

Alliance Theatre

institute

Study Guide
Maybe Happy Ending

Created as part of the Alliance Theatre's Dramaturgy by Students program
by Melissa Word, Teaching Artist
with: Astrid Maurer-Evans, Drama Teacher
and: Drama III and IV Students from Arabia Mountain High School



Book by Will Aronson and Hue Park
Music by Will Aronson
Lyrics by Hue Park
Directed by Michael Arden

January 18 – February 16, 2020
Coca-Cola Stage

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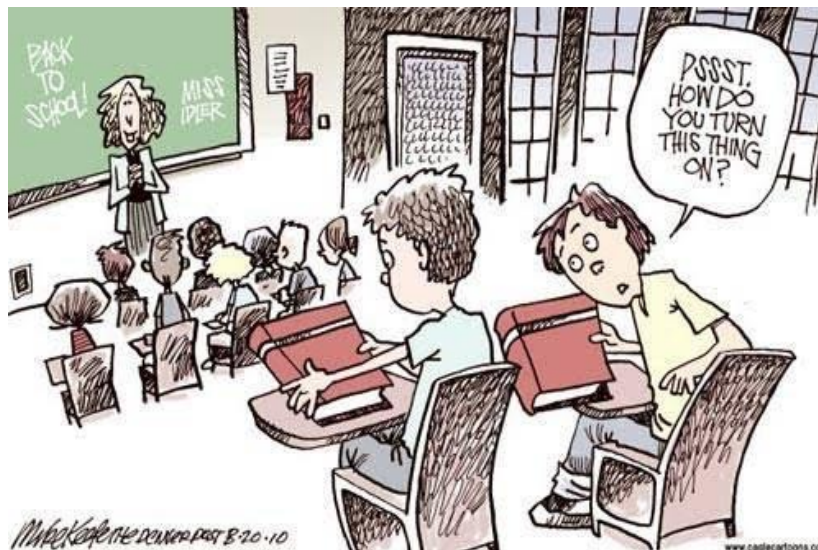


Photo source:

<http://techeducationwesterncivilization.blogspot.com/2014/05/political-cartoon-2-technology-in.html>

Georgia Standards of Excellence

English Language Arts (Grades 9-10 and 11-12)

- ELAGSE9-10RL2: Determine a theme and/or central idea of text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- ELAGSE9-10RL3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- ELAGSE9-10RL6: Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
- ELAGSE9-10RL7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums (e.g., Auden’s poem “Musée de Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s painting Landscape with the Fall of Icarus), including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.
- ELAGSE11-12RL3: Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- ELAGSE11-12RL4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
- ELAGSE11-12RL5: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Theatre Art (Grades 9-12)

- TAHSAD.RE.1 Engage actively and appropriately as an audience member.
 - a. Examine the relationship between actor and live audience in history and contemporary performance.
- TAHSFT.CN.1 Explore how theatre connects to life experiences, careers, and other content.
 - a. Examine how theatre reflects real life.
 - b. Analyze how theatre employs aspects of other art forms and disciplines to effectively communicate with a live audience.
- TAHSFT.CN.2 Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context.
 - a. Identify and analyze plays and dramas from a variety of historical periods and cultures.
 - d. Interpret cultural and historical research for use in a production.

Music Appreciation (Grades 9-12)

- HSMA.RE.1 Listen to, analyze, and describe music.
 - a. Identify and describe simple and complex forms of music, and relate them to the style, mood and context of the piece being studied.

Dance for Theatre (Grades 9-12)

- DHSdT.CR.2 Demonstrate an understanding of dance as a form of communication.
 - a. Recognize how choreographic structure is used to communicate meaning in a dance.
 - b. Demonstrate the use of theme through movement.

Synopsis

Set in the not-too-distant future in Seoul, Korea, two obsolete helper-bots are living an isolated existence in a robots-only housing complex on the edge of the city. Oliver is waiting for his former-owner to come looking for him, and Claire is just... waiting. When the two discover each other across the hall, they have a surprising connection that challenges what they believe is possible for themselves, relationships, and love. Looking past our era of technology-driven detachment, this award-winning musical imagines a magical and bittersweet reawakening to the things that make us human.

Source: <https://alliancetheatre.org/production/2019-20/maybe-happy-ending>

Author Study

Will Aronson and Hue Park



Source: <https://www.willaronson.com/>

Will Aronson

Will Aronson is an American contemporary composer and musical theater writer born in 1983. He attended New York University for an MFA in Musical Theatre Writing and Harvard for his BA in music. Aronson has written and co-written many books and scores that have been featured on Broadway and national tours.

Hue Park

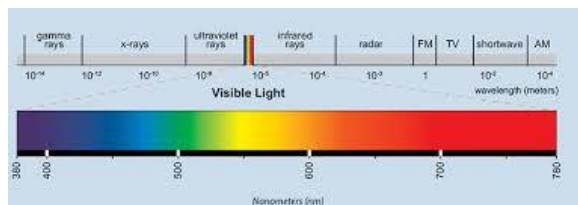
Hue Park is a South Korean lyricist and songwriter born on January 1, 1983. Based off his social media, he likes to have a good time with friends and loves to work out in the gym. He travels a lot, and often returns home to Seoul, South Korea. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts from New York University. You can find him on Instagram at @hue_park.

Discussion Question

Have you ever *collaborated* with another person on a creative project?

- Describe the experience.
- What were the benefits of partnering with another person?
- Were there any challenges?
- What strategies can artists use to collaborate successfully?

Pre-Show Activity: “Everything is a Spectrum”



Directions

Students stand in an open space, and imagine a line on the floor, extending from one side of the room to the other. The teacher/facilitator proposes the following statements, and students decide how much they agree or disagree with the statement. The imaginary line on the floor is a spectrum, with one end representing “YES, I DEFINITELY AGREE!” and the other end representing “I ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE!” Students assess how they feel and stand somewhere on the line that best reflects their feelings. The facilitator can then ask to hear responses from the polar ends of the spectrum and from the middle.

Statements

- + “Given the rapid pace of technological advancement and its adaptation to human needs, I believe that technology is ultimately positive for human evolution.”
- + “Overall, social media has a positive effect on my well-being.”
- + “Outdated objects like records, paper maps, and books still have value, and should continue to be produced.”
- + “If we know falling in love could lead to heartbreak, is it naive or brave to fall in love?”
Note: identify one end of the spectrum as *naive*, the other *brave*.

Journal Prompt

Imagine a world in which artificial intelligence (AI) develops the ability to feel emotions as humans do. How would that change the world as we know it?

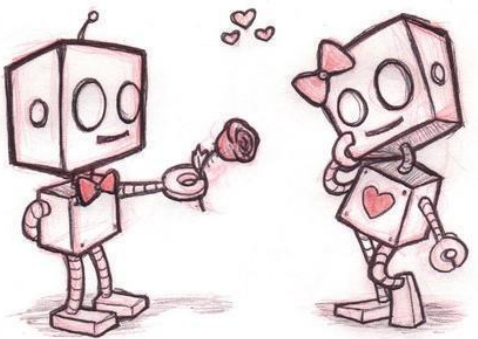


Photo source: <https://weheartit.com/entry/15408024>

Making Predictions Through Close Reading

Directions

Read, re-read, and reflect upon the passages below, which appear on page 2 of the script. During reading questions are provided to guide students towards making predictions about what might happen in this play.

Authors' Note

It has often been pointed out that people are gradually merging with technology, and it's easy to imagine a future when people and their electronic gadgets start to become indistinguishable. But underneath this, all the old human longings and fears and dreams are still there, unchanged – just maybe hidden from ourselves a bit more. Perhaps technology helps us forget that we are still confused humans, who only get a very short time to work things out before the season changes and we're gone.



Are we really *merging* with technology?



What types of things are confusing to humans?

With this in mind, we began to imagine a story not of two people but of two robots who, through their innocent, goofy discovery of the world, might actually remind us what it is to be human. To capture this feeling, we decided that instead of using an electronic, futuristic sound, we would paint our futuristic story with analogue, acoustic sounds – piano hammers and resonating strings; the crackling sound of a needle on LP grooves. And we would fill the story with as much of the world's simple magic as we could: a road trip; a field lit up by fireflies on a summer night.



What kinds of “the world's simple magic” are special to you?

An LP-player, a firefly, a human being – we all have a beautiful moment here in the universe, where we light up the darkness or make the air vibrate magically, and then we are gone. The question is only what we do with that knowledge. Do we love harder? Is loving someone intensely worth the pain that comes with that? How do we live fully, knowing all the while that everything is always changing, that everything must pass?



Pause to reflect upon and respond to each of the authors' questions.

On the Portrayal of Helperbots

Like all Helperbots, Oliver (a 5) and Claire (a 6) are physically identical to humans, although their emotions and movements are less gradated and perhaps ever so slightly exaggerated – in this respect, they might bring to mind silent film comedians. They are dressed perhaps in the manner of hipsters of the 2010s, as would fit the tastes of their cosmopolitan Korean owners. The Helperbot 5, and later the 6, were eventually replaced by more advanced Helperbots, leaving the earlier models ownerless and with a limited supply of replacement parts. Obsolete Helperbots live on the outskirts of Seoul Metropolitan in cheap apartments provided by the company that created them.



Improvise Helperbot movement based on this description.

Make Predictions:

1. Why do you think the authors chose to include an Authors' Note before the play?
2. Which moments in these sections stand out to you the most?
3. Based on these important notes from the authors:

What do you think this play is going to be about?

How do you think this play is going to make you feel?

A Brief History of Robots

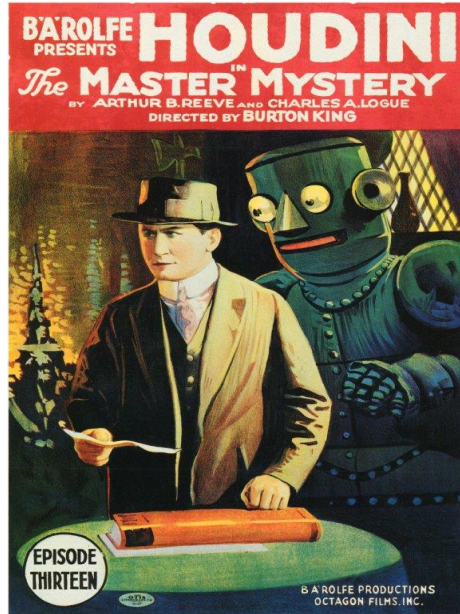


Photo source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0010446/>

The first robot to ever appear on the big screen was “The Automaton,” which was featured in the 1918 silent motion picture “The Master Mystery” alongside Harry Houdini. New ideas involving robots have evolved over the years from them creating utopian society, or bonding with humans to killing the human race.

Popular movies, shows and anime became prevalent in the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s both in America and Eastern Asia. America contributed popular movies such as *Star Wars* (1977), *The Terminator* (1984), *The Iron Giant* (1999), and *WALL-E* (2008). Japan created comics involving robots such as *Fullmetal Alchemist* and *Voltron*, which eventually became popular modern series and movie adaptations. They are often featured in many films, TV shows, cartoons, and other aspects of Hollywood.

Discussion Questions

- What technology are you emotionally connected to and why?
- What is your stance concerning the idea that robots “will take over the world”?
- How do you define a robot?

Resources for further robot research:

Ted Talk: *Why We Have an Emotional Connection to Robots*

https://www.ted.com/talks/kate_darling_why_we_have_an_emotional_connection_to_robots/transcript

Ted Talk: *Will Robots Invade Our Lives?*

https://www.ted.com/talks/rodney_brooks_on_robots

The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon







Sophia the Robot: https://youtu.be/Bg_tJvCA8zw

More robots: <https://youtu.be/G-zyTIZQYpE>

Vocabulary

Word	Definition	Used in context
Analogue	Something that is similar or comparable to something else either in general or in some specific detail.	"we would paint our futuristic story with analogue, acoustic sounds..." (page 2)
Acoustic	The science that deals with the study of sound , ultrasound , and infrasound .	"we would paint our futuristic story with analogue, acoustic sounds..." (page 2)
Gradated	Arranged in steps or quality .	"their emotions and movements are less gradated..." (page 2)
Cosmopolitan	To travel , be different or diverse .	"as would fit the tastes of their cosmopolitan Korean owners..." (page 2)
Obsolete	No longer used ; outdated .	"Obsolete Helperbots live on the outskirts of Seoul..." page 2)
Hipsters	Trendy , independent thinkers who are progressive in an unconventional way.	"They are dressed perhaps in the manner of hipsters of the 2010s" (page 2)
Nuanced	Characterized by expression , Nitpicking , or fussy emotions .	"she is capable of slightly more nuanced emotional shadings..." (page 3)
Forsworn	An agreement to give up something or to do without .	"Claire has forsworn any kind of long-term emotional bond..." (page 3)
Naïve	Having or showing a lack of experience , judgement , information , or wisdom .	"WERE WE BRAVE, OR WERE WE JUST NAÏVE?" (page 4)
Soldering	When two metals are joined together.	"He fetches a small welding kit from a drawer and does a quick soldering job" (page 4)
Agitation	moving back and forth or with an irregular , rapid , or violent action.	"He paces around in agitation" (page 11)
Hostile	To be unfriendly , antagonistic	"you really didn't have to be so hostile" (page 13)
Anti-participatory	To be non-inclusive or uninvolved .	"You're very anti-participatory" (page 40)
Cringing	Bent away in fear , experiencing embarrassment or disgust .	"I'M CRINGING LESS, I'M LAUGHING MORE" (page 55)
begrudgingly	Reluctant or resentful .	"OLIVER: (<i>fake-begrudgingly</i>) No, no, stay here -- I'll get my toolkit." (page 85)

Allusions

Reference & Description	Image
<p>LP Player</p> <p>The use of an LP player is mentioned multiple times throughout the script and this picture gives a feel of what it an actual LP player looks like.</p> <p>Photo Source: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/443393525798067343/</p>	
<p>LP Record</p> <p>This shows LP (long play) records, which is a vinyl record format played by an LP player. Oliver prefers listening to music in this format even though it is an outdated piece of technology.</p> <p>Photo Source: https://www.123rf.com/clipart-vector/vinyl_record.html?sti=nqagoudn2jzbzsoqii</p>	
<p>Fireflies</p> <p>Within the play, Claire mentions her love for fireflies, and want to see them when they gather in swarms at a certain time of year.</p> <p>Photo Source: https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2016/07/2016-summer-firefly-photos/</p>	
<p>Silent film comedians</p> <p>Silent film comedians were popular during the silent film era (1900s-1920s) before the technology was available to include sound and talking. Comedians from this era were related to mimes but in their own genre.</p> <p>Photo Source: https://www.carseywolf.ucsb.edu/pollock-events/women-comedy-oyster-princess/</p>	
<p>String telephone + Operator</p> <p>In the script, Oliver makes a string telephone to talk to Claire across the hallway. This is made by tying a long string between two cups, and attaching the string through a small hole in the bottom of the cups. When one person talks into their cup and the string is tight, the bottom of the cup vibrates back and forth with the sound waves. The second person can hear what the first person is saying because the sound waves travel on the string and into the other cup.</p> <p>Photo Source: https://www.cocoro.tv/2017/07/learn-make-string-telephone/</p>	
<p>Paper Maps:</p> <p>Used as the primary way to get from place to place. Very necessary in the time before GPS!</p> <p>Photo Source: https://carryingonblog.wordpress.com/2011/08/15/paper-maps-and-travel-artifacts/</p>	


During Reading

Directions

Compare and contrast a Helperbot 5 (Oliver) and Helperbot 6 (Claire). Some ideas have been provided. What would you add?

Helperbot Version 5 (Oliver)	Both	Helperbot Version 6 (Claire)
<p>Oliver's personality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• socially awkward• insecure• content with the way things are• jealous of the 6 <p>Capabilities of 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More durable than 6• not as advanced	<p>Personality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• brave• kind• caring• enjoy teasing each other <p>Capabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• obsolete• antique	<p>Claire's personality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• social butterfly• seeks adventure• risk-taker• maybe a bit naive <p>Capabilities of 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• less durable than 5• can understand more nuanced language, such as slang

Character Analysis

Character	Costume Rendering
<p>Oliver: An obsolete Helperbot 5. Loves other forms of outdated technology – LP players and paper maps and books -- which some people claim were even better than what came later. Optimistic by design, Oliver has always believed his former owner is eventually going to come pick him up from the discarded Helperbot apartment complex. Helperbot 5 replacement parts are no longer produced, so Oliver is adept at creatively repairing himself.</p>	<p><i>Draw a costume rendering for Oliver, below.</i></p>
<p>Claire: An obsolete Helperbot 6. As a model 6, she is capable of slightly more nuanced emotional shadings than the 5, including a better command of specialized language like slang. Somewhat impatient with less advanced models. Claire has forsworn any kind of long-term emotional bond, having observed at close range the broken relationship of the couple that owned her. Helperbot Inc. has also discontinued Helperbot 6 replacement parts.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pictured right: Model of Claire created by a student from Arabia Mountain High School, who imagines Claire's charger is a magnetic screen she attaches to her back.</p>	

Discussion Questions

For each character, consider:

1. What motivates the character? (Hint: a complex character has multiple or conflicting motivations).
2. How does the character interact with others throughout the play?
3. How does the character develop throughout the play?
4. How does this character advance the plot?
5. How does this character's thoughts, words, or actions contribute to a major theme?

Setting

Maybe Happy Ending is set in: Seoul, Korea. The near future. 2044 to be exact.

In our current time, Seoul is highly advanced in fashion and technology, yet remains deeply rooted in its traditions. The capital city and largest metropolis in Korea, Seoul is a place with many palaces, temples, cutting-edge design and architecture, natural beauty, and is the home of K-Pop music.

There are over three thousand islands along the western and southern coasts, mostly small and uninhabited. The country's largest island is Jeju-do, which, in the play, is a place Claire longs to go to see the annual gathering of thousands of fireflies.

In the year 2044, air pollution is very severe in the year in Korea. The script mentions an unusual day where the people don't have to wear their breathing masks.

Much of the action takes place in a discarded Helperbot apartment complex – specifically, Oliver's room. From his room, Oliver sings:

**WATCHING FROM THE WINDOW AS THE MORNING CROWDS APPEAR
PICTURING THE PLACES THEY ARE GOING
SOON THE RUSH IS OVER AND THE SIDEWALK STARTS TO CLEAR
THEN I START MY DAY IN HERE!**

**THE WORLD WITHIN MY ROOM -
THE PERFECT PLACE TO EXPLORE FROM.
I NEVER NEED MORE FROM
THE WORLD WITHIN MY ROOM.
I CHOOSE A BOOK AND I READ IT.
A PLACE TO RECHARGE WHEN I NEED IT -
AND IT'S ALL WITHIN MY ROOM!**

Journal Prompt:

SPACE IS THE PLACE

Where is your space to recharge - Is it your bedroom, a cozy seat in a library, a busy coffee shop, walking outside listening to music, somewhere else?

What makes it special or different from any other room?

Describe three things about your chosen space that make it special to you.

Maybe Happy Ending: The Playlist Featuring Oliver's Favorite Jazz Classics

- Track 01. "Blue Train" by John Coltrane, 1958
 Track 02. "Monk's Dream" by Thelonious Monk Quartet, 1963
 Track 03. "Caravan" by Duke Ellington, 1936
 Track 04. "I'll Remember April" by Charlie Parker, 1949 (written by Gene de Paul and Patricia Johnston)
 Track 05. "I've Got You Under My Skin" by Cole Porter, 1936
 Track 06. "Basin Street Blues" by Louis Armstrong, 1928 (written by Spencer Williams)
 Track 07. "Jeru" by Gerry Mulligan, from Miles Davis' 1957 compilation album *Birth of The Cool*
 Track 08. "Godchild" by George Wallington, from Miles Davis' 1957 compilation album *Birth of The Cool*
 Track 09. "Moon Dreams" by Chummy MacGregor, from Miles Davis' 1957 compilation album *Birth of The Cool*
 Track 10. "Why Love" by The Gil Brentley Jazz Messengers (a fictitious group credited with writing James' favorite Jazz tune, although actually written by the play's authors)

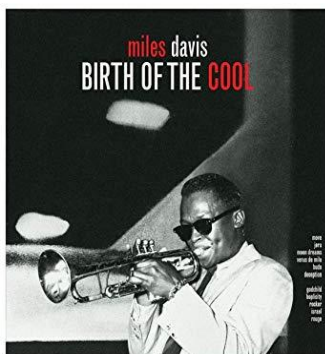
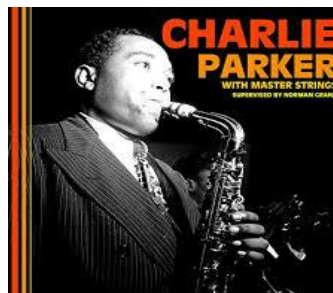
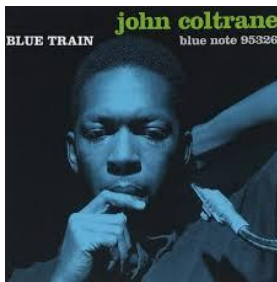


Photo Sources:

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Facts About Love

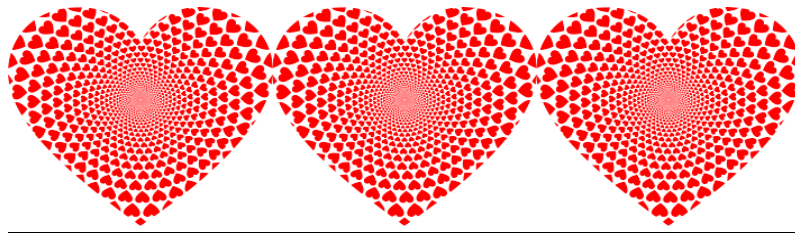
Throughout the play, Oliver recites the following “facts” about love –

“The feeling of love lasts a maximum of 4 years, and then it’s just inertia and fear of being alone that keeps people together.”

“Love is unstable; love is well-known to have an equal if not greater tendency to create pain rather than joy; love makes people, and as far as we know, robots, act irrationally.”

Discussion Questions

- Do you agree or disagree with these “facts”?
- Why do you think Oliver recites these “facts” – how is he feeling, and/or how is he hoping to feel?
- How do you define love?



Example Student Reflections on Love

We think love is when you have that feeling that you can’t live without each other. Love is someone you can count on for anything and that you have trust in also. Love is when you feel comfortable around your partner. Love is this emotional attachment that you have with your partner that will never go away.

I learned all of this from my parents and people that have given me wisdom and knowledge about love and what it means to be in love and the difference between love and lust.

Also love can make you do things you never thought you would’ve done. For example: Claire and Oliver would never have thought about erasing their hard drives, but when love comes into the picture, most of the things you thought you would never do, you do for the sake of love.

Post-Show Discussion Questions

1. Return to the passage, below. Then, reflect on the music and lighting choices made in this production. How was this moment portrayed in the production you saw today?

OLIVER

Okay... tell me about fireflies please.

(MUSIC, and possibly simple lighting or projections, accompany her description.)

CLAIRE

(with awe)

Fireflies are a special type of insect that used to be almost everywhere, but now can only be found in one area of Jeju. *(map)* There's a complex chemical reaction in their abdomen that is not found in other insects. *(diagram of chemical process)* Because of this chemical process, they can produce light by themselves – without ever being plugged in. *(slide of fireflies glowing)*

OLIVER

Little forest robots.

CLAIRE

They only live for two months. But what a beautiful two months.

2. How do you feel about Claire and Oliver's choices to erase and not erase their hard drives? If you were in their position, what would you do?

3. Is there a benefit in being able to forget the painful things that happen to us, if it also means losing the joyful memories too?

Visioning Exercise

The year is 2044. What does the world look like *according to you*? Not so much a prediction based on current trends and trajectories, but rather how would you like to see the world transforming? Your school, your neighborhood, your country? What do cities look like, how do people spend their time? Do we spend money the same ways, drive in the same ways, govern our cities in the same ways that we do in 2019? Freely write about your vision of 2044 and share with your peers. Consider creating a time capsule as a class, compiling your fantasies for the future, and storing them somewhere for safekeeping. Traditionally, time capsules are made of glass and buried in the ground for future generations to find.



Photo source:

<https://www.slashgear.com/mit-construction-uncovers-time-capsule-intended-for-2957-a-d-20415487/>

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