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# Isaac Asimov, the father of modern science-fiction

Isaac Asimov was a Russian American writer and scientist. He is considered one of the most talented writers of science-fiction since he was able to make scientific topics understandable and interesting. He was born in 1920 in Petrovichi, then part of the Soviet Union, but moved to New York City together with his family in 1923. Isaac was a brilliant student and got interested in science reading science-fiction magazines, which his father sold in his candy store. He began to write essays, academic texts and short stories during the years spent at the high school and later, at the age of nineteen, he graduated with a bachelor's<sup>1</sup> degree in Chemistry at the Columbia University.

His ability in mixing literature fiction and scientific truth granted him an enormous success. His literary production is very broad<sup>2</sup> and includes the famous 'Foundation' series (*Foundation*, *Foundation and Empire*, and *Second Foundation*), initially published in a magazine in the 1940s, and based on the future of robotics.

Other important works concerning robotics are *The Bicentennial Man* (1976) and *I Robot* (1940s), a collection of nine short stories focusing on the interaction between robots and men and the almost prophetic moral which should govern their relationship. The stories told in *I Robot* are based on Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, which should rule the behaviour of robots in order to prevent them from harming<sup>3</sup> people. The Laws state:

- 1 a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm;
- 2 a robot must obey orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law;
- 3 a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

In 1966 Isaac Asimov was awarded the Hugo Award by the World Science Fiction Society. He died in New York City in 1992.

### GLOSSARY

- 1 first university degree
- 2 wide
- 3 injuring

## ACTIVITIES

- 1 Do you think the Three Laws of Robotics have a value in contemporary society? Think about robotics today and discuss in class.
- 2 Choose a short story from *I Robot*, read it and fill in the form.

Author	Isaac Asimov
Genre	Science-fiction
Title	
Date of publication	
Main theme	
Main character/s	
Setting (time and location)	
Plot	
What did you like?	
What didn't you like?	
Would you suggest the reading? Why/Why not?	