



ABOUT YOU

Answer the questions and talk about your ideas.

- 1 How many questions do you think you ask in a typical day?
- 2 What are the questions about? Who do you ask?
- 3 What do you do when you want to get information about something?
- 4 Can you think of any questions that are impossible to answer?

Science fiction stories are often about other planets, worlds and strange **aliens**. Science fiction writers imagine amazing places and ideas. This is the beginning of a story called 'The Answerer'.

- 1 As you read the text, try to imagine what Answerer looks like.

Ask a Foolish Question (1953)

Robert Sheckley

Answerer was built to last as long as was necessary – which was quite long, as some groups understand time, and not long at all, according to others. As to size, Answerer was large to some and small to others. He was sometimes

- 5 **viewed** as hard to understand although some believed that he was really very simple. Answerer knew what he was. And the most important thing – he was The Answerer. He Knew.

The group that built him did it to help less sophisticated groups, and **departed** in a unique way. Where they went

- 10 only Answerer knows. Because Answerer knows everything. Upon his planet, travelling in a circle around his sun, Answerer sat. Within him were the Answers. He knew the nature of things, and why things are as they are, and what they are, and what it all means. Answerer could answer
- 15 anything, as long as it was a **legitimate** question. And he wanted to! So he waited for **creatures** to come and ask. 'We're going to find The Answerer,' said Morran, a young **physicist**.

- 20 Lingman, a biologist and an old man, **nodded** at his partner. Together they had followed the stories about The Answerer across the universe. The stories of ancient



humans who knew the answer to all things, and who had built Answerer and departed.

- 25 'Think of it,' Morran said. 'The answer to everything!' As a physicist, Morran had many questions to ask Answerer.

'Yes,' Lingman said. He had two questions.

What is life?

What is death?

GLOSSARY

aliens	creatures from another planet
viewed	seen
departed	left a place
legitimate	correct
creatures	things that live but are not plants
physicist	a person who studies physics
nodded	moved head up and down as a way of agreeing
humans	men, women and children

2 Read the text again and answer the questions.

- 1 What is strange about how different groups saw Answerer?

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- 2 What do we learn about the group that built Answerer?

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- 3 What kind of question is Answerer unable to answer?

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- 4 What kind of questions do you think the physicist will ask Answerer?

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VOCABULARY

3 Match the beginnings and endings of the sentences.

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 I have a legitimate reason for | A wrote a book. |
| 2 They departed | B as the best player in the world. |
| 3 The physicist | C missing class. |
| 4 He is viewed | D head to show she understood. |
| 5 She nodded her | E at the end of the film. |

4 Choose a word from the box for each description. Sometimes more than one answer is possible.

aliens creatures humans physicists

- 1 They live in the sea.
- 2 They came from Mars.
- 3 They use mathematics in their work.
- 4 They don't live on the moon.
- 5 Some people say they don't exist.

WRITING

- 5 Write ten questions you would like to ask Answerer. Remember, these must be *legitimate* questions. Subjects you could ask about include your future, the future of humans, your country, your school, sports, money, etc.

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SPEAKING

- 6 Work in small groups. Look at the questions you wrote in the Writing activity. Choose one person to be Answerer. The others ask this student one question each. When everyone has asked a question, talk about Answerer's best answer. Then choose another student to be Answerer and repeat the activity.