

When automation works

A 50-60 minute lesson using only Chapter One of *The Last Surgeon*. No answer key is included.

Students examine a future in which AI-powered robotic surgery has improved measured outcomes while the last human surgeon loses his practice, professional identity, and place in the institution.



CENTRAL QUESTION When machines outperform even highly trained professionals, what happens to human expertise, identity, and purpose?

TIME	TEACHER MOVE	STUDENT TASK
0-5	Display the central question. Ask students to name a profession they believe will be difficult to automate and explain why.	Write a two-sentence prediction.
5-12	Give one sentence of context: David Halpern is a surgeon near the end of his career in a largely automated hospital.	Read or review Chapter One. Mark one image of absence and one detail showing that the system works.
12-22	Ask pairs to separate facts about the technology from facts about insurers, institutions, markets, and David.	Complete the evidence sort on page 2.
22-35	Close-read the waiting room, malpractice notice, risk comparison, and final line.	Support one interpretation with two details.
35-48	Run a four-corner discussion: progress, loss, both, or insufficient evidence.	Choose a position, hear one challenge, and revise or defend.
48-55	Return to the opening prediction.	Complete the exit ticket.

Learning goals

- Identify details that show the system functioning effectively.
- Explain what work gives David besides income.
- Distinguish machine performance from surrounding institutional choices.
- Build a claim using textual evidence.

Materials

- Chapter One: thelastsurgeon.org/sample
 - Student handout on page 2
 - Optional classroom slides: thelastsurgeon.org/educators
- Best fit: high school, college, medical or health-professions education.

Content note: Occasional strong language; discussion of suicide and job-related despair; illness, death, surgery, and medical injury; and themes of economic collapse and job loss. Recommended for upper high school, college, and adult learners. Educators should review the text for their own setting.

Evidence sort and exit ticket

Record what Chapter One actually shows before deciding what the story says about AI or progress.

TEXTUAL DETAIL	WHAT IT SHOWS ABOUT TECHNOLOGY	WHAT IT SHOWS ABOUT PEOPLE OR INSTITUTIONS
The clinic and waiting room		
The malpractice notice		
Patient cost and insurance		
The photograph of the former team		
The chapter's final line		

Discussion

1. Which details make the hospital feel efficient? Which make it feel empty?

2. Has anyone explicitly forbidden David from working? Why does that distinction matter?

3. What has David lost besides income?
4. Who benefits from the system described in the chapter? Who bears its costs?

5. Does Chapter One depict progress, harm, or both? What evidence would make you reconsider?

EXIT TICKET

In 75-100 words, answer: What is the most important human cost in Chapter One, and who or what causes it? Use one specific detail.

YOUR CLAIM
TEXTUAL DETAIL
HOW THE DETAIL SUPPORTS YOUR CLAIM

Free Chapter One: thelastsurgeon.org/sample Educator resources: thelastsurgeon.org/educators