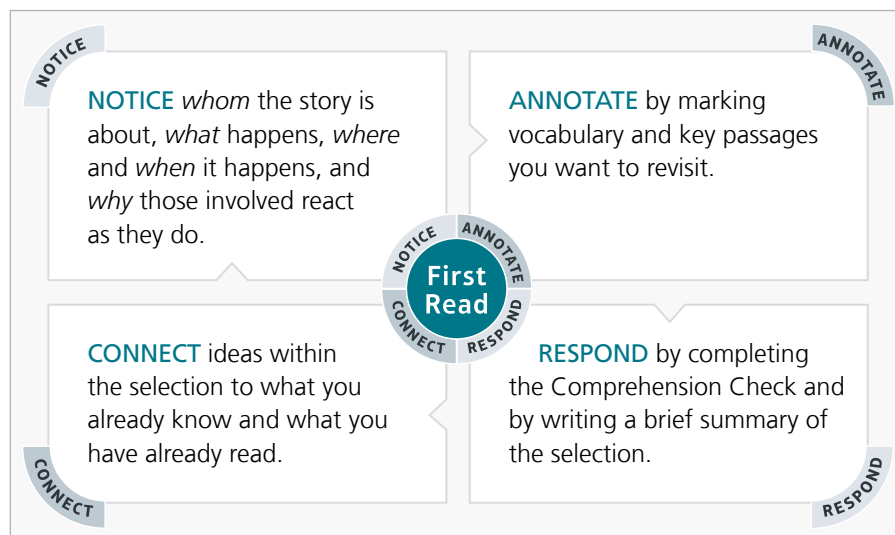
Synonyms: The director blamed and **criticized** Andre and Gaby for missing band rehearsal.

Elaborating Details: Terry could be **arrogant**—he really thought he was superior—when he had the right answer.

Apply your knowledge of context clues and other vocabulary strategies to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words you encounter during your first read.

First Read FICTION

Apply these strategies as you conduct your first read. You will have an opportunity to complete a close read after your first read.



The Fun They Had



Isaac Asimov

BACKGROUND

New methods of learning have been influenced by changes in technology. During ancient times, the Romans wrote on wax tablets. Children in the 1700s read and practiced writing on slates, or blackboards. In the 1900s, educational radio programs were introduced. In today's society, online education has become popular.

- 1 **M**argie even wrote about it that night in her diary. On the page headed May 17, 2155, she wrote, "Today Tommy found a real book."
- 2 It was a very old book. Margie's grandfather once said that when he was a little boy, his grandfather told him that there was a time when all stories were printed on paper.
- 3 They turned the pages, which were yellow and crinkly, and it was awfully funny to read words that stood still instead of moving the way they were supposed to—on a screen, you know. And then, when they turned back to the page before, it had the same words on it that it had had when they read it the first time.

NOTES

Mark context clues or indicate another strategy you used that helped you determine meaning.

sorrowfully (SAWR oh fuhl ee) *adv.*

MEANING:

Why would anyone write about school?

4 “Gee,” said Tommy, “what a waste. When you’re through with the book, you just throw it away, I guess. Our television screen must have had a million books on it and it’s good for plenty more. I wouldn’t throw it away.”

5 “Same with mine,” said Margie. She was eleven and hadn’t seen as many telebooks as Tommy had. He was thirteen.

6 She said, “Where did you find it?”

7 “In my house.” He pointed without looking, because he was busy reading. “In the attic.”

8 “What’s it about?”

9 “School.”

10 Margie was scornful. “School? What’s there to write about school? I hate school.” Margie always hated school, but now she hated it more than ever. The mechanical teacher had been giving her test after test in geography, and she had been doing worse and worse until her mother had shaken her head **sorrowfully** and sent for the county inspector.

11 He was a round little man with a red face and a whole box of tools with dials and wires. He smiled at her and gave her an apple, then took the teacher apart. Margie had hoped he wouldn’t know how to put it together again, but he knew how all right and, after an hour or so, there it was again, large and ugly, with a big screen on which all the lessons were shown and the questions were asked. That wasn’t so bad. The part she hated most was the slot where she had to put homework and test

papers. She always had to write them out in a punch code¹ they made her learn when she was six years old, and the mechanical teacher calculated the mark in no time.

12 The inspector had smiled after he was finished and patted her head. He said to her mother, “It’s not the little girl’s fault, Mrs. Jones. I think the geography sector was geared a little too quick. Those things happen sometimes. I’ve slowed it up to an average ten-year level. Actually, the overall pattern of her progress is quite satisfactory.” And he patted Margie’s head again.

13 Margie was disappointed. She had been hoping they would take the teacher away altogether. They had once taken Tommy’s teacher away for nearly a month because the history sector had blanked out completely.

14 So she said to Tommy, “Why would anyone write about school?”

15 Tommy looked at her with very superior eyes. “Because it’s not our kind of school, stupid. This is the old kind of school that

1. **punch code** card containing data that was used to program computers during the 1940s, when this story was written.

they had hundreds and hundreds of years ago.” He added **loftily**, pronouncing the word carefully, “*Centuries* ago.”

16 Margie was hurt. “Well, I don’t know what kind of school they had all that time ago.” She read the book over his shoulder for a while, then said, “Anyway, they had a teacher.”

17 “Sure they had a teacher, but it wasn’t a *regular* teacher. It was a man.”

18 “A man? How could a man be a teacher?”

19 “Well, he just told the boys and girls things and gave them homework and asked them questions.”

20 “A man isn’t smart enough.”

21 “Sure he is. My father knows as much as my teacher.”

22 “He can’t. A man can’t know as much as a teacher.”

23 “He knows almost as much I betcha.”

24 Margie wasn’t prepared to dispute that. She said, “I wouldn’t want a strange man in my house to teach me.”

25 Tommy screamed with laughter, “You don’t know much, Margie. The teachers didn’t live in the house. They had a special building and all the kids went there.”

26 “And all the kids learned the same thing?”

27 “Sure, if they were the same age.”

28 “But my mother says a teacher has to be adjusted to fit the mind of each boy and girl it teaches and that each kid has to be taught differently.”

29 “Just the same, they didn’t do it that way then. If you don’t like it, you don’t have to read the book.”

30 “I didn’t say I didn’t like it,” Margie said quickly. She wanted to read about those funny schools.

31 They weren’t even half finished when Margie’s mother called, “Margie! School!”

32 Margie looked up. “Not yet, Mamma.”

33 “Now,” said Mrs. Jones. “And it’s probably time for Tommy, too.”

34 Margie said to Tommy, “Can I read the book some more with you after school?”

35 “Maybe,” he said, **nonchalantly**. He walked away whistling, the dusty old book tucked beneath his arm.

36 Margie went into the schoolroom. It was right next to her bedroom, and the mechanical teacher was on and waiting for her. It was always on at the same time every day except Saturday and Sunday, because her mother said little girls learned better if they learned at regular hours.

37 The screen was lit up, and it said: “Today’s arithmetic lesson is on the addition of proper fractions. Please insert yesterday’s homework in the proper slot.”

NOTES

Mark context clues or indicate another strategy you used that helped you determine meaning.

loftily (LAWF tih lee) *adv.*

MEANING:

Mark context clues or indicate another strategy you used that helped you determine meaning.

nonchalantly (non shuh LONT lee) *adv.*

MEANING:

- 38 Margie did so with a sigh. She was thinking about the old schools they had when her grandfather's grandfather was a little boy. All the kids from the whole neighborhood came, laughing and shouting in the schoolyard, sitting together in the schoolroom, going home together at the end of the day. They learned the same things so they could help one another on the homework and talk about it.
- 39 And the teachers were people. . . .
- 40 The mechanical teacher was flashing on the screen: "When we add the fractions $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$. . ."
- 41 Margie was thinking about how the kids must have loved it in the old days. She was thinking about the fun they had. 🐼

Comprehension Check

Complete the following items after you finish your first read. Review and clarify details with your group.

1. What does Tommy find in the attic?

2. Why does Margie hate school now more than ever?

3. Why does Margie's mother send for the county inspector?

4. What surprises Margie about teachers of the past?

5.  **Notebook** Write three to five sentences to summarize the story.

RESEARCH

Research to Clarify Choose at least one unfamiliar detail from the text. Briefly research that detail. In what way does the information you learned shed light on an aspect of the story?

Research to Explore Choose something that interested you from the text, and formulate a research question that you might use to find out more about the topic.

Name:	Date:
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The Fun They Had

Isaac Asimov

SHORT-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS: Complete the following items after you have read the text.

1. (a) Explain what the text says explicitly.

Reread paragraph 38 of “The Fun They Had.” Then, explain what this paragraph says about Margie’s thoughts about schools from the past. Cite evidence from the text to support your response.

(b) Explain an inference you can draw from the text.

What can you infer from paragraph 38 about how Margie feels about her own school? Support your inference using both details from the paragraph and your knowledge of the rest of the story.

2. Explain how a particular scene in a text contributes to the development of its theme.

Reread paragraphs 10-12 of “The Fun They Had.” Then, identify a theme, or central message, of the story that concerns the drawbacks of technology. How does the scene described in these paragraphs help you understand the theme, or central message, of the story? Use details from the text in your answer.



3. (a) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.

In paragraph 10, the author writes, "Margie was scornful." Based on details in the paragraph, what is the meaning of *scornful*? Consider Margie's attitude when she talks about school.

(b) Analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

Reread paragraph 15 of "The Fun They Had." Focus on the words *superior* and *loftily*. What do these words help you understand about Tommy's attitude toward Margie? Do these words create a happy tone, a sad tone, or another kind of tone? Explain why.



EXTENDED-RESPONSE ACTIVITY ▶ Theme or Central Idea

DIRECTIONS: Complete the following activity as either a written response or a group discussion.

4. “The Fun They Had” is a science fiction story. Summarize the story by describing the main characters, the important events, and the main characters’ responses to events. Also identify a theme, or central message, of the story. Then, identify elements, or features, of the genre of science fiction that appear in the story. Explain how these elements help to convey, or show, the story’s theme. Use details from the story to support your response.

Use these guidelines in your writing or discussion.

- Begin by summarizing the story “The Fun They Had.” In your summary, identify the title and author and describe main characters, important events, and the ways that characters respond to events.
- Identify a theme that concerns the use of technology.
- Describe elements of science fiction that appear in the story. For example, identify the time period when the story takes place and the role that technology plays in the story. Also, describe both realistic, or true-to-life, and imaginative, or invented, details in the story.
- Explain how the elements of science fiction and story details convey or support the theme of the story.

TIP FOR WRITTEN RESPONSE

If you use quotations from the story, explain how the quotations connect to your ideas.

TIP FOR DISCUSSION

Connect your ideas to the ideas of other discussion participants

Name:	Date:
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CONCEPT VOCABULARY AND WORD STUDY

The Fun They Had

Isaac Asimov

WORD LIST

sorrowfully	loftily	nonchalantly
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- A. DIRECTIONS:** In each of the following items, think about the meaning of the italicized word. Then answer the question.
1. In the panel discussion, the professor spoke *loftily* about his role in the research. Would you say the professor thought his role was important? Explain. _____
 2. Jerome responded *sorrowfully* when he realized he had stepped on his little brother's favorite toy. True or false: Jerome was sad about breaking the toy. Explain. _____
 3. When you ask your friend Alize if she is looking forward to going to the amusement park, she responds *nonchalantly*. Is Alize excited about to going to the amusement park? Explain. _____
- B. WORD STUDY:** The Anglo-Saxon suffix *-ful* means "full of" or "having the qualities of." For example, the word *respectful* means "full of, showing, or giving respect." Write the definition of each word below. Then, use each in a sentence.
1. harmful _____

 2. thoughtful _____

 3. careful _____

 4. delightful _____

Analyze Craft and Structure

Science-Fiction Writing **Science fiction** is a form, or genre, of fiction that imagines the technology and science of the future. Science-fiction stories balance technological and scientific ideas with realistic elements—characters, events, and situations that are true to life. These realistic details help readers relate to a story that may take place in very unfamiliar places. Most science fiction includes these types of elements:

- scientific ideas
- imaginary beings, such as futuristic robots or aliens from distant planets
- settings that are different from Earth or from Earth right now—These may be non-Earthly places, such as spaceships, other planets, or alternate universes. Or, they may be Earth, but in the future.
- plots that reflect issues in society today, such as the impact of technology or even political ideas—Science-fiction writers often place familiar issues into unfamiliar settings in order to explore their complexities and understand them better.


Like all other types of literature, science fiction conveys **themes**, or insights into life. These themes may relate to science and technology, or they may simply relate to human nature and society.

CITE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE
to support your answers.

Practice

1. Use the chart to identify passages from “The Fun They Had” that reflect each element of science fiction. Work individually, and then share your responses with your group.

THE FUN THEY HAD	
SCIENCE-FICTION ELEMENT	EXAMPLE FROM STORY
Scientific Ideas	
Imaginary Beings	
Alternate Setting	
Comment on Issues in Society Today	

 **Notebook** Answer the questions.

2. Consider this possible theme for the story: *Nothing, not even great technology, can replace human interaction.* Which story details support this theme? Explain.
3. In what ways might this story be considered a warning about the future? Explain your response.



THE FUN THEY HAD

Conventions

Action Verbs and Linking Verbs Verbs are an essential element of all sentences and clauses. A **verb** expresses action or indicates a state or condition.

An **action verb** can express a physical action, such as *shake* or *laugh*, or a mental action, such as *hope* or *learn*.

A **linking verb** connects a subject to a word in the predicate that renames, identifies, or describes it. The most common linking verb is *be*, with forms such as *are*, *was*, *were*, *is* *being*, and *have been*. Other common linking verbs include *appear*, *become*, *feel*, *look*, and *seem*.


ACTION VERBS	LINKING VERBS
Her mother <i>had shaken</i> her head. (The action is <i>shaking</i> .)	Tommy and Margie <i>are</i> students. (<i>Are</i> links <i>Tommy and Margie</i> to <i>students</i> . <i>Students</i> renames <i>Tommy and Margie</i> .)
All the kids <i>laughed</i> in the schoolyard. (The action is <i>laughing</i> .)	The girl <i>became</i> curious about the old book. (<i>Became</i> links <i>girl</i> to <i>curious</i> . <i>Curious</i> describes the <i>girl</i> .)

Read It

Identify the verb(s) in each sentence from the selection. Then, label each verb as an action verb or a linking verb.

1. Margie even wrote about it that night in her diary.
2. He was a round little man with a red face and a whole box of tools with dials and wires.
3. “. . . Actually, the overall pattern of her progress is quite satisfactory.”
4. “Please insert yesterday’s homework in the proper slot.”

Write It

 **Notebook** Imagine that you are Margie’s friend in the year 2155. Write a journal entry describing your feelings about your mechanical teacher. Use at least three action verbs and two linking verbs in your writing.

STANDARDS

Language
6.L.CSE.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage.



Writing to Sources

Dialogue is the conversations that take place among characters in literary works. Authors use dialogue to move the plot forward, as well as to provide insights into characters' personalities and the ways they change.

Assignment

With your group, write a **scene with dialogue** in which Margie describes finding the old book to one of her friends. Choose one of the following options:

- Write the scene in dramatic form with characters' names appearing at the beginning of each new line of dialogue. Place in brackets any descriptions or lines not spoken by the characters.
- Write the scene in short-story form. All descriptions will appear in paragraphs. Indicate who is speaking, and set lines of dialogue in quotation marks.

Project Plan First, discuss Margie's character and what one of Margie's friends would be like. Then, describe how other aspects of this future time might be different from today and how to pull these ideas into the scene. Brainstorm for a few sample lines of dialogue that feel true to Margie's character and how you think her friend would react. Take notes during the discussion.

Then, use your discussion notes and the story as background to develop the scene. Decide on a logical sequence of events. Use narrative techniques, such as *pacing*. Pacing is similar to rhythm. You can either slow down the action of the scene or speed it up. Slow down action by adding more description and longer sentences. Speed up action by using short sentences that make things seem to happen quickly. When writing your scene, use precise words, vivid details, and descriptive language to show the setting and action.

Revise and Edit Work together to revise and edit the scene. Keep the following elements in mind:

- Are the events arranged in a logical order?
- Are the word choices descriptive, and do they capture the futuristic setting in which the conversation takes place?
- Does the dialogue contribute to the reader's understanding of the characters and plot?
- Do you use appropriate pacing to point out an important idea or to build suspense?

Present and Discuss Present your group's scene to the class and answer any questions your classmates may have.

EVIDENCE LOG

Before moving on to a new selection, go to your Evidence Log and record what you learned from "The Fun They Had."

STANDARDS

Writing

6.W.TTP.3 Write narratives (fiction and nonfiction) to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

- a. Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a speaker/narrator and/or participants/characters.
- b. Organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.
- d. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description when appropriate, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Name:	Date:
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ANALYZE CRAFT AND STRUCTURE ► **SCIENCE-FICTION WRITING**

The Fun They Had

Isaac Asimov

Science fiction is an imaginative genre that imagines the technology and science of the future. Science-fiction stories balance technological and scientific ideas with realistic elements—characters, events, or situations that are true to life. These realistic details help readers relate to an inventive story. Most science-fiction includes the following elements:

- scientific ideas, such as space travel
- imaginary creatures, such as aliens
- settings in outer space, in some other world, or in a futuristic Earth
- plots that reflect issues in society today

Together, these science-fiction elements can make a message stronger or emphasize an important lesson. Science-fiction stories convey **themes**, or important insights, about society, human nature, or the impacts of technology and science on society.

DIRECTIONS: Answer these questions about “The Fun They Had.”

1. In what way is the setting typical of science fiction?

2. How is the setting typical of a science-fiction story?

3. Give an example of a well-known scientific idea that is present in the selection.

4. Consider this possible theme for the story: *It’s natural for people to want what they don’t have and to appreciate what they do have.* Which story details support this theme? Explain your answer.



Newsela

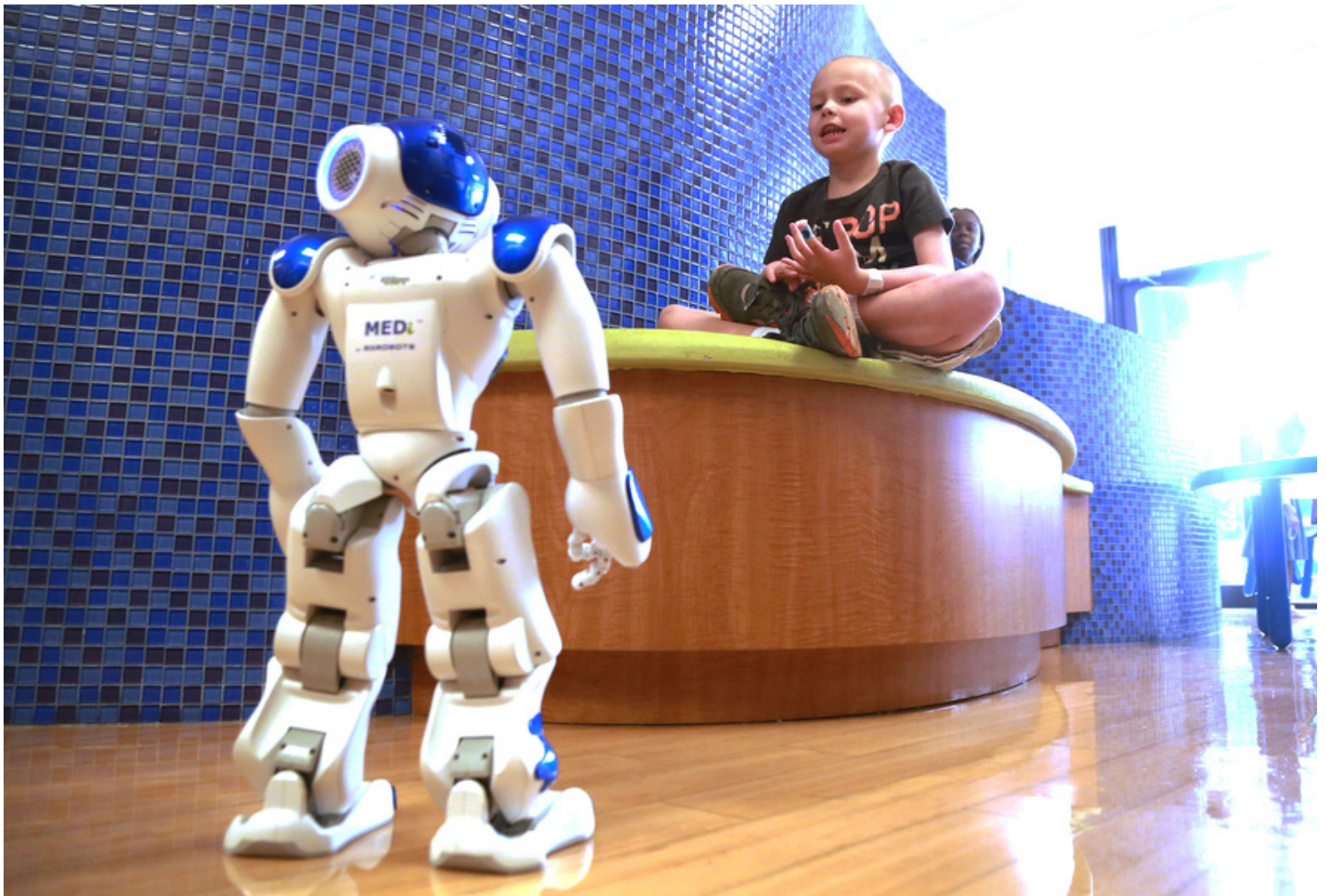
Reading Comprehension Practice

A little robot named MEDi is a big help at a Florida children's hospital

By Tribune Content Agency, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.08.16

Word Count **645**

Level **980L**



Tommy Boegler, 4, of Tamarac, Florida, with MEDi during a visit to Broward Health Medical Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The hospital is one of eight nationwide using a child-friendly robot named MEDi to help the littlest patients overcome the anxiety and fear associated with most medical procedures. Carline Jean/Sun Sentinel/TNS

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — MEDi is a robot who distracts and comforts children while they are in the hospital. He helps with their fears of all the things that frighten them like prickly needles, endless hallways and mysterious medical equipment.

Songs, Stories, Deep Breathing Tips

The little blue and white robot works at Broward Health Children's Hospital in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He has just the right touch when it comes to keeping children calm. MEDi's name is short

for Medicine and Engineering Design Intelligence, and he looks like a toy. The robot is just 2 feet tall and weighs only 15 pounds, but is a big hit with kids.

Dr. Patricia Rowe-King runs the children's program at the hospital. She says that MEDi takes on many roles with the kids such as companion and pain coach. He is also a teacher, and tells them what to expect when they are having blood drawn or a cast removed.

Broward Health is one of only eight hospitals in the country that use MEDi to help young patients. The robot speaks English and Spanish, and has comforted cancer patients from 2 to 14 years old. He is programmed just for the children's hospital, and gives tips on how to manage pain and fear using deep breathing. He can also help with blood tests, changing bandages and shots. Most of all, MEDi is a friend to the hospital's youngest patients.

Making Hospitals Less Scary

Tommy Boegler is 4 years old and was diagnosed with kidney cancer in February. He has become fast friends with MEDi in the past few weeks. When Tommy needs his blood drawn, MEDi is right there with him, telling him what is coming next and distracting him just before the needle prick. For example, to get Tommy's attention, MEDi asked for help getting something out of his eye, then said, "You'll never guess what color my blood is. The same color as my toes." MEDi can also sing, dance, tell a story, or play a game.

Kasey Castro works with Tommy when he is at the hospital. Castro says that hospitals can be scary for kids, but MEDi helps to distract and educate them. Castro says, "He can make it more fun and less threatening for them."

Let's Dance!

During a hospital trip this week, Tommy's mom, Beth-Ann Boegler, asked if he thought his robot friend would remember him. Tommy was sure he would, and he was right. MEDi has software that helps him recognize faces, and is programmed to greet each child by name. When MEDi came into the room, Tommy's face lit up. After the robot said hello to Tommy, he gave the boy a high-five and then danced, playing his own lively tune with Tommy dancing along with him.

The past few months have not been easy for Tommy. Tommy's mom says he spent 100 days in the hospital. He has had two surgeries, seven radiation treatments and 23 chemotherapy treatments, with two more to go.

Doctors Appreciate MEDi

Tommy does not think that the hospital is as scary now, thanks to his robot friend. "MEDi took the fear of being here away," his mom says. "There were a lot of dark days for a while. We didn't think he'd ever get out of the hospital." She says that Tommy is doing well.

Dr. Hector Rodriguez-Cortes, Tommy's physician, says that when the robot helps the patient, he is helping the hospital's workers too. He makes it easier for them to do their jobs. Cortes says, "This thing that looks like a toy puts the patient in a more calm state so the nurses can move ahead with the procedure."

MEDi seems to be a hit with doctors as well. Rodriguez-Cortes says, "I've danced with him, but it looks like the robot was doing a better job than me."

Quiz

- 1 Which detail BEST supports the article's central idea?
- (A) MEDi's name is short for Medicine and Engineering Design Intelligence, and he looks like a toy.
 - (B) He is also a teacher, and tells them what to expect when they are having blood drawn or a cast removed.
 - (C) Tommy Boegler is 4 years old and was diagnosed with kidney cancer in February.
 - (D) He has had two surgeries, seven radiation treatments and 23 chemotherapy treatments, with two more to go.

- 2 Which sentence BEST summarizes the section "Doctors Appreciate MEDi"?
- (A) Doctors respect MEDi even though he looks like a toy.
 - (B) Doctors admire MEDi because he is a better dancer than they are.
 - (C) Doctors value MEDi because he makes it easier for them to do their jobs.
 - (D) Doctors are grateful for MEDi because he is a calm hospital worker.

- 3 Read the selection from the section "Making Hospitals Less Scary."

When Tommy needs his blood drawn, MEDi is right there with him, telling him what is coming next and distracting him just before the needle prick. For example, to get Tommy's attention, MEDi asked for help getting something out of his eye, then said, "You'll never guess what color my blood is. The same color as my toes."

Which phrase in the selection BEST helps the reader know what the word "distracting" means?

- (A) "just before the needle prick"
 - (B) "to get Tommy's attention"
 - (C) "MEDi asked for help"
 - (D) "getting something out of his eye"
- 4 Read the selection from the section "Doctors Appreciate MEDi."

"MEDi took the fear of being here away," his mom says. "There were a lot of dark days for a while. We didn't think he'd ever get out of the hospital."

Based on the selection, what does the phrase "a lot of dark days" mean in the second sentence?

- (A) a lot of days when Tommy and his mom never saw the sun outside
- (B) a lot of days when Tommy and his mom had to sit in the hospital room without any light being on
- (C) a lot of days when Tommy and his mom felt very sad
- (D) a lot of days when Tommy and his mom had no understanding of why Tommy was in the hospital

Dream Jobs: Designing robots for kids

By Alexa Kurzius, Newsela staff on 05.08.20

Word Count **790**

Level **930L**



De'Aira Bryant codes robots that interact with children, tutoring them in math or providing physical therapy. Photo: De'Aira Bryant

De'Aira Bryant studies computer science in Georgia where she is getting her Ph.D. She develops robots and studies how they interact with children.

What was your life like growing up?

I'm from a small town in South Carolina. I grew up on a farm with fields of corn, cotton and hay. I lived with my mother, father, sister and grandma. We had lots of cookouts and played kickball and baseball with my cousins who lived down the street. My father died when I was 13, which was hard.

Growing up, I loved school and sports, like math and softball. In high school, I would make birthday and wedding invitations, programs for my church, and things like that. I graduated as valedictorian with 60 people in my class.

How did you choose computer science?

I did not take a computer science class until my freshman year at the University of South Carolina. I realized that computer science was not what I thought it was. I had to write code, which was completely new to me. Code is a set of instructions that tells a computer what to do.

My teacher was one of the most important mentors I ever had, and she convinced me to stay in the class. I stayed but boy did I struggle, and it was the hardest semester I have had to this day!

How did you get involved in robotics?

That same teacher from my first computer science class invited me to do research in her lab. They were coding robots so if a student got a math question wrong, the robot would help guide students to the right answer. Later, we took the robot to the middle school I went to and other rural schools in South Carolina. I coded the robot to do a hip-hop dance move each time the student did a math problem correctly and they loved that.

Between my junior and senior year of college, I worked in a lab at Georgia Tech in Atlanta, Georgia. They were coding robots to help children with disabilities do physical therapy. I fell in love with this work and couldn't wait to return as a graduate student. In 2017, I began a Ph.D. program in computer science at Georgia Tech.

Now, my research focuses on how to code robots that can adapt, or change their response, based on children's behavior. We purchase the robots from a company and code them with artificial intelligence, or machine learning. This approach teaches a machine to make decisions as a human would. With artificial intelligence, robots and computer programs can study information. They can instantly make a decision. Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa are a few examples.

Why do robots need to be different for children than adults?

Most robots with artificial intelligence are designed to recognize emotions in adults. It works like this: a robot looks at a person's face. It takes photos of that person with cameras and then the images are compared with a database of images the robot already has. From there, the robot can tell what emotion the person is expressing. Yet, for the robot to be able to do this it takes a lot of data—we're talking millions and millions of images.

So far, robots are really good at understanding happiness and surprise for adults. But children express their emotions differently. So there is a lot of room for improvement. For example, the robots tend to confuse children's facial expressions for anger and sadness.

Why is it important to have an adaptable robot?

When kids first see a robot, they are super excited about it. However, a week later, they figure it out and lose interest. A robot that can adapt can better interest a child and help them in the moment.

The hope is that we can create robots that better use artificial intelligence. This could allow physical therapy to be customized for each person. This would help children with missing limbs or conditions like cerebral palsy who need physical therapy on an ongoing basis. Down the line, the robot could be used in homes so that children don't have to wait for a physical therapy appointments.

What do you want to do with your career?

There are very few black females in the computer science field and this was initially an adjustment for me. In fact, my first class with a black professor was when I was a Ph.D. student at Georgia Tech. Now, my adviser is a black female computer science professor. Her mentorship means so much to me. My long-term goal is to be a professor so I can be an ally, mentor, and role model for other students of color.

Quiz

1 Read the following selection.

But children express their emotions differently. So there is a lot of room for improvement. For example, the robots tend to confuse children's facial expressions for anger and sadness.

WHY did the author include this idea?

- (A) to highlight the challenge of using artificial intelligence to train robots
- (B) to explain why De'aria's robotics research is important
- (C) to describe why computer science and coding are difficult
- (D) to show why De'aria wants to inspire more people of color to study coding

2 Which answer choice accurately characterizes De'aria Bryant's reaction to her first computer science course?

- (A) hopeless and isolated
- (B) disappointed and angry
- (C) excited and inspired
- (D) challenged and frustrated

3 Read the section "What do you want to do with your career?" What does this section explain that other sections DO NOT?

- (A) the lack of people of color currently working in computer science
- (B) the number of women studying computer science
- (C) the ways computer science can improve education and physical therapy
- (D) the reason De'aria was inspired to study computer science and robotics

4 Read the section "How did you get involved in robotics?" HOW does this section contribute to the article's main idea?

- (A) by explaining how robots determine how people are feeling
- (B) by describing De'aria's childhood and family
- (C) by showing how robots can help students learn math
- (D) by highlighting the different ways children and adults show their feelings

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WRITING TO SOURCES ▶ **DIALOGUE**

The Fun They Had

Isaac Asimov

Dialogue is the conversation between two or more characters in a story or drama. It is also an important tool for revealing character traits, for creating conflict, and for moving a plot forward. Consider, for example, the conversation below from “The Fun They Had.”

“Gee,” said Tommy, “what a waste. When you’re through with the book, you just throw it away, I guess. Our television screen must have had a million books on it and it’s good for plenty more. I wouldn’t throw it away.”

“Same with mine,” said Margie. She was eleven and hadn’t seen as many telebooks as Tommy had. He was thirteen.

She said, “Where did you find it?”

“In my house.” He pointed without looking, because he was busy reading. “In the attic.”

“What’s it about?”

“School.”

Margie was scornful. “School? What’s there to write about school? I hate school.”

Here, the author reveals the conflict Margie has with school, as well as some of Margie’s and Tommy’s personality traits. The dialogue also provides information about the futuristic setting, revealing that people read telebooks and that paper books are rare.

DIRECTIONS: Write a dialogue between Margie and one of her friends. Use the chart to note what you know about Margie's character from reading the story. Then brainstorm traits for her friend's character. Write down ideas for a conflict that you could explore. For example, Margie might have a conflict with her friend, she might describe a conflict she has with Tommy, or she might expand on her conflict with school and her mechanical teacher. Then explore how you might move the plot forward. Part of the chart has been completed for you as an example.

Elements	Descriptions/Details
Margie's character	Opinionated, curious, lonely
Friend's character	
Conflict	
Plot	

Robot "double" allows students who are sick to attend school, see friends

By Kathy Boccella, Philadelphia Inquirer, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.09.18

Word Count **1,159**

Level **MAX**



Image 1. Jilly DeStephano talks with her friends through a robot from home during social studies class. Jilly is a middle schooler at Octorara Intermediate School in Atglen, Pennsylvania. She uses a robot in school because she has an ongoing illness. Photo by: Sydney Schaefer/Philadelphia Inquirer/TNS.

During her sixth-grade social studies class at Octorara Intermediate School in Atglen, Pennsylvania, Jilly DeStephano acted like any 12-year-old. She was lost in chatter with her good friends Melanie and Katie.

"Jilly, I like your hair," said Melanie, admiring her neat brunette pigtails, which Jilly flicked in response. Suddenly, their teacher Melissa Fanelli showed up.

"Jilly, did you get the classwork I emailed you?"

"Got it," answered Jilly. She was actually a couple of miles away, sitting at her dining room table at home in Christiana, just past the edge of Philadelphia in Lancaster County.

Inside the Octorara classroom, her friends and teacher had been talking to her image on an iPad atop a skinny robot, called a "Perfect Attendant." It is essentially a pole on Segway wheels that Jilly

controls from a computer. The device allows her to attend school virtually, even as she copes with her exhausting chronic medical condition, mitochondrial disease, at home.

Telepresence For Attendance

Jilly calls her high-tech helper "the Double," its brand name. It is one of more than 1,000 "remote presence" or "telepresence" robots that have been placed in America's classrooms this decade. The robots allow kids who have difficulty attending school because of a medical condition to get much of the experience remotely. They can take quizzes, goof around with friends, and even go to lunch or on field trips.

"Sometimes I'm too tired to actually go to school," said Jilly. She has been coping since she was very young with the illness, in which cells fail to properly produce energy. By third and fourth grade she was spending more time at home being taught by a teacher than in class. So when the school came to her last year to ask if she would test out the robot, Jilly and her family were enthusiastic.



"They told me it was a pole on wheels," she said. "I was like: 'Hey, it's cool. Oh my gosh, it looks like me.'"

Jilly is one of three students currently using a Double on loan from the Chester County Intermediate Unit, which started the program two years ago. The two other students are in Owen J. Roberts School District. One is an elementary school student recovering from open heart surgery. The other is a middle schooler who recently used the device from her room at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia while undergoing treatment for leukemia.

The IU owns three of the \$4,000 machines, but plans to buy another because of demand, said Sam Ewing. He is assistant director of student services for the IU. So far there's been no charge for using the Double, but starting with the next user the IU will charge districts \$37.29 per day. The cost includes tech support and training in how to use the bot. For schools, that's far less than the cost of a homebound tutor, typically \$40 to \$60 per hour.

Officials in Chester County say the success of the space-age accessories in providing an almost normal school day for kids with difficult medical issues has been remarkable.

Wi-Fi Connection Necessary

"It's amazing, how that generation ... it's natural for them," said Paul Sanfrancesco, the director of technology at Owen J. Roberts. Sanfrancesco noted that talking to a screen atop a robot was more of a challenge for the teachers at first. The kids, on the other hand, escort the robot from class to class as if their actual friend were present. "They wave to her when she comes down the hall," he marveled.

Students receive computers to go along with the bots. They are trained to maneuver the bot through school with the arrows on their computer and the help of a friend or teacher on site as a guide.

Some students in other parts of the country are testing the outer limits of the robots. They are using them to practice along with the school choir or go along on field trips. The trips can be tricky when it comes to holding a Wi-Fi connection, the biggest problem most kids have encountered so far. Several years ago, one student in South Carolina even outfitted her VGo model robot with pink ribbons and a tutu. She renamed it Princess VGo.

For Jilly, the Double has allowed her to stay home on the days when she needs to conserve her strength. She can save her energy for other school activities like "bubble ball," a recent Wiffle ball tournament, floor hockey or playing the flute.

"That's really what the Double gives her," her mother, Ashley DeStephano, said. "Otherwise, Jilly's body doesn't have enough energy for other things. Her conserving energy in this way allows her to be a kid." Jilly, she said, loves school. She was depressed when she had to be taught alone at home. "She was just bummed. She missed that social interaction. She always felt left out," she said.

Jilly is an animal lover. Her favorite classes are art and science. She says her goal is to become a veterinarian or to rescue sloths, her favorite animal, in the Amazon rain forest.

But first, she has to master ancient Egypt in social studies, a class she attended on a recent afternoon with her Double at her desk, while she faced her computer in the dining room back home. Her two dogs — Hero, a chihuahua, and Pippy, an old shih tzu — were with her. Her mom was nearby.

Working with her friends Melanie and Katie, Jilly researched facts about Egypt's Old Kingdom. As the girls chatted and Jilly flashed thumbs up from time to time, their teacher leaned in to check on their progress.

Later, Fanelli said that sometimes Jilly's face will pixilate because of spotty Wi-Fi, or the class will hear the sound of Jilly's mom in the background. But despite the occasional glitch, she said the robot has been a boon to the sixth grader's learning.

Like The Jetsons For Some Teachers

"To you and I, oh my gosh ... it's like George Jetson," Fanelli said. But the kids "interact with her like they do in the classroom."

Indeed, between grappling with the ancient Egyptians and how to spell pharaoh, Jilly bantered with her friends. She laughed when Melanie showed off a hand puppet. A few minutes before class was over, Melanie guided her to her next class.

The pair hadn't even reached her desk when a teacher asked, "Jilly, do you have that article printed out yet?" Science class was starting for Jilly and her Double. Together they have mastered an art that any child can envy: being in two places at once.



Quiz

- 1 Which selection from the article shows Ashley DeStephano's MAIN opinion about how the Double helps her daughter?
- (A) "That's really what the Double gives her," her mother, Ashley DeStephano, said.
 - (B) "Her conserving energy in this way allows her to be a kid."
 - (C) Jilly, she said, loves school. She was depressed when she had to be taught alone at home.
 - (D) "She was just bummed. She missed that social interaction. "

- 2 Read the section "Wi-Fi Connection Necessary."

Select the paragraph from the article that MOST CLEARLY suggests other students in the classroom have had a positive reaction to the telepresence robots.

- (A) "It's amazing, how that generation ... it's natural for them," said Paul Sanfrancesco, the director of technology at Owen J. Roberts. Sanfrancesco noted that talking to a screen atop a robot was more of a challenge for the teachers at first. The kids, on the other hand, escort the robot from class to class as if their actual friend were present. "They wave to her when she comes down the hall," he marveled.
- (B) Students receive computers to go along with the bots. They are trained to maneuver the bot through school with the arrows on their computer and the help of a friend or teacher on site as a guide.
- (C) Some students in other parts of the country are testing the outer limits of the robots. They are using them to practice along with the school choir or go along on field trips. The trips can be tricky when it comes to holding a Wi-Fi connection, the biggest problem most kids have encountered so far. Several years ago, one student in South Carolina even outfitted her VGo model robot with pink ribbons and a tutu. She renamed it Princess VGo.
- (D) For Jilly, the Double has allowed her to stay home on the days when she needs to conserve her strength. She can save her energy for other school activities like "bubble ball," a recent Wiffle ball tournament, floor hockey or playing the flute.

- 3 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?

- (A) During her sixth-grade social studies class at Octorara Intermediate School in Atglen, Pennsylvania, Jilly DeStephano acted like any 12-year-old.
- (B) Inside the Octorara classroom, her friends and teacher had been talking to her image on an iPad atop a skinny robot, called a "Perfect Attendant."
- (C) The robots allow kids who have difficulty attending school because of a medical condition to get much of the experience remotely.
- (D) For schools, that's far less than the cost of a homebound tutor, typically \$40 to \$60 per hour.

- 4 Read the paragraph from the article.

"Sometimes I'm too tired to actually go to school," said Jilly. She has been coping since she was very young with the illness, in which cells fail to properly produce energy. By third and fourth grade she was spending more time at home being taught by a teacher than in class. So when the school came to her last year to ask if she would test out the robot, Jilly and her family were enthusiastic.

HOW does this paragraph support the MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) It describes some of the issues Jilly has encountered while trying to use telepresence robots.
- (B) It shows that Jilly has adjusted easily to using a telepresence robot to go to class.
- (C) It demonstrates that Jilly still wishes she could be in the classroom instead of the robot.
- (D) It explains why Jilly was a good candidate to try out telepresence robots in the classroom.

Playing video games may improve your memory and attention, study says

By Alison Pearce Stevens, Science News for Students on 02.01.23

Word Count **903**

Level **MAX**



Kids who play video games more than 20 hours a week did better than non-gamers on mental tasks requiring memory and attention. Photo: Motortion/Getty Images Photo: Motortion/Getty Images

Plenty of kids spend their free time playing video games. And plenty of adults — including parents — worry those games might be harmful to a child's developing brain. But a new study finds games could offer some benefits to the mind. Video gamers performed better on two separate mental tasks than nongamers did.

The researchers shared their findings in *JAMA Network Open* on October 24, 2022.

Many studies have looked at brain impacts of playing video games, but to date, there hasn't been a clear answer as to their effects. Some studies suggested gaming might harm a young player's mind, but others pointed to possible benefits. One reason for the difference? Small sample sizes, says Bader Charani, who is a neuroscientist at the University of Vermont in Burlington, Vermont. "It's really important," he says, "to have as big a sample as we can get." That means you need to test lots and lots of people.

Chaarani was part of a team that set out to study the brains of more than 2,000 kids from 21 different sites across the United States. All were taking part in what's known as the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) study. Every year, its participants — between the ages of 10 and 20 — answer a series of questions. Some deal with things like their height, weight and physical health, and other questions focus on a kid's activity, mental health and more. Every other year, the scientists also perform an MRI scan of each kid's brain.

Chaarani and his team worked with data from 2,217 children who had their brains scanned at age 9 or 10. All belonged to one of two groups. Some kids said they never play video games. This was the non-gamer group. A video-gamer group reported playing at least three hours a day. The researchers compared scans from the two groups, looking for signs that might point to differences in their cognition (ability to think and learn).

While in the MRI scanner, the kids performed tasks. One asked them to press an arrow key that matched the right or left arrow on a computer screen. But if the arrow was followed by an arrow that pointed up, the kids were supposed to *not* press a key. The up arrow was a signal to stop. This task tested their ability to quickly act on that stop cue.

The second task asked the kids to remember facial expressions in pictures shown on the screen. They were supposed to remember the very first expression they saw, and they also had to remember the expression they had seen two faces back before any given moment. This tested what's known as their working memory — holding onto and using short-term information.

As kids performed the tasks, the scanner recorded activity in their brains.

Gamers proved better at both tasks. Compared to non-gamers, they more often could stop themselves from clicking a key when the up arrow appeared. They also were better at remembering facial expressions.

Leveling Up The Brain?

Those findings matched what showed up in certain areas of the kids' brain scans. Specifically, Chaarani says, parts of the brain "that are highly involved in working memory and attention and problem solving" were more active in gamers. That's not surprising. "Games require fast-paced processing of many [types of] information within a very short amount of time." And, he adds, "they require problem solving, [and] a lot of visual attention."

Brain areas involved in hand-eye coordination were less active in gamers than non-gamers. Chaarani says that's likely due to practice. It's like using a muscle. Someone who goes to the gym, he notes, "can lift the same weight using little effort [compared to] someone who goes to the gym for the first time." Gamers' brains seem to have become stronger in this area. They didn't need to work as hard for the kids' hands to respond to the images viewed on the screen.

Do gamers have an advantage because the tasks used screens and keyboards, just as video games do? The researchers don't think so. But, Chaarani says, "that's something we can verify by looking



at other cognitive tasks that don't involve eye-finger coordination."

Fran Blumberg works at Fordham University in New York City. There, she studies children's attention and problem-solving skills. As she points out, this study "is correlational," which means we don't know if playing games caused the effects that were seen. However, she adds, the study does appear to show that gamers perform better on certain tasks than nongamers, and those match up with differences seen in their brain scans. The big question, she asks, is why? "We still need more studies to understand why we see the difference in pictures of the brain between these two groups of children."

The results might please gamers. Still, Chaarani urges caution. "Don't jump to conclusions," he says. "Many media sources have been interpreting [the results to mean] video gaming is good for you. We're not saying that." Observed brain changes could come at the expense of other brain functions. This study was a first look at this group of kids from the ABCD study. Chaarani plans to see whether and how their skills — and brains — may change over time.

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article shows Chararani's MAIN opinion about video games' effects on children?
- (A) Chararani was part of a team that set out to study the brains of more than 2,000 kids from 21 different sites across the United States.
 - (B) Chararani and his team worked with data from 2,217 children who had their brains scanned at age 9 or 10.
 - (C) Specifically, Chararani says, parts of the brain "that are highly involved in working memory and attention and problem solving" were more active in gamers.
 - (D) But, Chararani says, "that's something we can verify by looking at other cognitive tasks that don't involve eye-finger coordination."

- 2 Read the conclusion.

Playing video games may help people perform certain tasks more effectively.

Which sentence from the article provides the BEST support to the statement?

- (A) One asked them to press an arrow key that matched the right or left arrow on a computer screen.
- (B) They didn't need to work as hard for the kids' hands to respond to the images viewed on the screen.
- (C) "We still need more studies to understand why we see the difference in pictures of the brain between these two groups of children."
- (D) Observed brain changes could come at the expense of other brain functions.

- 3 Read the claim.

More research needs to be done on how video games affect people's brains.

How does the author support this claim in the article?

- (A) by suggesting the sample size in Chararani's study was too small
 - (B) by arguing that the results of MRI scanners are inaccurate
 - (C) by emphasizing that video games are constantly changing
 - (D) by explaining that the results of Chararani's study are correlational
- 4 In the article, the author claims gamers are better at some tasks than nongamers are. How does the author support this claim?
- (A) by describing the results of a portion of the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study
 - (B) by showing what happened when kids' brains were scanned while playing video games
 - (C) by emphasizing that Chararani and other researchers think video games are good for children
 - (D) by explaining how gamers' performance on certain tasks changed over several years

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CONVENTIONS ACTION VERBS AND LINKING VERBS

The Fun They Had

Isaac Asimov

A verb is a word that expresses an action or indicates a state or condition. Every complete sentence includes at least one verb.

An **action verb** may express a physical action, such as *run* or *jump*. It may also express a mental action, such as *think* or *believe*.

A **linking verb** is a word that links or connects the subject to a word in the predicate that renames, identifies, or describes it. The most common linking verb is *be*, which includes the forms *am*, *was*, *were*, *is*, *being*, and *has been*. Other linking verbs include *appear*, *feel*, *look*, *become*, and *seem*. *Become* and *seem* are always linking verbs. Some other linking verbs can also function as action verbs.

ACTION VERBS	LINKING VERBS
Margie <i>wrote</i> the answers on the paper. (The action is <i>writing</i> .)	Margie <i>was</i> disappointed. (<i>Was</i> links <i>Margie</i> to <i>disappointed</i> . <i>Disappointed</i> gives more information about the subject <i>Margie</i> .)
Tommy <i>screamed</i> with laughter. (The action is <i>screaming</i> .)	The book <i>looked</i> old and worn. (<i>Looked</i> links <i>book</i> to <i>old and worn</i> . <i>Old and worn</i> gives more information about the <i>book</i> .)

DIRECTIONS: Identify the verb in each sentence. Then identify whether the verb is an action verb or a linking verb.

1. It was a very old book. _____
2. They turned the pages of the yellow and crinkly book. _____
3. It was always on at the same time every day. _____
4. Margie was thinking about the kids in the old days. _____
5. The school children learned the same things back then. _____
6. The mechanical teacher was flashing on the screen. _____
7. And the teachers were people. _____