

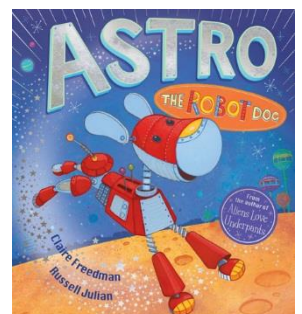


Astro the Robot Dog

written by Claire Freedman,
Illustrated by Russell Julian

1 – Introducing the book

- Read the first few pages of the story up to the point where Astro sets off for Earth. Look at the pictures of Xog at the beginning of the book. What is it like there? Do you think it is hot or cold? Encourage children to use a range of vocabulary to describe Xog. Before reading on, show children pictures of our solar system and of Earth from space – for example using Google Earth to zoom in as Astro would on his journey. What do you think Astro would notice as he came to land on planet Earth? How is our planet different to Xog? Discuss what we have on planet Earth that other planets don't have, such as trees, water, clouds, blue sky.
- Read on through the story. What does Astro report back about life on Earth? What does he enjoy doing with the boy? (splashing in streams and kicking a ball). Invite children to share the games that they like playing that they think Astro would enjoy. Encourage them to give reasons for their responses: *I think Astro would like playing ... with me because...* You could develop this into a 'hot-seating' activity, where children are able to question Astro directly about his experiences on planet Earth.
- Ask children to read and sound out simple words from the story, for example Z-a-k, d-o-g, p-u-p, s-a-d, b-e-d, f-u-n. Imagine that on planet Xog they also speak the alien language Xogish. Show them some Xogish words, for example p-l-i-p, s-o-f, d-u-s, t-r-o-c. For small group work, provide magnetic letters or whiteboards and pens. Say a simple word and ask children to make/write it. Is it an English word or a Xogish word? This activity can be tailored to the phonic ability of the group.

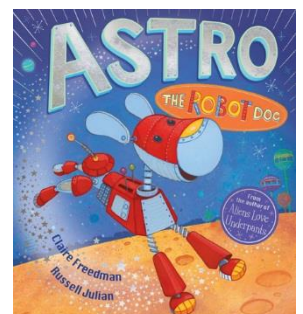




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2 – Amazing Astro

- Read the story again, focusing particularly on the character of Astro. It says 'He did as all good robots do – whatever he was programmed to!' What would you programme a robot pet to do?
- Look at the picture of Astro at the beginning of the story. What features has he got that are the same as a real dog? How is he different? Work with children to write labels for parts of his body and fix them in the right place.
- Provide a range of junk modelling materials (pipe cleaners, yoghurt pots, plastic lids, foil food trays, shiny paper, milk container lids etc) for children to build their own robot dog. They could also work in small friendship groups to create a backdrop for a space-themed role play area, for example doing bubble printing to make an unusual planet surface, or collaging other planets from tissue paper. Have tough trays filled with sand mixed with glitter, or with red lentils. Children can then play with their robot pets in an intergalactic environment.
- Invite children to devise (and write) a name for their dog. They can then introduce him/her to their friends.





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3 – Even robot dogs have feelings

- In the story Zak says ‘I wish Astro was real but robot dogs aren’t built to feel’. What would life be like if you didn’t have any feelings? Brainstorm different emotions, and encourage children to understand that experiencing the full range of these is part of life, and what makes us who we are.
- Provide a range of images which show different emotions, and encourage children to say which emotion they think is being shown. Explore strategies for coping with difficult feelings like anger, or how you can be a good friend to someone who is feeling worried/upset or angry.
- What does the boy do which shows Astro that he is a good friend? Ask children what they think Astro would have made of planet Earth if he had met a boy who was unkind?

