

Name: _____

Set at the intersection of the near future and the reimagined past, explore a world in which every human appetite can be indulged without consequence.

Westworld Is a Park Without Limits

Westworld is an exclusive theme park where those who can afford a ticket can live without limits. Partners Arnold Weber and Robert Ford created lifelike robots (hosts) that pass for humans. The hosts allow guests to live out their fantasies (without harming humans) in the park.

No matter how illicit the fantasy may be, there are no consequences for the park's guests, allowing for any wish to be indulged. *Westworld* -- which is based on the 1973 Michael Crichton movie of the same name -- features an all-star cast that includes Oscar winner Anthony Hopkins and Golden Globe winner Ed Harris.

At first glance, *Westworld* is just another show about robots run amok—a simple remake of the 1973 *Westworld* movie, a new *Terminator*, or at best a twenty-first-century *I, Robot*. It appears to be solely interested in *Frankenstein*-style questions about people creating technology that no-one can control, and in *Blade-Runner*-style questions about artificial life forms evolving into creatures like us, with as much—or as little—autonomy, self-understanding, and feeling as we have. If you look a little closer, though, you find all kinds of other philosophical questions in play, and you find them being explored with impressive seriousness and subtlety. At the level of philosophical reflection, this is golden-age television at its very best.¹

Pre-Viewing Discussion

Is there anything particularly valuable about humanity? Are we right to strive for the continuation of the human species, or should we just let ourselves go extinct? What, if anything, is worth saving? Storytellers used to ask this question by spinning yarns about immortal beings, like the gods of Olympus; now we've got robots ("hosts") to help us think it through.

Questions/Notes

1. Dolores is questioned. This questioning will continue as voiceover throughout the episode. Who is she?
2. As we are introduced to the park, can you tell who is "real/human" and who is a host/robot? Why or why not?
3. Write down three things that strike (resonate) with you about the control room.

¹ <https://www.philosophytalk.org/blog/philosophy-westworld>

4. The name of the saloon is Mariposa (butterfly in Spanish). Why do you think this is so?

Before discussing with the class as a whole, take five minutes to write down your thoughts/reactions to what you have seen so far.

5.

6. Regarding the final compound scene where they are questioning Dolores and her father: Interpret the quotes. Why Shakespeare?

“Hell is empty and all the devils are here.” (*The Tempest* 1.2)

“When we are born, we cry that we are come/To this great stage of fools” (*King Lear* 4.6)

“By my mechanical and dirty hand” (*Henry IV* 5.5)

“I shall have such revenges on you both/That all the world shall—I will do such things--/What they are yet I know not, but they shall be/The terrors of the earth.” (*King Lear* 2.4)

“These violent delights have violent ends” (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.6)

Class Discussion

I never understood why they paired some of you off. It seems cruel. Then I realized winning doesn't mean anything unless someone else loses. That means you're here to be the loser.

The Man in Black

You know what this means? It means that we're done, that this is as good as we're gonna get. It also means that you must indulge me the occasional mistake.

Dr Ford

*“We can't define consciousness because consciousness does not exist. Humans fancy that there's something special about the way we perceive the world, and yet we live in loops as tight and as closed as the hosts do, seldom questioning our choices, content, for the most part, to be told what to do next.”—Dr. Robert Ford, *Westworld**

Extra Credit: Notice the music?