

# Educational material for the play Rub-a-Dub-Dub

## - a play by Fergal O’Byrne

How to use the educational material:

If you are just going to *see* the play, you can work on part 1 and part 3.

If you are going to *study* the play in detail, the assignments in part 2 will be relevant as well.

Make sure you study the right version of the play, so the page numbers will correspond to the educational material. Contact [bf@ordrupgymnasium.dk](mailto:bf@ordrupgymnasium.dk)

If you have questions or comments, you are welcome to contact us.

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About the play:

Rub-a-Dub-Dub centres around three aging friends, Neil, Dan and Bobbi, who due to circumstances have drifted across the globe and only get to meet in person occasionally.

Time has been kind to one, cruel to another and cheated by the third.

Neil has arranged an important meal for them in his remote country hideaway. He is nervous about meeting his life-long friends. He has something to tell them. Something he knows they will not be delighted to hear.

Rub-a-Dub-Dub examines the nature of lifelong friendship, the theme of aging and how we cope with it, and on people’s use, misuse and fear of technology.

Characters:

Dan

Neil

Bobbi

SiSi

## Part 1: Opening the play

Describe the picture. What are your immediate impressions of the four characters?



1. Given a choice, would you rather:
  - a. grow old naturally
  - b. be given your natural timespan, but with the choice of enhancing your physique
  - c. be enabled to prolong your natural timespan
2. If you had the possibility to know your death date, would you like to know?  
How might this knowledge affect your life?

3. About the title: "Rub-A-Dub-Dub" is an English language nursery rhyme first published at the end of the 18th century. Fergal O'Byrne uses the nursery rhyme to structure his play:

Act 1:

Rub a dub dub

Three fools in a tub

Act 2:

And who do you think they be?

The butcher, the baker,

The candlestick maker.

Act 3

Turn them out, knaves all three

The rhyme exists in many variations. Listen to this version of the song and sing along.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIy2j9ak5GY>

What associations do you get from this title? Why might O'Byrne choose a nursery rhyme as the title of his play?

Listen to O'Byrne's comments about the play in the following link and note five things you find interesting. What information do you get about the characters?

Follow this link: [https://youtu.be/AH\\_jV81d1z0](https://youtu.be/AH_jV81d1z0)

4. The word robot is from an old Slavonic word, robota, for "servitude," "forced labor" or "drudgery", corresponding to the term slave. Is it morally permissible to own self-conscious "machines" to do our work? Why/why not?

## Part 2: Questions for the play:

### Act one:

p.1 What are your first impressions of Neil and Dan?

Who is Sisi? What role might she play? Give examples of her taking things very literally rather than understanding metaphors and figures of speech. What does that say about human nature versus the way a machine or artificial intelligence might function?

Find examples of gallows humour in the first pages. Who uses this type of humour and why might he do so?

p.8 Omen “I have something I wish to share” - what might that be?

p.12 Comment on Neil’s line, “It’s technology Dan. It enriches our lives.” In what ways are the lives of the characters in this play “enriched” by technology? Is technology always beneficial for them or are there side-effects?

pp.14-15 Describe how Neil reacts to music, and bear this in mind as you continue reading the play. This might be compared to a general theme in the play, of how the characters communicate - or fail to - with one another. Why do Dan and Neil find the situation embarrassing? Why are they reluctant to show feelings?

Describe Dan’s reaction “SiSi, how many times has this track been played by sad bastard loser aka Neil?” Why does he react in such a harsh manner? Is his reaction to be taken at face value?

p.15 In this part of the play we are told that Neil and Dan “tacitly agree to move one.” Bear in mind the word tacitly (understood or implied without being directly stated). What does this unspoken communication say about their relationship?

pp. 15 down - 18 Characterize Dan and Neil’s former science teacher Fannis. What did they do to him? What influence has he had on the characters? See also p. 40-41.

We are repeatedly informed that SiSi removes Dan’s wine glass. Why does she do so? Discuss the moral value of her actions.

p.21 We are told that “NEIL watches but immediately looks away when he gets caught observing DAN’s walk.” Neil seems embarrassed by his friend’s frailty. Why might this be?

### Summing up Act one:

What do we know so far about the characters we have met?

What are your impressions of Bobbi based on Dan and Neil’s conversations?

What do you anticipate about Dan and Neil meeting Bobbi?

## Act two:

Intro:

Describe Bobbi. What is he wearing? What are your first impressions of him?

What is the effect of SiSi playing Carl Orff's "O Fortuna" from Carmina Burana?

What do we learn about Bobbi from Dan and Neil's dialogue p. 24-25?

pp. 24-30 Comment on the conversation between the three old friends Bobbi, Dan and Neil when Bobbi has made his entrance. Is the conversation natural or awkward? Why is this? Consider to what extent the characters share the same world view, and where they differ. Give examples.

pp. 30-31 Describe Bobbi according to your first impressions. What values does he have in life? What do we learn about why Bobbi has an Exo-suit? How has this affected his life? He seems to be a fundamentally optimistic person despite his ordeal. Why might that be? Who seems to be his opposite at this point in the play?

p. 35 Why is the acronym WANKA (Walking Assistant Nanotech Kane Appliance) amusing? Why is SiSi unaware of the accidental joke she makes?

p. 36 Comment on Bobbi's remark to Dan: "Yeah, you the past, me the future" Give examples of Bobbi's orientation towards the "future" and Dan's orientation towards the "past".

This might suggest that Neil is the present, in which case we have past, present and future, in other words time.

p.37 Look at the following description from the play. What role does the timing and the music play in providing a comic atmosphere?

DAN and BOBBI square up – a man with a cane and a frail demeanour against the tanned Lothario encased in an Exo-skeleton suit; it is not an even match. NEIL is oblivious to this as he searches the nether reaches of the fridge for the soy milk, humming some 'O Sole Mio to himself. DAN and BOBBI face off. It is high tension. DAN gives BOBBI a gentle push, he moves ever so slightly in response and rocks back on his machine-clad legs. DAN notes this and pushes a little bit harder; BOBBI rocks a little bit more pronounced. DAN gives it a more forced push and this time BOBBI loses his balance in the Exo-suit and starts to fall in slow motion. SiSi plays "Waltz of the Flowers" from the Nutcracker Suite. DAN quickly tries to prevent this and the two of them end up doing what can only be described as a waltz across the floor; tottering on the brink of falling before being dragged back; their moves are over-exaggerated. The music matches their movements and even NEIL's bottom, protruding from the fridge, is in time with their movements. This proceeds for a few moments until they finally end up exactly where they started, exhausted and fatigued. At the precise moment they finish NEIL finds the soy milk and turns around as if nothing had happened.

In the following conversation, there is a list of sayings beginning with “the three”. Browse the internet to find out where they originate from. Consider their relevance in relation to the characters in the play. Are they particularly relevant to the character that utters them?

Look at the three of us. What are we like ... the three  
 whatyoumacallits?  
 SiSi: Musketerers ...  
 DAN: Amigos ...  
 SiSi: Knaves ...  
 NEIL: Tenors ...  
 BOBBI: Leafed Clovers ...  
 SiSi: Newton’s Laws of Motion ...  
 BOBBI: Ways to Skin a Horse ...  
 NEIL: Little Pigs ...  
 DAN: Piece Suit ...  
 NEIL: Coins in a fountain ...  
 BOBBI: Sheets to the Wind ...  
 NEIL: Cornered Hat ...  
 BOBBI: To Get Ready ...  
 NEIL: Bags Full ...  
 SiSi: Acts in a very long drama ...

Comment on the following dialogue:

Neil: I meant she is a machine, it is pointless being rude.

DAN: He’s half-machine and I am only being half-rude. It’s his human bits I don’t care for.

In extension, compare SiSi to Bobbi. SiSi looks human but in many ways acts as a machine Bobbi looks like a machine but acts human. To what extent might this comparison blur the boundaries between humans and machines?

p. 42 SiSi imitates the speaker at a derby race, with Bobbi and Dan acting as horses. Would you expect a cyborg to act in such a way?

Do you find this scene comical or tragic? Please explain why.

p. 45 Neil tells the others that “I’ve decided to go down the route of ... euthanasia ...” Bobbi misunderstands the term, remarking: “When you and Derek split up ... I knew you’d be upset but if you want to find some young Asian guy then I say ... good for you. Good. For. You.”

What does Bobbi think euthanasia means?

What is euthanasia really?

How do the other characters react when they realise what he is actually saying?.

Comment on how comedy and tragedy are entwined at this point and consider if this might be a turning point in the play?

Take a careful look at the dialogue between the characters from the bottom of page 46 to the top of page 48. How would you describe the three characters based on this dialogue? Is this how you would expect old friends to communicate with one another in the face of a serious life decision? Why might they do so?

### **Summing up Act 2:**

What is your impression of the relationship between Bobbi, Dan and Neil?

Was the relationship as you had anticipated after Act 1?

How do the three characters relate to SiSi?

What are your expectations for Act 3?

### **Act 3:**

What do we learn about SiSi and Neil's relationship in the beginning of the act?

Why does it surprise Dan?

Based on the dialogue pp. 52 - 55, what appears to have happened the night before?

What effect does this seem to have on the different characters?

p.55 In the stage directions, we are informed about Neil that "there is a suggestion he is milking the attention." Please explain what that means and how it affects our understanding of Neil.

pp.55 - 56. The three men engage in a group hug. Bearing in mind their communication up to this point, does this surprise you? In what sense does it show new aspects of their relationship?

p. 56 A central issue is their discussion of "The Arrow of Time". Comment on aging as a central theme in the story.

p. 57 Dan asks "*SiSi, could you give an estimate of our life expectancies?*"

Looking at the dialogue over the next couple of pages, what does she say?

How and why do the numbers change during their conversation?

Do you believe her, or does she give any information that might be questionable?

Dan's reaction to the bad news is described as stoical. What does this term mean, and what does it say about Dan's character in general?

p. 62 At the bottom of the 62, Neil remarks "*I may well be the sanest one here.*"

In what ways may the three characters' reactions to their situation be considered sane? In what ways might they not be?

p. 64 Consider Dan's remark: "*Come on Neil. Over the years ... we've put up with all your ailments and sicknesses and ...*". Dan has just been described as a stoic. How might we describe Neil? Why might his personality affect his choice of assisted suicide? Do you think he will go through with it?

p. 64 At the bottom of the page, we are told that Dan gets an idea. Over the next few pages, look at how his idea unfolds. What is his idea and what effect does it have on Neil? SiSi catches on to the idea. What does this say about her? Do you consider this "robot-like" behaviour?

p. 69 What does Neil realize at the top of the page?  
What is his reaction?

p.69 What does Dan realize at the bottom of the page?  
What is his reaction?

p. 70 Bobbi returns. What are Dan and SiSi afraid of?  
What does Bobbi tell them on p.70? What do you think he pretends to have done?  
How does Neil react when he realizes the truth of the matter?

### **Summing up Act 3:**

Has your impression of the relationship between Bobbi, Dan and Neil changed during this act?

How about SiSi, her character and her relationship to the three other characters?

Did things turn out as you had expected? Is it a happy ending?

## Part 3: Additional activities and material

1. Themes and message
2. Debates
3. Focus on the characters
4. Focus on the language
5. Put the play into perspective
6. The role of music

### 1. Themes and message

What is the message of the play?

What are the major themes?

Discuss the following themes. Which do you find most relevant? Which do you find most interesting? Why?

1. Old Age
2. Artificial Intelligence
3. Euthanasia
4. Man/machine - transhumanism
5. Endurance of friendship

**Theme: Artificial Intelligence. Man/machine**

- Read and discuss this article about Medibots

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg20427351-100-medibots-the-worlds-smallest-surgeons/>

- Articles about the use of SiSi's to take care of the elderly

Watch the video about elder care robots and list 10 words that belong to the semantic field of "Artificial Intelligence"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_0jzsNF8kA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_0jzsNF8kA)

List all the *advantages* and *disadvantages* in connection with Elder Care Robots

Advantages of elder care robots	Disadvantages of elder care robots

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### **Dilemmas:**

If a machine - or cyborg- such as SiSi are self-conscious, do we have a moral duty to treat them as we would a human being? Or may they be treated as machines? Find examples in the play, where the other characters transgress the “humanity” of SiSi.

### **Theme:       Endurance of friendship:**

In the play Dan asks Neil to take a side for once in his life instead of being the peacemaker. (p.42) Dan’s quote: “Don’t do the peacemaker bullshit please, Neil... you’ve been doing it for so many years now...maybe just get off the fence and take a side for once in your life.”

Consider all the positive effects of always trying to avoid conflicts.

What are the possible side effects of trying to avoid conflicts?

Bobbi accuses Dan of being jealous of him. Bobbi says: “Always strikes me like you were kinda jealous.”

Dan’s reaction is: “Of what? You and your money, Held together with wires and sticky tape. What’s wrong with growing old gracefully?”

What does Dan’s reaction tell us?

Bobbi ends up asking: “My point is this, why do we do this every ten years? I have hardly heard from you in the last four, only for the accident...why do you bother? Do you even like me? It’s important, do you actually want me to be friends or are you just going through the motions?”

Ask your parents: What are the basic values in their best friendships?

What are the basic values in your own friendships? Try to make a definition of friendship.

## **2.       Debates:**

Preparation time: 15 minutes.

Teams of 3 or 4 students who prepare arguments for their motion.

### First debate

Proposition: This house would allow people to prolong their natural timespan, if technology makes it possible.

Opposition: This house would not allow people to prolong their natural timespan, if technology makes it possible.

Second debate

Proposition: This house would legalize euthanasia.

Opposition: This house would not legalize euthanasia.

Third debate

Proposition: This house would encourage the use of Elder Care Robots.

Opposition: This house would not encourage the use of Elder Care Robots.

Fourth debate

Proposition: This house would tell people their death dates if it was possible.

Opposition: This house would not tell people their death dates if it was possible.

**3. Focus on the characters**

Note down your own observations of the characters. Afterwards, try to place the words underneath the boxes) with the right character:

Character	Description of the character
Dan	
Neil	

Bobbi	
SiSi	

Place the following words with the right character:

Gay

Overweight

Tanned and youthful

“Technology! It has enriched our lives” p.8

”honey” p.10

Had a crash. Very bad spinal injuries. p.24

“I have a system for life...it’s called ....living!” p.29

Represents the future p. 29

Represents the past p.29

Fake p.29

“Was life ever meant to be easy?” p.32

“What’s wrong with growing old gracefully?” p.34

“laser surgery is like getting a haircut now” p.35

Metal man p.38

Stick man p.38

“Age is a con” p.39

Illegally imported lambs p.40

“maybe just get off the fence and take a side for once in your life” p.42

“I’ve decided...to go down the route of...euthanasia” p.45

“I spend millions on my health” p.45

Die with dignity p.47

“I would like... to be loved” p.51

#### **4. Focus on the language**

In the following you can characterize the 3 characters through very short quotes.

Bobbi’s language:

Make a stylistic analysis of Bobbi's use of words in italics in the following lines:

Example 1:

p.35 "It's a technique to improve circulation by *immersing* your body into ice baths"

Alternatively, Bobbi could have used the words:

It is technique to improve circulation by dipping your body into ice baths

Example 2:

p.34: "Great. Well, what say I freshen up and we *reconvene* for dinner?"

Alternatively, Bobbi could have used the words:

"Great. Well, what say I freshen up and we meet again for dinner?"

Comment on Bobbi's choice of words.

Bobbi uses the expression "clever cogs"- and SiSi corrects him "Clever clogs". Bobbi misunderstands the word Euthanasia (pp.57-58)

p.43 he says: My therapist says that is a primo factual case for..."

SiSi corrects him: "The term is Prima Facie..."

What does this tell us about Bobbi? Consider the stylistic analysis in your characterization of Bobbi.

Stylistic analysis of Dan's quote (P.59)

"My tone? Our best friend has just told us he is going to commit "euthanasia" and not only have you no fucking clue what that even means...you then add insult to injury by giving him cooking tips. Can you ever crawl out of your rusty arsehole and think about something else for a change?"

Dan expresses p.58 "For the love of...will you ever spend some of your dollars on a new brain."

Characterize the language used by Dan in these quotes.

What does this tell us about Dan's attitude towards Bobbi?

**Neil's language: (p.59)**

"I don't want to decay like an apple"

"I want to die with dignity. I want to be able to make the choice myself, at a time of my own choosing. I want to be able to taste all of this and not have to purée it first".

How does Neil's language differ from Bobbi and Dan's language?

Do you find that the language used by the 3 characters emphasizes your impression of the characters?

More examples:

Comment on the following quotes:

First quote: p.68

“The word “friend” implies an obligation to keep people you care about, alive, well and happy.”

Who says it?

Why is this quote important for the play?

Second quote: p.69

“I came to the conclusion that everything good is behind me - all my achievements, all the things I like about life and all the things I am proud of...there is nothing to look forward to. There is only me falling apart physically and mentally...decay, entropy, gravity, more decay. The arrow of time...I can never go back...”

Who says this?

Why is this quote important for the play?

Third quote: p.70

“I am programmed to convey sensitive news with a different tone. Switching. (her tone becomes more empathetic and very mellow).

What questions does this quote raise concerning the difference between man and machine?

## 5. Put the play into perspective

Compare the play with other texts or films.

Suggestions:

Kurt Vonnegut - Tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow (reprinted in “Welcome to the Monkeyhouse”, 1968)

Assimov - I Robot, the three laws of robotics <https://theconversation.com/after-75-years-isaac-asimovs-three-laws-of-robotics-need-updating-74501>

Blade Runner <https://www.theverge.com/2017/10/5/16428544/blade-runner-philip-k-dick-do-androids-dream-of-electric-sheep-analysis-adaptation>

Compare the play *Rub a dub dub* with Kurt Vonnegut’s short *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. (originally written in 1953).

In what ways are Fergal O’Byrne’s and Kurt Vonnegut’s views on the future different? Are their views in any way similar?

## 6. The role of music in the play

Fergal O’Byrne uses the following music in the play. Describe the effect of the use of music.

1. O Sole Mio [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d\\_mLFHLSULw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_mLFHLSULw)

2. Una Furtiva Lagrima “A furtive tear” by Donizetti  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f71r5w\\_f\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f71r5w_f_g)
3. Carmina Burana [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJC-\\_j3SnXk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJC-_j3SnXk)  
Note “O Fortuna” is a medieval Latin poem written in the 13th century. It is a complaint against the goddess of Fortune. SiSi plays Carl Orff’s “O Fortuna” from Carmina Burana in Act two. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXF5K0ogeg4>
4. Waltz of the Flowers (Nutmcracker Suite)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxHkLdQy5f0>
5. Bruce Springsteen - Glory Days <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vQpW9XRiyM>

## Glossary:

### Act 1

exuberant: (p.1) joyously unrestrained and enthusiastic

knob: (p.1) a way of addressing or referring to a person that you think is very stupid or unpleasant, usually a man

unbeknownst (p.5) unknown

Santé: (p.6) cheers in French

ladle: (p.6) deep-bowled long-handled spoon

demise: (p.9) death

demeanour: conduct, outward behaviour

parse: (p.12) examine in a minute way, analyze critically

amble off: (p.14) saunter

tacitly: (p.15) expressed without words or speech

a Non-Disclosure Agreement (p.22)

### Act 2

squint: (p.24) squinting out the window

gobsmacked: (p.24) astounded, overwhelmed with wonder, shock, surprise

actuator: (p.25) a device that causes a machine or device to open

riposte: (p.29) quick clever reply to an insult or criticism

copter: (p.29) helicopter

taking its toll: (p.30) have a serious effect, cause harm or damage

maudlin: (p.31) self-pityingly or tearfully sentimental

gush over (someone or something): (p.32) to rush or flow over something in an uncontrolled manner

baton: (p.32) a thin stick passed from one runner to another in a relay race

clever clogs (p.33) a person who is irritatingly and ostentatiously knowledgeable or intelligent (a person who is clever in a way that is annoying) British informal and disapproving)

(Bobbi uses the term “clever cogs” and SiSi corrects him “Clever cogs”. The correct phrase).

quaint: (p.33) attractively unusual or old-fashioned.

audacity: (p.37) rude or disrespectful behaviour

demeanour (p.37) conduct, outward behaviour  
 tottering: (p.37) shaking  
 knackered: (p.37) exhausted  
 aperture: (p.40) an opening  
 ferocious: (p.41) cruel  
 slugger: (p.45) one that strikes hard (also used as a nickname for a tired or ageing boxer)  
 ladle: (p.46) deep-bowled long-handled spoon  
 modicum: (p.46) small quantity  
 FDA: (p.48) Food and Drug Administration  
 feign: (p.54) pretend  
 euthanasia: (p.56) the act of killing or permitting the death of a hopelessly sick individual in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy (also called assisted suicide or mercy killing).  
 sagely: (p.57) in a wise manner  
 syringe: (p.58) a device used to inject fluids into  
 flail: (p.60) move around energetically in uncontrolled manner

### Act 3:

goner: (p.63) one whose case is hopeless  
 CPR: (p.63) Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (First Aid)  
 guffaw: (p.65) loud hearty laugh  
 remonstrate: (p.69) to present and urge reasons in opposition  
 smirk: (p.71) smile in a smug or condescending way  
 self-deprecating: (p.71) tending or serving to disparage or undervalue oneself  
 anomaly: (p.71) deviation from the common rule  
 Asimov Rules: (p.74) A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the first or second law.  
 palatable: (p.74) pleasant, satisfying  
 longevity: (p.75) long duration of individual life  
 summersault: (p.79) a movement in which a person turns forward in complete revolution  
 dastardly: (p.81) cowardly  
 bluster: (p.82) utter with noisy self-assertiveness