

MONSTROUS DEVICES

Damien Love

Teaching Resources

ABOUT MONSTROUS DEVICES

When twelve-year-old Alex receives an old tin robot in the post, the note from his grandfather simply reads: 'This one is special'. But as strange events start occurring around him, it doesn't take Alex long to suspect that the small toy is more than special; it might also be deadly.

Just as things are getting out of hand, Alex's grandfather arrives, whisking him away from his otherwise humdrum life and into a world of strange, macabre magic. From Paris to Prague, they flee across snowy Europe in a quest to unravel the riddle of the little robot, and outwit relentless assassins of the human and mechanical kind. How does Alex's grandfather know them? And can Alex safely harness the robot's power, or will it fall into the wrong, wicked hands?

ABOUT DAMIEN LOVE

Damien Love was born in Scotland and lives in Glasgow, where, even as you read these words, it is raining. He is the author of several books on film and filmmakers, and is the TV critic for Scotland's broadsheet, The Sunday Herald. He has the ability to talk to cats, but there is no evidence that they understand him. Monstrous Devices is his first novel. Learn more at damienlove.com.

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PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- *Discuss the cover and the clues it offers about what's inside.
What do you think of the robot on the cover: is it a toy or is it dangerous?
How do you think robots will change the world - have they already done so?*
- *Discuss the title. What does it make us think of? What does it suggest? Is there more than one way of reading it? Is it a quote from somewhere?*

DISCUSSION POINTS ON KEY THEMES

Bullying

Alex is bullied in the flesh and online. How does he handle it? What advice would you give him?

Power

That feeling you've described, that power. The things that happened. Did you enjoy it? p. 261

Throughout the story, Alex is able to make the robot serve him, from completing his essay to nearly killing a boy on the train. How do you think you would feel if you gained this kind of power? Why does Alex's granddad believe seeking power is a lonely and dangerous path?

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Trust

“The only question that matters is: do you trust me?” the old man had asked. Did he? Did he even know him? p. 241

How does Alex’s trust in his granddad change throughout the story and what are the reasons for these changes? Do you think that trust is restored by the end of the story? Do you think that Alex’s granddad damaged his trust by keeping things from Alex or was it the correct decision to protect him?

Myths & Legends

The book delves into the legend of the golem of Prague. What other myths and legends are associated with Prague? Are there local myths and legends (even tales of haunted houses) that you think would make a good starting point for a story?

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Art

Benjamin Loewy made three robots which are valuable collectors’ items. Make a poster advertising an auction for the two robots that don’t appear in the book. Think about what the two robots look like. What makes them special?

The villains use robots built to do specific tasks - design a robot to do one main thing (drawing or sculpture or Lego etc.)

Draw a comic strip depicting one of the battles between Alex and life-sizers in the story.

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English and Creative Writing

When Alex believes his granddad is dead, he spends a night walking around the Gare du Lyon, cold and frightened. Write a diary entry from his perspective at this time.

After Alex disposes of the tablet in the river, he and his granddad stay on in Prague for two more days. Write a postcard from Alex to his mother, explaining what you've done on your holiday. Think about whether he'd want his mother to be worried, and how much he would want her to know.

Write a newspaper report describing the localised storm that took place in Prague. Think about how you are going to convey the confusion and different testimonies.

Geography

This book has four main settings: Alex's home town, London, Paris and Prague. Look up the places mentioned in the story and find them on a map. Create a profile for each setting and make a list of its key features. Think about the weather, the location and the buildings. Then choose an important site in each city and write a brief description of it.