

# CATCH ME IF I FALL

By Barry Jonsberg

**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Ages 10-14 years old **UPPER PRIMARY AND LOWER SECONDARY**

**GENRE:** Fiction

**THEMES:** Family, love (parenting, sibling, traditional ideas, challenges), ethics (climate change, technology, artificial intelligence, sustainability)

**CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:**

- **English:** Literature, literacy and language
- **Humanities and Social Sciences:** Inquiry and skills
- **Cross-curriculum priority:** Sustainability

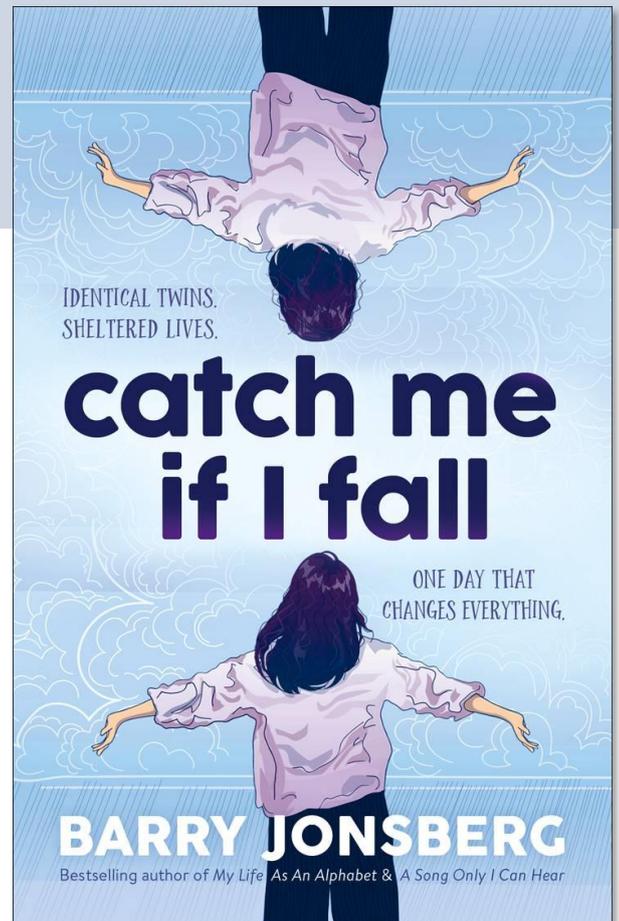
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# INTRODUCTION

This novel is suitable for students aged between 10 and 14 and will expand their understanding of global warming and food security. It will also highlight ethical issues about computer technology and its uses; particularly artificial intelligence.

## STORY SUMMARY

Set in a dystopian Australian future, twins Ashleigh and Aiden Delatour discover things about their world beyond the safety of sheltered existence and opulent home. When they start attending a new school, the world as they know it is shattered as they confront the realities of a struggling planet and the resulting conflicts between vastly differing socio-economic levels. Ultimately, we discover one of the twins has transcended physicality to become... something more than human.

## BEFORE READING *CATCH ME IF I FALL*

Prepare students for the topics below. How much (or how little) time you spend on each can be tailored to your students. It may be best to read this novel as a class to avoid some students reading ahead and spoiling the 'twist' for others.

**Dystopia:** If necessary, explain what a dystopia is. Students may be familiar with films and novels such as *1984*, *Gattaca*, *The Hunger Games*, *Minority Report*, etc. **\*Avoid talking about AI in detail until students have discovered the twist for themselves.**

**Food Security/Insecurity:** This is particularly topical in the era of Covid – many people are establishing food gardens for the first time. Both articles below are excellent catalysts for discussion:

[Coronavirus Gardening Boom Overwhelms Seed Suppliers in New Zealand and Australia](#) (*The Guardian* online, April 2020)

[The Return of the World War Victory Garden](#) (ABC News online, March 2020)

Students can consider: why are people reacting in these ways? Do students have personal experiences of gardens being planted for food? What are their families planting?

Have students work in pairs – half the class to research articles that say Australia has excellent food security and the other half sourcing articles that suggest otherwise. Here are some articles to get them started:

[Australia is one of the most food secure nations in the world, despite droughts and coronavirus pandemic](#) (ABC News article considers environmental factors, April 2020)

[Food Insecurity in Australia](#) (Mccrindle.com blog considers socio-economic factors referencing the Foodbank Hunger Report 2017)

Bring students together to prepare a debate on the topic using the evidence they have found.

# CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

## ENGLISH

### LITERATURE

The range of characters in *Catch me if I Fall* is readily recognisable. Students can understand and explain how combinations of words and images in texts are used to represent particular groups in society, and how texts position readers in relation to those groups.

1. The opening chapter is a flashback that becomes more resonant as the novel progresses. Have students write their initial impressions of Ashleigh, Aiden and their mother, using quotes to justify their answers. Have them think about their routines at home – are there specific things they/their parents do?
2. The first dinkus is on page 12 – why do you think the publisher has used webs to separate sections of text? What are the connotations of a web?
3. Having read to page 123, have students write a short prediction of what they think will happen when Aiden returns to the park on the next afternoon, complete with dialogue.
4. Chapter 11 features Xena. What do we find out about her character? How is it conveyed to readers?
5. What does Ashleigh learn about the world outside hers from Xena? What does Xena mean when she says ‘poverty killed’ her brother?
6. Aiden is hospitalised once more (page 168). Have students write their own account of what they think is wrong with him.
7. Having read page 174, discuss who might have already spotted that Aiden is AI – and why. Explore students’ reactions to this revelation (see related assessment at the end of this section).
8. Look at Chapter 16 in detail – following on from the discussion about reader positioning – how are readers positioned to will the success of Ashleigh’s plan to help Aiden escape the clinic?
9. On page 243, Ashleigh experiences the camaraderie of Xena’s community. Have students discuss in pairs how different this is to anything she has experienced. The author has characterised the community as warm and functional – how has he achieved this?
10. In chapter 19, readers learn of Aiden’s burial. The affair seems extremely sad and readers share that sadness – what details has the author included to position readers here?
11. At the end of the novel, we discover Aiden has transcended his body and will live forever. What do students think about this ending?

### LITERACY

Students can analyse and evaluate the ways that text structures and language features vary according to the purpose of the text. They can experiment with text structures and language features to refine and clarify ideas to improve the effectiveness of students’ own texts.

1. Read to page 35. Aiden is covering for Ashleigh about their foray into ‘the outside’. Have students write a stream of consciousness, detailing what might be going through Ashleigh’s thoughts before she responds. Have them write about a time when they didn’t do the right thing.

2. Having read chapter 5, discuss Mr Meredith's allegorical story about the spider and how it correlates exactly to Ashleigh's position. Can students think of any other ways Mr Meredith could have communicated his point?
3. Read to page 83. How does the author create pace and tension in his description of Ashleigh's kayak accident? Look at specific literary techniques in this section (personification, simile, metaphor and alliteration) and discuss their effect. Look at sentence length and consider how it contributes to pace. Have students think about a time when they may have hurt themselves and describe it using the techniques they have identified in this section.
4. On page 222, Aiden asks his 'mother': 'am I alive and did you love me'? Have students discuss why this question is so poignant. Ask them to write his mother's thoughts at this point as they imagine them to be.

## LANGUAGE

Students can recognise that vocabulary choices contribute to the specificity, abstraction and style of texts. In addition, they can identify and evaluate examples of how rhetorical devices reveal the dark or serious aspects of a topic in ways that cause laughter or amusement.

1. Have students examine Aiden's tone in the exchange between him and his mother (pages 150-152). Describe the tone – any word that can be used to describe the human voice – how has the author created it?
2. Readers are tricked into thinking what Ashleigh's parents are thinking in Chapter 15 when Ashleigh visits Aiden in the clinic and then told the truth in Chapter 16. Have students describe how the trick makes them feel. You might discuss how it foregrounds the positioning of readers by authors and our willingness to 'suspend our disbelief' while reading.
3. On page 245, consider Ashleigh's assumption that others would value the same things she does. Have students describe, in their own words, why money is useless in Xena's world.

### ASSESSMENT: CHOOSE ONE QUESTION

- Answer this question in essay format: How does Barry Jonsberg manipulate readers to assume the character of Aiden is human while still giving clues throughout that he may not be?
- Build a diorama of Ashleigh and Aiden's home, accompanied by the descriptions from the novel you have used/extrapolated from.
- Look at climate change from a factual perspective and present your findings to the class as an oral presentation with graphs/statistics etc.
- Invent an original dystopian setting and write a detailed description of it.
- Produce a detailed report on an AI creature you would like to invent. What does it do? How could it be useful to humans? Provide diagrams and specifications for your prototype.
- Write an additional chapter to the novel set 10 years after the ending.

# HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

## INQUIRY AND SKILLS

Students pose questions to investigate people, events, places and issues. They examine information to identify different points of view and distinguish facts from opinions and draw simple conclusions based on analysis of information and data.

1. On page 15, Ashleigh's friend Charlotte asserts that Ashleigh and Aiden must be fraternal, rather than identical twins – have students work in pairs to research this – is Charlotte correct?
2. Read to page 35. Aiden is covering for Ashleigh about their foray into 'the outside'. Have students write a stream of consciousness, detailing what might be going through Ashleigh's thoughts before she responds. Have them write about a time when they didn't do the right thing.
3. On page 93, Ashleigh watches her father clean the 'solar sail' that protects their home from extreme UV. Have students draw an impression of what they think this looks like. Though the notion of the sail in this context is fictional, solar sails are actually used in space flight – more here: [Solar Sail Demonstrator \('Sunjammer'\)](#) (from NASA.com)
4. Ashleigh and Aiden receive an AI dog for their birthday (pages 99-103). To avoid plot-spoiling, give students a brief explanation of what Artificial Intelligence is – you can use more detailed resources after reading (see notes on AI below). Discuss why pets aren't allowed in this world.
5. Charlotte gets the twins a hologram app for their tablets. Look at some holograms on Google and find out how to make them with students using old CD cases and a glue gun here: [How To Make Hologram Projector In 2 Minutes](#) (from YouTube)
6. On pages 110-112, Aiden ponders whether it's possible to love a machine and uses their dog Zorro as an example. Discuss with students the gadgets they 'love' and examine different types of love – as the word is an abstract noun, it can connote different things for different people.

Aiden also talks about Turing and students can learn about him here: [How Alan Turing Invented the Computer Age](#) (from ScientificAmerican blog)

Though Aiden also mentions John Searle's Chinese Room experiment, leave until after reading to avoid plot-spoiling.

7. Aiden attempts to justify stealing from his parents (pages 136-7). Are students persuaded by his justification? Why or why not?

Use the blackline master at the end of these notes – students can put their reasons why they'd support Aiden on one side and reasons why they wouldn't support him on the other. When students have completed this, discuss their views and collate on the white/smartboard.

8. On pages 163-4, we find out the extent of climate change during Mr Meredith's Heads or Tails game. You can recap the novel at this point by asking a series of true/false questions about it and having students play the game.

A virtual coin-tosser can be found here: [Flip-a-coin](#)

9. Read on to page 196 before exploring AI further with students. Refer to Worksheet 2: Evolution of Artificial Intelligence and view the clips listed below.

Consider 'Pandora's Box' in Greek mythology and suggest how it might relate to technology: [The Myth of Pandora's Box](#) (5m)

View this fascinating YouTube Originals episode hosted by Robert Downey Jr explaining AI: [How Far is Too Far – The Age of A.I.](#) (35m)

This TED talk presented by Hugh Herr can be compelling viewing for an older age group (especially when juxtaposed with the YouTube Originals episode on The Age of A.I.): [How we'll become cyborgs and extend human potential](#) (15m)

Finally, consider this BBC Studios presentation where Marcus Du Sautoy tries to find out whether a computer really can understand a new language: [The Chinese Room Experiment – The Hunt for AI](#) (4m)

*The argument and thought-experiment now generally known as the Chinese Room Argument was first published in a 1980 article by American philosopher John Searle. It has become one of the best-known arguments in recent philosophy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*

10. There is an interesting discussion thread between academics about whether AI can escape human control here:

[Can the development of artificial intelligence and robotics escape the human control?](#) (researchgate.net, February 2019)

## SUSTAINABILITY

### FUTURES

The sustainability of ecological, social and economic systems is achieved through informed individual and community action that values local and global equity and fairness across generations into the future. Actions for a more sustainable future reflect values of care, respect and responsibility, and require us to explore and understand environments. Sustainable futures result from actions designed to preserve and/or restore the quality and uniqueness of environments.

1. At the beginning of Chapter 9 (page 115), Mr Meredith mentions the ‘Great European Famine of ‘32’. He means 2032.

Consider the list in this link and divide students into groups to research and record one particular famine on a large poster, then compile a timeline of them for classroom display: [Terrible Famines in History](#)

2. When Ashleigh goes with Xena to Xena’s community (page 231) she is stunned that the people there eat meat, as she and others of the ruling class don’t. Discuss why this might be. These articles may help:

[10 ways vegetarianism can help save the planet](#) (*The Guardian* online, July 2010)

[Is a vegetarian diet really more environmentally friendly than eating meat?](#) (*The Conversation* online, January 2017)

3. On page 235, Ashleigh watches as a pig is killed. Discuss our reactions to this – should we only eat meat and fish that we have caught and killed ourselves? Why or why not? Would we still eat animals if we had to face killing them to do so? Think too about the names of meat – pig becomes ‘ham’ and ‘bacon’ – how does this help disguise our eating habits and make them more palatable (pun intended)?

# AUTHOR BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barry Jonsberg's YA novels, *The Whole Business with Kiffo and the Pitbull* and *It's Not All About YOU, Calma!* were shortlisted for the CBCA awards. *It's Not All About YOU, Calma!* also won the Adelaide Festival Award for Children's Literature and *Dreamrider* was shortlisted in the NSW Premier's Awards. *Being Here* won the QLD Premier's YA Book Award and was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Award. *My Life as an Alphabet* won the Gold Inky, the Children's Peace Literature Award, the Territory Read, Children's Literature/YA Award and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award and was shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, the CBCA awards, the WA Premier's Book Awards and the Adelaide Festival Awards. It was also made into an award-winning film, *H is for Happiness* by the makers of *Red Dog*. *A Song Only I Can Hear* won the Best Young Adult Fiction, Indie Book Awards, was a Notable book in the CBCA Awards, Older Readers and won the YA Award in the Chief Minister's NT Book Awards.

Barry lives in Darwin. His books have been published in the USA, the UK, France, Poland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Italy, Slovenia, Brazil, Turkey, China and Korea.

## IN THE WORDS OF THE AUTHOR

“This book came about like all of my books come about – from a small idea. There is an old saying; a brother or a sister should be there to catch the other if he or she should fall. Sounds good. Sounds sensible. But what if one sibling's only reason for existence is to do exactly that? What kind of a relationship would those kids have?

“It turned out that Ashleigh and Aiden took me into the future and into some strange and fascinating subjects. As a result, I learned a huge amount about artificial intelligence. I'm now both scared and excited in equal measure...”

– Barry Jonsberg

## ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

Anita Jonsberg lives in Darwin with her husband Barry and Blue Heeler Zorro and loves teaching English to Years 10, 11 and 12.

## CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

*We are Legion (We are Bob)* by Dennis E. Taylor (2016)

*A Closed and Common Orbit* by Becky Chambers (2016)

*Robopocalypse* by Daniel H. Wilson (2002)

*All Systems Red* by Martha Wells (2017)

### **OTHER NOVELS FOR OLDER TEENAGERS BY BARRY JONSBURG**

*Game Theory*

*Pandora Jones (BK 1) Admission*

*Pandora Jones (BK 2) Deception*

*Pandora Jones (BK 3) Reckoning*

*My Life as an Alphabet*

*Being Here*

*Cassie*

*Ironbark*

*Dreamrider*

*It's Not All About You, Calma!*

*The Whole Business with Kiffo and the Pitbull*

## **ONLINE LINKS IN FULL** (in order of appearance in the notes)

Coronavirus Gardening Boom Overwhelms Seed Suppliers in New Zealand and Australia (*The Guardian* online, April 2020): <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/08/coronavirus-gardening-boom-overwhelms-seed-suppliers-in-new-zealand-and-australia>

The Return of the World War Victory Garden (ABC News online, March 2020): <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-25/the-return-of-the-world-war-victory-garden/12085190>

Australia is one of the most food secure nations in the world, despite droughts and coronavirus pandemic (ABC News article considers environmental factors, April 2020): <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-17/australia-food-secure-despite-drought-coronavirus/12155222>

Food Insecurity in Australia (from Mccrindle.com blog): <https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blogarchive/food-insecurity-in-australia/>

Solar Sail Demonstrator ('Sunjammer') (from NASA.com): [https://www.nasa.gov/mission\\_pages/tdm/solarsail/index.html](https://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/tdm/solarsail/index.html)

How To Make Hologram Projector In 2 Minutes (from YouTube): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzsJ5QKASyk&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzsJ5QKASyk&feature=emb_logo)

How Alan Turing Invented the Computer Age (from ScientificAmerican blog): <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/how-alan-turing-invented-the-computer-age/>

Flip-a-coin\_ (virtual coin-tosser): <https://commentpicker.com/flip-a-coin.php>

The Myth of Pandora's Box (from YouTube): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXmHA-XySmk&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXmHA-XySmk&feature=emb_logo)

How Far is Too Far – The Age of A.I. (YouTube Originals):  
<https://www.youtube.com/embed/UwsrzCVZAb8?feature=oembed>

How we'll become cyborgs and extend human potential (from a TED talk):  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLk8Pm\\_XBJE&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLk8Pm_XBJE&feature=emb_logo)

The Chinese Room Experiment – The Hunt for AI (from BBC Studios):  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0MD4sRHjIM&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0MD4sRHjIM&feature=emb_logo)

Can the development of artificial intelligence and robotics escape the human control? (from researchgate.net, February 2019):  
[https://www.researchgate.net/post/Can\\_the\\_development\\_of\\_artificial\\_intelligence\\_and\\_robotics\\_escape\\_the\\_human\\_control](https://www.researchgate.net/post/Can_the_development_of_artificial_intelligence_and_robotics_escape_the_human_control)

Terrible Famines in History (from listverse.com): <https://listverse.com/2013/04/10/10-terrible-famines-in-history/>

10 ways vegetarianism can help save the planet (*The Guardian* online, July 2010):  
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/jul/18/vegetarianism-save-planet-environment>

Is a vegetarian diet really more environmentally friendly than eating meat? (*The Conversation* online, January 2017): <https://theconversation.com/is-a-vegetarian-diet-really-more-environmentally-friendly-than-eating-meat-71596>

## WORKSHEETS

See Black Line Master and handout overleaf

## WORKSHEET 1: WEIGHING UP SUPPORT FOR AIDEN

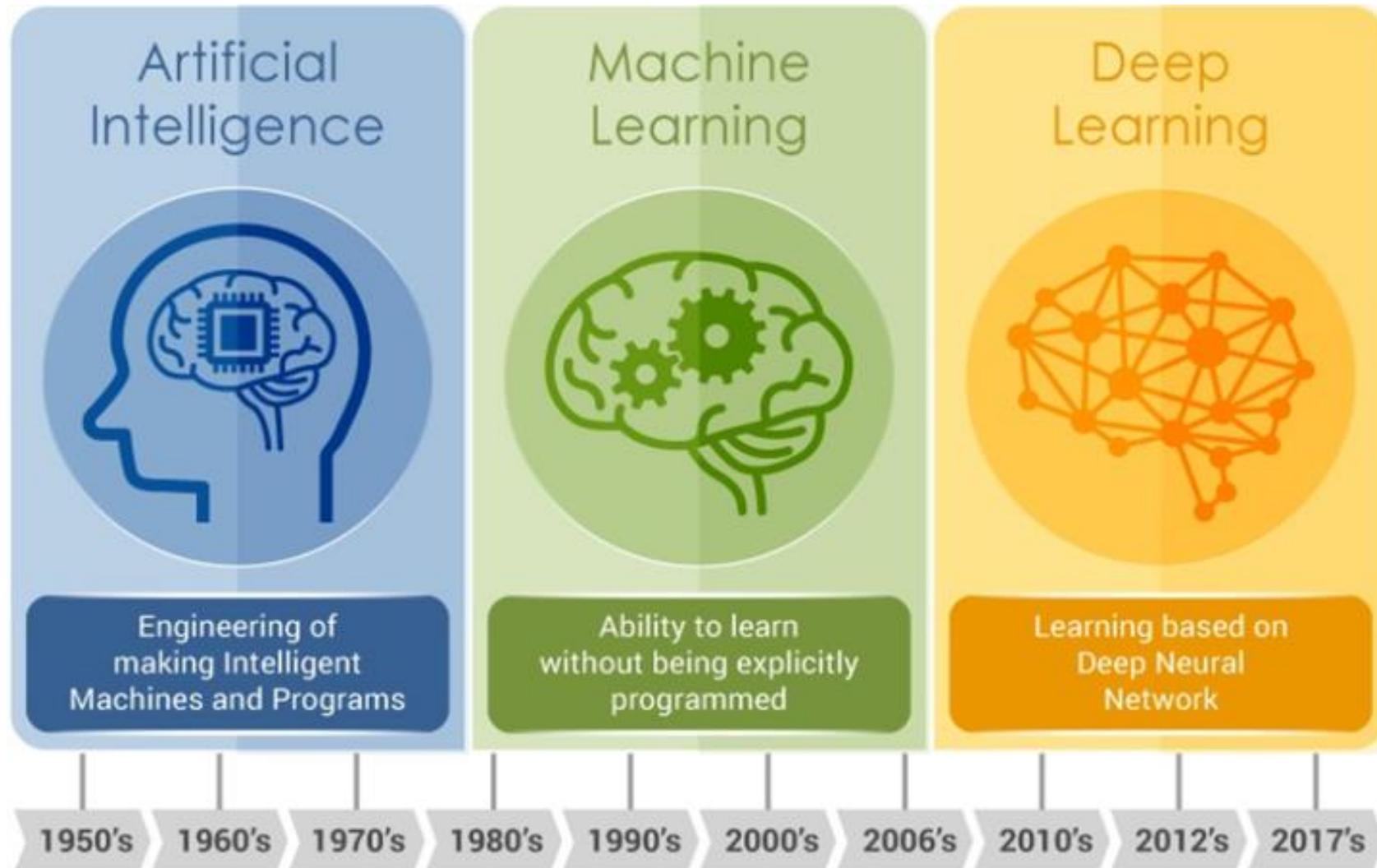
On pages 136-7, Aiden attempts to justify stealing from his parents. Are you persuaded by his justification? Why or why not? List the reasons why you support Aiden on one side of the scale below, and reasons why you wouldn't support him on the other.

**FOR**

**AGAINST**



## WORKSHEET 2: EVOLUTION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



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