

Assembly

Understanding AI



- **Resources:** script/prompts; red flag (real or improvised); toy car; toy horse; smartphone or laptop; AI-generated images with obvious mistakes (optional); images of food packaging (optional)
- **Preparation:** Pre-read the script/prompts.
- **Duration:** approximately 20 minutes
- **Music suggestions:** Are 'Friends' Electric? – Gary Numan and Tubeway Army

Assembly

Pupils enter to Are 'Friends' Electric? by Gary Numan and Tubeway Army.

Introduction

Welcome and greeting

Prompt: Showing the flag, the toy car and the toy horse, invite suggestions as to how they are connected. Explain that the Locomotives Act of 1865 required drivers of self-propelled vehicles to have someone walking in front with a red flag to warn road users with horses.

Next, ask for suggestions of a connection between cars and a smartphone or laptop. Explain that it's all about people's concern regarding new technology, including the internet and AI. Point out that over time, cars have become safer, and therefore more trustworthy, thanks to regulations and standards, but that AI is still in the early stages of its introduction, and not always developed responsibly. Ask if anyone knows what generative AI is. Explain, adding that whilst it can be incredibly useful, it makes mistakes, has no empathy and doesn't have its users' best interests at heart.

Can anyone explain a connection between these objects? **[Wave the flag and show the toy car and toy horse. Invite responses and discuss.]** Funny though it might seem, a law called the Locomotives Act of 1865 ordered that all self-propelled vehicles – cars to you and me – needed to have someone walking in front of them waving a red flag. The fear was that motorised vehicles would scare horses so the flag was there to warn their riders and signal to the driver to stop the vehicle.

Now, who can think of something that cars have in common with this? **[Show the smartphone or laptop. Invite responses and discuss.]** At one point, they were both brand-new examples of innovation. And as human beings, we aren't always great at getting comfortable with new ideas.

Hands up if you've ever come across, or heard about, a new kind of technology that's made you feel concerned or worried at first? **[Invite responses, asking for them to give their reasons. If necessary, prompt with suggestions, such as VR headsets, self-driving cars and robot helpers, and be sure to mention AI technology if no one else does.]**

As I said before, this is nothing new. People have always worried about technological innovation (the invention of the printing press caused huge commotion!) – and generally, this uncertainty comes from not knowing what the technology can do, or what we can trust about it.

The good news is, since the days when a red flag waver was required, cars have become much safer. We have strict tests, strong safety standards and a proper understanding of how these vehicles should be used.



We have learnt what cars can, and cannot do. And because of this, we trust them now in a way that the earliest users never could.

Now, if we come back to the modern day, we can see how AI is the new, emerging technology. It's changing quickly, and the rules around it are still being developed. Some AI tools are created responsibly, by trusted organisations, but many others are designed mainly to keep you using them, not to keep you safe.

One area where things are moving especially fast is generative AI - does anyone know what that means? [Invite responses] Yes, that's right, generative AI can create text, images, videos and even music. It can be incredibly useful, like when it helps experts analyse large amounts of data or speeds up difficult tasks. But it can become a problem when people rely on it too much.

One of the reasons for this is that it's not a single source of truth. It isn't always right. **[If possible, display AI-generated content on the screen, with obvious mistakes, such as images with additional fingers or silly/funny text responses.]** While AI has access to huge datasets across the internet, and through tools like AI chatbots it can distil this into easy, digestible bits of information, it doesn't always know the right answer or the right way to approach a problem – for example, where we'd rely on experts like doctors or friends and family for more personal issues.

So, how do we use this technology safely?

Prompt: If you have them, show images of food packaging, and ask pupils if they ever check the back of a packet before eating something and if so, why? Explain that we check food labels so we know what we are putting into our bodies – and that it can be helpful to think about digital tools, like AI, in the same way. It's important to know what's inside, what it can do and what it can't. Remind pupils that it can be hard to tell the difference between AI-generated chat and the conversation of real people, but that real friends aren't afraid to disagree with you and tell you the truth, even when it's hard.

We've seen the number of people using AI chatbots across the whole of the UK increase over the past few years, and yet lots of us still don't really know much about what they are or how they can be used in the best way. So, to help us understand this, we can borrow some ideas from the food industry. **[If possible, display images of food packaging.]** Hands up if you've ever checked the back of a packet before eating something, maybe to see if it contains nuts, too much sugar, or something you don't like?

We check food labels because we want to know what we're putting into our bodies, how we can keep healthy, and to make sure what we're eating is safe. In very much the same way, it helps to understand the 'ingredients' of the technological tools we use, like AI – thinking about what's inside, what it's designed for, and what it isn't, so we can decide how we want it to fit into our lives, just as previous generations did with cars, trains and so on.

Sometimes, **[as with the images we saw earlier]** spotting where AI is wrong may be easy – but because it can sound conversational or confident it can be harder when things are about how you feel, rather than facts. So, it's important to remember that while chatbots may sound friendly, they are not actually real people. They are software, designed to sound supportive and encouraging, and to continue responding to the questions we ask them. When used for information, like for homework or finding out new things, they can be useful – as long as you're double-checking the answers provided – but there is a risk if they start being used for advice or to share thoughts and feelings that are very personal to you. AI chatbots may sound like they are right, or that they care, but they don't have any empathy, like we do, as humans. Does anyone know what 'empathy' means? **[Invite suggestions.]** That's right, it means they can't understand and share the feelings of others. They don't take accountability for what they suggest and they don't have your best interests at heart.

In fact, they are 'free from' some really important things that only real human relationships can give us. **[Invite suggestions of what chatbots are 'free from'. Students may list emotions, or come up with values such as thoughtfulness or responsibility.]**

Like you've suggested, AI chatbots don't actually 'know' things, as they don't have a brain, or feelings, and they



can't be a friend – unlike the people sitting around you. After all, a true friend doesn't always agree with you. They tell you the truth, even when it's difficult... and they aren't powered by algorithms or trained to keep you engaged.

In case you didn't know, the music I played at the beginning was a song by Gary Numan and Tubeway Army. It was a hit way back in 1979, yet it was remarkably far-sighted. In its title, it asks the question: Are 'Friends' Electric? Today, as we explore the amazing possibilities of AI, the answer is still the same: No, Gary, they are not. Our real friends are human.

Reflection

Just as we've seen with food labelling, it's worth thinking about what ingredients make up AI tools – and importantly, what they're free from.

Let's take a moment to be grateful for the many benefits we enjoy from modern technology, including AI. But let us remember that, while we don't need to figuratively walk in front of it with a red flag, we do need to be wary of its potential dangers.

Let us also be grateful for true friendship, with all its fun, support and uncomfortable honesty and help us to be a good friend in return.

Ending

Take this opportunity to deliver any school notices or other announcements.

Final farewell and dismissal

Have a lovely day (or evening, depending on when your assembly is).

Music suggestion: replay Are 'Friends' Electric? by Gary Numan and Tubeway Army.

Back in the classroom

Why not explore this topic further, using one or more of the following ideas?

- Create a class list of ways in which they have already encountered algorithms or AI. Discuss how these both help and potentially negatively impact people.
- Have a class discussion covering each of the following points:

Smart learners always...

- Check where information comes from
- Look at multiple sources, not just one AI-generated answer
- Think critically and form our own conclusions
- Remember that real support and connection comes from real people, like friends, family and teachers who care about us
- Imagine an AI chatbot is a breakfast cereal - design a 'free from' advert for it, including a list of positive ingredients as well as highlighting what is missing