What is a robot? Learners opinions, ideas and beliefs will be constantly challenged as they move through the various sections of “Hello Robot”, the latest exhibition to arrive at V & A Dundee.

I was very excited to be offered an invitation to the opening night on November 1st and it did not disappoint. Teaching in P6 at Rosebank Primary this year, we decided to try something a little different – a digital classroom. This includes a flexible seating arrangement, one to one access to laptops and a focus on using technology to complement our learning wherever possible. When I heard that “Hello Robot” was coming to Dundee, its first and only time in the UK, I knew this would link in perfectly with what we were doing in class.

Split into four sections, each one with its own distinct focus and aesthetic to match. A series of 14 questions hang from the ceiling as you journey through the exhibition. This is a brilliant way to keep pupils motivated and on task.

The first room contains lots of examples of what would be considered “classic” robots. There are many variations on show, big and small, and this is the perfect hook to capture pupil’s imagination. There are lots of opportunities to compare, contrast and discuss how design has changed over the years. There is also an interactive element in this section with Robo Wunderkind, a customisable robot designed to be used with from early years up as a gateway into coding. Pupils will enjoy the opportunity to use the torch to test how the light sensors react.

Moving through to the next area, the focus shifts to robots in industry. Can a robot do your job and in which situations is it useful to use robots to complete tasks? The discussion that this will prompt will be interesting and older pupils could certainly use this as a stimulus for further research. A large section of this room focuses on 3D design and any schools that have used 3D printers will find lots of interesting information to link in with their own projects.

The third section explores the relationship between humans and robots. There are a lot of different exhibits in this large space that learners will enjoy exploring. Many ethical questions to ponder, and links that can be made with both the Health and Wellbeing, and Religious and Moral Education frameworks. Robots as pets, friends, carers and even taking over
parental duties. Is this a step too far? In the future will we use robots to fulfil the role of the adult in social situations that may be boring, uncomfortable or even upsetting. It will be interesting to see how learners respond to these questions.

Paro the seal will be the main attraction for younger pupils. A therapeutic pet seal designed to offer comfort to dementia sufferers. There are lots of opportunities to carry the story of Paro back to the classroom through creative writing projects, art lessons and links to STEM with ideas for their own robotic pet inventions.

The final section looks to the role of robots in the future. There is a video to watch that shows a current project involving the use of robotic bees to do the work of real bees. This would be an interesting topic to explore within an Eco group. The Hylozioc Grove is an immersive motion tracking installation that uses motion sensors to react and adapt to the movements of its users. While the function may be over the heads of younger pupils, they will certainly be fascinated to watch the hypnotic movements of the strange tentacle-like arms.

Outwith the main exhibition stands the Upsticks installation, which was designed and built entirely by robots. Awe-inspiring, pupils will have the opportunity to walk around and even sit inside the structure, a fantastic link to STEM on many different levels.

I thoroughly enjoyed my tour of the exhibition and cannot wait for my class to see, hear and discuss what lies inside. There is something for all ages here, the sensory experiences alone make the visit worthwhile, and the multiple cross-curricular links that I was able to identify during my walkaround will only be the beginning. It is an absolute must-see for any classes studying or working with robotics, Code clubs and STEM groups alike. I look forward to hearing how other educators engage with the exhibition and what this leads to back in classrooms across the country.

Sarah Jenkins
Class Teacher
Rosebank Primary
Dundee