

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

A New Work World



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- Post Reprint and Discussion Questions: “Hire today, gone tomorrow”
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Think Like a Reporter | Vary the Lede

A fire wiped out their Christmas tree farm

Joe McNally and Anne Benoit fled their home here through a gantlet of flames, speeding away with one dog, three cats and a black box labeled “EVAC.”

Left behind were McNally’s wallet, Benoit’s wedding ring and one of the last Christmas tree farms in Butte County.

Ten thousand trees.

Ten thousand living rooms.

Ten thousand Christmas mornings.

All gone in the inferno.

The Camp Fire destroyed this town and killed at least 86 people last month, one of the worst wildfires in U.S. history. Many of the things it stole will not be replaced, including a local landmark, Mountain View Christmas Tree Farm.

McNally, 71, and Benoit, 70, said they are too old to replant and start over, and so their scorched-earth farm joins hundreds of others that have closed in recent years, most of which were felled by economic forces, retiring proprietors and America’s affinity for fake trees. ...

— Damian Paletta
in Paradise, Calif.
December 23, 2018

Dairy farms are dying off. They’re taking a way of life with them.

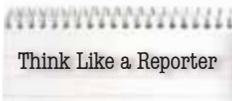
After 40 years of dairy farming, I sold my herd of cows this summer. The herd had been in my family since 1904; I know all 45 cows by name. I couldn’t find anyone who wanted to take over our farm — who would? Dairy farming is little more than hard work and possible economic suicide.

A grass-based organic dairy farm bought my cows. I couldn’t watch them go. In June, I milked them for the last time, left the barn and let the truckers load them. A cop-out on my part? Perhaps, but being able to remember them as I last saw them, in my barn, chewing their cud and waiting for pasture, is all I have left.

My retirement was mostly voluntary. Premature, but there is some solace in having a choice. Unlike many dairy farmers, I didn’t retire bankrupt. But for my wife and me, having to sell our herd was a sign — of the economic death not just of rural America but also of a way of life. It is nothing short of heartbreaking to walk through our barn and know that those stalls will remain empty. ...

— Jim Goodman
December 23, 2018

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 Think Like a Reporter

Think Like a Reporter | Vary the Lede *continued*

Job openings — and 19 million applicants

NEW DELHI Anil Gujjar arrived in India's capital from a small village in the northwestern state of Rajasthan carrying nothing except a backpack and hopes of finding a good job.

The odds were not in his favor. In February, India's railways system announced a national recruitment drive for the most menial positions in its hierarchy — helper, porter, cleaner, gateman, track maintainer, assistant switchman.

It attracted 19 million applicants for 63,000 vacancies.

Gujjar, the son of a farmer and the first person in his family to attend college, was one of them. At the test center in Delhi where he took a mandatory exam in November, he looked around warily at hundreds of young men like him. Nearly all were college students or graduates. Some even had a master's degree.

The railways recruitment effort is a potent symbol of India's employment conundrum. The country is one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world, but it is not generating enough jobs — let alone good jobs — for the increasingly educated young people entering the labor force.

By 2021, the number of people in India between the ages of 15 and 34 is expected to reach 480 million. They have higher levels of literacy and are staying in school longer than any previous generation of Indians. The youth surge represents an opportunity for this country of 1.3 billion, economists say, but only if such young people can find productive work. ...

— Joanna Slater
January 5, 2019

Want dinner at George Mason? A robot can deliver it.

The little white robot on wheels began its journey outside Blaze Pizza.

Hanging a quick right, the machine rolled past groups of hurried students, over sidewalk cracks and twigs, down a ramp, up a hill, and across a two-lane street — pausing briefly to “look” for cars.

Fifteen minutes after departing, the robot arrived outside Commonwealth Hall, a freshman dorm on the north side of the George Mason University campus, where Shamor Williams was waiting. The hungry 19-year-old has never ordered lunch from a robot before, but the Internet technology major operated like a pro. Casually opening the device's lid with his smartphone, he removed a 10-inch cheese pizza, pausing to reflect upon his novel encounter with a semiautonomous machine only when asked.

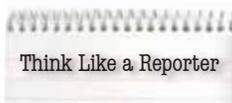
“It's technology. It's really simple,” he said, shrugging matter-of-factly as a 68-year-old professor wide-eyed and smiling, stopped to marvel a few feet away.

“Have a nice day!” the robot exclaimed before rolling away.

It's hard to say how the sudden appearance of a fleet of robots on a college campus may have been received five or 10 years ago. But in 2019 — when robots are piloting vehicles, tending bars, baking bread and prowling grocery stores — the arrival of 25 igloo cooler-size delivery robots elicits curious glances and smiles, but little else, from most students. (To be fair, occasional robot head-patting and photo-taking was witnessed.) ...

— Peter Holley
January 26, 2019

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Think Like a Reporter | Vary the Lede *continued*

Reporters must consider what is the best way to begin their articles. Part of the decision is based on whether they are writing a news story, a feature story or commentary.

The lede (also spelled lead) is the first sentence, paragraph or short portion at the beginning of a piece. The traditional or straight news lede contains 5Ws and H — Who, What, Where, When, Why and How. The lede may also be a variety lede to grab the reader’s attention, to illustrate a difficult concept, establish setting or give background.

1. Write a traditional or straight news lede about something that has happened at your school. This may be a regular event, a decision of administrators or student council, or athletic team or club event(s). First you must decide what the following are. You may not have all 5Ws and H.

Who
What
Where
When
Why
How

Write the straight news lede on your own paper. After writing it, share with a classmate to see if he or she can identify the 5Ws and H that begins your story. Have you remained unbiased giving just the facts?

2. Read the beginnings of four articles from *The Washington Post*. Identify the kind of variety lede that the writer has used in each. Please note: there is a break between the lede of the story and the “nut graf,” the heart of the story, the summary or information that might be in a traditional lede.

a.
b.
c.
d.

3. Annotate the ledes. In particular, look for the following.

a. Specific details
b. Description
c. Anecdote
d. Quotation

4. Select one of the articles and discuss how the above approaches draw you into the story, provide a face to the issue or situation, and/or help you to understand the main news. What do you know before reading the whole article?

5. Using a variety lede, write a lede to a story about something that has happened at your school.

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Hire today, gone tomorrow

BY AMBER PETROVICH

• Originally Published December 27, 2018

You've probably seen me around your office. Maybe we've even had lunch together. I'm the contract (or freelance, contingent, temp, outsourced) worker your company hired on a short-term basis to get that project done or cover the busy period. I'll be here anywhere from two weeks to two years, depending on your state's labor laws.

Have you noticed an increase in temp people such as me? That's because, according to a 2016 study, "94 percent of the net employment growth in the U.S. economy from 2005 to 2015 appears to have occurred in alternative work." In July, the human-capital consultants G. Palmer Associates forecast a 3.4 percent increase in demand for temporary workers for the 2018 third quarter: "The momentum in the temp help employment market continues to be positive due to GDP growth and the expected effects around lower corporate tax rates and less government regulation."

Alternative work. Contingent work. The gig economy. The world in which I live, floating from gig to gig, unable to gain a solid financial footing, is one without pay raises or basic benefits. Yet it also enables



GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

A Lyft logo is attached next to an Uber sticker on a car in Pittsburgh.

companies to increase profits and the Bureau of Labor Statistics to issue rosy reports about the lowest unemployment rate in decades. New hires for temp work count as jobs "added." When you hear about low unemployment rates, it's because people who hold these jobs aren't counted.

I'm not unemployed. I'm underemployed. People like me are everywhere. The American Staffing Association pegs the number at 3 million nationwide in any given week. And if my temp assignment happens to be a longer one, you and I might spend some time getting to know each other. You might hear

me mention how hard I'm trying to find a full-time, permanent job. I'll probably ask you for help, but you, of course, don't have much say in the lengthy, complicated process of requesting additional head count in a large company.

And I get it. A corporation doesn't have any reason to approve those requests. Because, let's face it, I'm a heck of a lot less expensive than a permanent full-timer. I have to be here full-time, but if I'm sick, they don't have to pay me. If I want to take a vacation day, they don't have to pay me. If I have to leave early for a doctor's appointment, they don't have to pay me. Then again, I also don't

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receive health-insurance benefits, so I try to avoid doctors and getting sick in general.

Sorry about this, but if I do get sick, I'll probably show up at work anyway, because I need those hours!

You mentioned you're going to the employee stock ownership plan meeting tomorrow, but I won't be going, because that's another benefit I don't receive. In fact, for more than a decade now, I've struggled to build retirement savings, because my hourly wage barely covers living expenses, in addition to buying independent health insurance. And God forbid I become seriously ill or injured and can't work, or if I become pregnant and need to take (unpaid) maternity leave. I'd go broke.

It's a fun time of year, though, with the holidays here, right? You were all hoping the boss would tell the

department we don't have to work on Monday before Christmas. Three-day week! I'll keep it to myself that I really didn't want that day off because I always stress about any lost wages. Glad I managed to save at least a little money — maybe I'll need to dip into savings.

And I'm not the only one in that position. A 2017 study that the Freelancers Union and Upwork commissioned found that 63 percent of freelancers had to go into their savings once a month. The report also found that 36 percent of the U.S. workforce, or 57.3 million Americans, is freelancing or doing gig work. Upwork's business model is matching freelancers with employers, so of course it celebrates the news. Freelancing redefines stability, the company says. And it's flexible!

It is flexible sometimes. Occasionally

I get freelance work I can do at home. But two-thirds of the freelance off-site jobs I've held averaged an hourly rate of \$10 — not much for Los Angeles, but freelance rates are almost always nonnegotiable.

So here I am, working next to you for the next few months. Don't get me wrong — I love being here. The whole department is full of extremely nice people. That's not always the case. As an outsourced nonemployee, though, I don't have much leverage for complaints. I don't have much leverage for anything. But I do have a "job." Maybe as companies increasingly become dependent on temporary labor, they'll see the wisdom of paying a decent wage and even kicking in a few benefits.

Amber Petrovich is a writer and editor in Los Angeles.

Discussion Questions

1. What is meant by the term "gig economy"?
2. How does the Bureau of Labor Statistics account for these positions?
3. What are the benefits to a business to hire temps and freelancers?
4. What are the benefits to an individual to be a temp worker?
5. What percent of the American workforce does gig work, according to a 2017 study?
6. When might it be advantageous for a company to add some benefits to the gig work package?
7. Explain why you would/would not consider work in the gig economy.

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5

Myths About Fast-Food Work

BY MICHELLE CHEN

• Originally Published April 10, 2015

Since fast-food workers started walking off the job in New York more than two years ago, their campaign has grown into a worldwide movement.

Demanding \$15 per hour and a union, workers in fast food and other low-wage industries have staged strikes, rallies and a media campaign to make their case about the difficulties of minimum-wage work. As the Fight for \$15 movement plans a massive day of action for April 15, here are five myths about fast-food work.

MYTH 1 *Fast-food workers are mostly teenagers working for pocket money.*

Fast food was indeed an adolescent

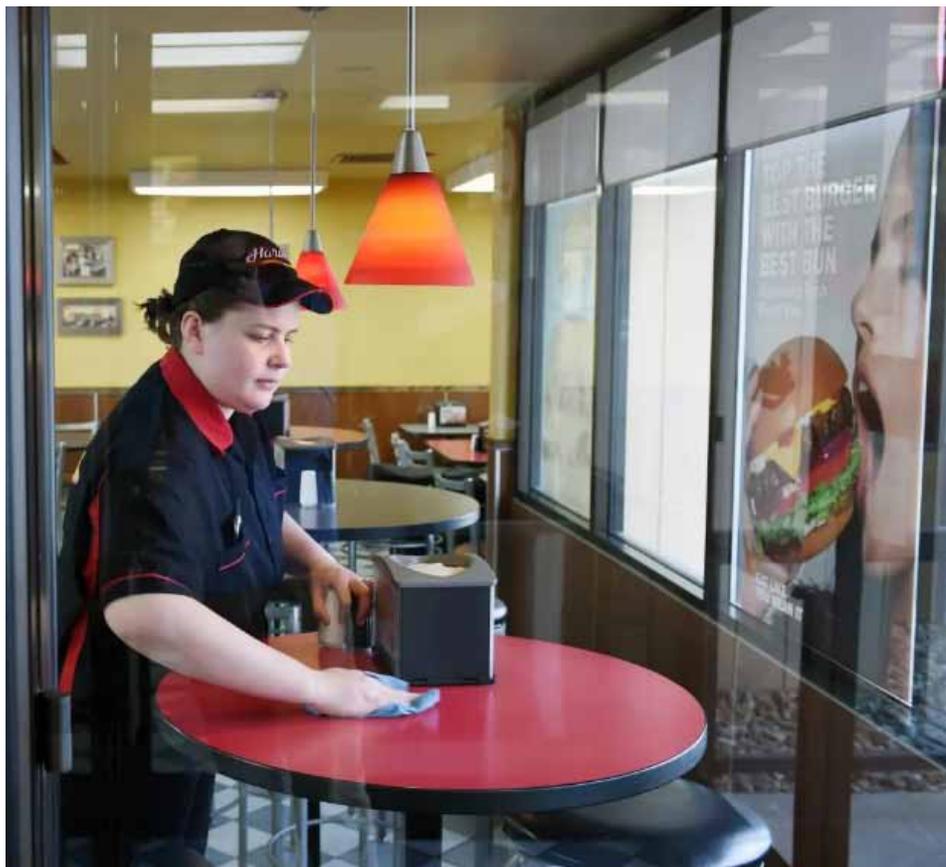
Michelle Chen is a contributor to the Nation and to Dissent magazine's "Belabored" podcast.

gig in the 1950s and 1960s, when the paper hat symbolized the classic short-term, entry-level job. But today, despite arguments that these low-wage jobs are largely filled by “suburban teenagers,” as the Heritage Foundation put it, labor data shows that about 70 percent of the fast-food workforce is at least 20 years old. The typical burger-flipper is an independent adult of about 29, with a high school diploma. Nearly a third have some college experience, and many are single parents raising families on \$9 an hour. In contrast to McDonald’s rather optimistic model budget — which assumes that an employee

lives in a two-income household and need child care or gas or groceries — a large portion of fast-food workers are forced to borrow from friends to cover basic household expenses, or sometimes fall into homelessness.

According to researchers at the University of California at Berkeley, about half of the families of front-line fast-food workers depend on public programs, compared with 25 percent of the American workforce. About 87 percent of fast-food workers lack employer health benefits, compared with 40 percent of the general workforce. And roughly one-fifth of workers’ families are below the poverty line. That adds up to some \$7 billion in welfare payouts each year — essentially enabling fast-food megachains to subsidize ultra-low wages with public benefits.

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MATT MCCLAIN/ THE WASHINGTON POST

Emily Abell works at Hardee's restaurant in Creston, Iowa, in 2018.

MYTH 2 *Employees can work their way up and eventually even own a franchise.*

Burger King's career Web site proclaims: "You'll never be short of opportunities to show what you've got. And if we like what we see, there's no limit to how far you could go here." The New York Restaurant Association boasts that restaurant work "creates an opportunity for people to live the American dream." Under its franchise "success stories," McDonald's features a man who advanced from being a crew member

to owning a franchise in just a few years.

The dream of upward mobility, however, eludes most workers. The National Employment Law Project (NELP) points out that about 90 percent of the fast-food workforce is made up of "front-line workers" such as line cooks and cashiers. About 9 percent are lower-level supervisors, who earn about \$13 an hour. And just 2.2 percent of fast-food jobs are "managerial, professional, and technical occupations," compared with 31 percent of jobs in the U.S.

economy.

As for the notion of working your way up to ownership, NELP reports that 1 percent of the fast-food workforce owns a franchise — a purchase that could require \$750,000 to several million dollars in financial assets. And there's no indication that many of these franchisees actually did "rise through the ranks" to become owners, which requires an amount of capital that might top the lifetime salary of an average kitchen worker.

MYTH 3 *Fast-food companies can't control franchise wages or working conditions.*

McDonald's plan to raise wages at least \$1 over the local minimum wage was announced this month to much fanfare. But the raise applies only to employees of the 1,500 stores McDonald's owns directly. The company contends that as a chain franchisor, it merely licenses its brand to individual franchise operators; is not legally liable as an employer; and thus "does not direct or co-determine the hiring, termination, wages, hours" and other working conditions for all who toil under the golden arches.

But critics say these fast-food chains actually exert powerful oversight over their franchisees by closely tracking their spending and operations. Domino's, one franchisee claims, critiqued how his employees answered the phone; Burger King franchisees sued the chain in 2009, claiming that it was forcing them

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to sell menu items for a loss at \$1. Companies often pressure owner-operators to squeeze down labor costs: According to one employee quoted in the Guardian, “McDonald’s corporate representatives turn up at restaurant where he works five or six times a year, counting the number of cars using the drive-through service, timing sales, making sure staff are preparing food according to McDonald’s specifications.” More so than most fast-food chains, McDonald’s wields financial control over its franchisees and owns the rental real estate of the restaurants.

Former McDonald’s executive Richard Adams has said: “McDonald’s franchisees are pretty compliant. They don’t really organize, they don’t really protest. And if you do, they tell you you’re not a good member of the McFamily. I don’t want to make this seem too Orwellian, but the average franchisee has about six restaurants, and the franchise agreement is for 20 years. You’re probably going to have a renewal coming up. If you’re not a compliant member of the team, you’re probably not going to get that renewal.”

The issue of whether McDonald’s can be labeled a “joint employer” is being litigated in numerous claims of unfair labor practices that workers have filed with the National Labor Relations Board. The NLRB’s general counsel recently deemed McDonald’s a joint employer, and if it is ultimately penalized as such, workers could see a dramatic

expansion in the company’s legal and regulatory obligations.

MYTH 4 *Flipping burgers is an easy job.*

Some people chafe at the idea of “unskilled” fast-food workers meriting a wage more suited to a “high-skilled” job. Not only does this ignore the fact that this work requires skills — from managing inventory to training and supervising other employees — it also disregards the day-to-day challenges workers navigate on the job. According to a slew of complaints filed with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, workers often suffer injuries such as hot-oil burns and are sometimes denied proper medical care. (Some are told to dress wounds with condiments.) Violence is also common at fast-food restaurants; according to a recent survey, roughly one in eight workers reported being assaulted at work in the past year.

Workers have also complained of racial discrimination, sexual harassment and retaliatory punishment by management. More than 40 of the NLRB claims filed against McDonald’s in the past few years alleged illegal firings or penalties because of workers’ engagement in labor activism. Add to all of this the challenge of just getting paid: Subway was found guilty of 17,000 separate wage and hour violations since 2000, and in 2013, Taco Bell was hit with a \$2.5 million settlement in a class-action lawsuit over unpaid overtime.

MYTH 5 *Paying workers \$15 an hour would make burgers prohibitively costly and hurt the industry.*

Some analysts, particularly on the right, have laid out doomsday scenarios of massive economic disruption caused by a sudden doubling of wages in the fast-food industry. The Heritage Foundation argues that raising wages to \$15 an hour could lead to a price spike, shrinking job opportunities, and huge drops in sales and profits.

In reality, any such wage increase would probably be incremental and could be absorbed in large part by lowering the fees collected by parent companies from franchisees. Fast-food workers already enjoy such higher pay in other countries with strong labor regulation and union representation. A Big Mac in New Zealand costs less than one in the United States — \$4.49 vs. \$4.79, according to the *Economist’s* Big Mac index — and it’ll likely be served by a full-time union worker earning about \$12 per hour.

Higher wages might also bring business benefits, in the form of lower turnover and good press. The Michigan-based fast-casual restaurant Moo Cluck Moo offers a \$15 wage alongside premium grass-fed burgers, turning its reputation as a socially responsible employer into a selling point. The market for super-cheap fast food is apparently declining. Consumers just might be hungry for a more conscientious business model.

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ECONOMIC POLICY • ANALYSIS

When the next recession comes, the robots will be ready

For humans, it's a down turn. For machines, it's an opportunity.

BY ANDREW VAN DAM

• Originally Published January 25, 2019

Robots' infiltration of the workforce doesn't happen gradually, at the pace of technology. It happens in surges, when companies are given strong incentives to tackle the difficult task of automation.

Typically, those incentives occur during recessions. Employers slash payrolls going into a downturn and, out of necessity, turn to software or

machinery to take over the tasks once performed by their laid-off workers as business begins to recover.

As uncertainty soars, a shutdown drags on, and consumer confidence sputters, economists increasingly predict a recession this year or next. Whenever this long economic expansion ends, the robots will be ready. The human labor market is tight, with the unemployment rate at 3.9 percent, but there's plenty of slack in the robot labor force.

This next wave of automation won't just be sleek robotic arms on factory

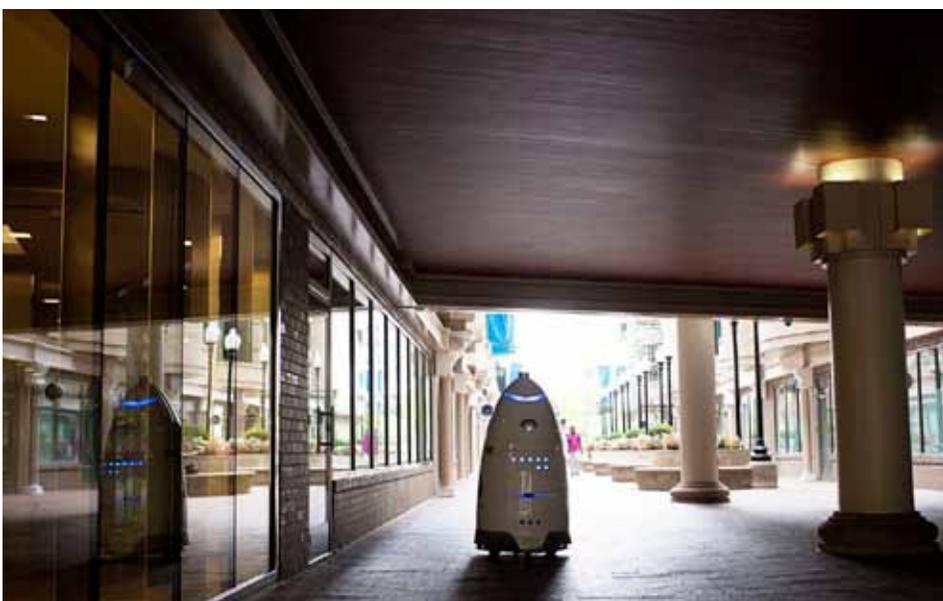
floors. It will be ordering kiosks, self-service apps and software smart enough to perfect schedules and cut down on the workers needed to cover a shift. Employers are already testing these systems. A recession will force them into the mainstream.

A new analysis from Mark Muro, Robert Maxim and Jacob Whiton of the Brookings Institution, a nonpartisan think tank, finds much of the nation will be susceptible to the upheaval caused by automation in coming decades, particularly young people, minorities and Rust Belt workers.

The total number of jobs will rise in the long run, but many workers will be forced to adapt. Robots will continue to roil the long-suffering manufacturing sector, Brookings finds. They will also move into low-skill service jobs such as food services workers once considered too cheap or too difficult to automate.

Economists generally focus on workers performing repetitive tasks, including rote mental or clerical work in an office cubicle and rote manual labor on a factory floor, to measure the influence of technology.

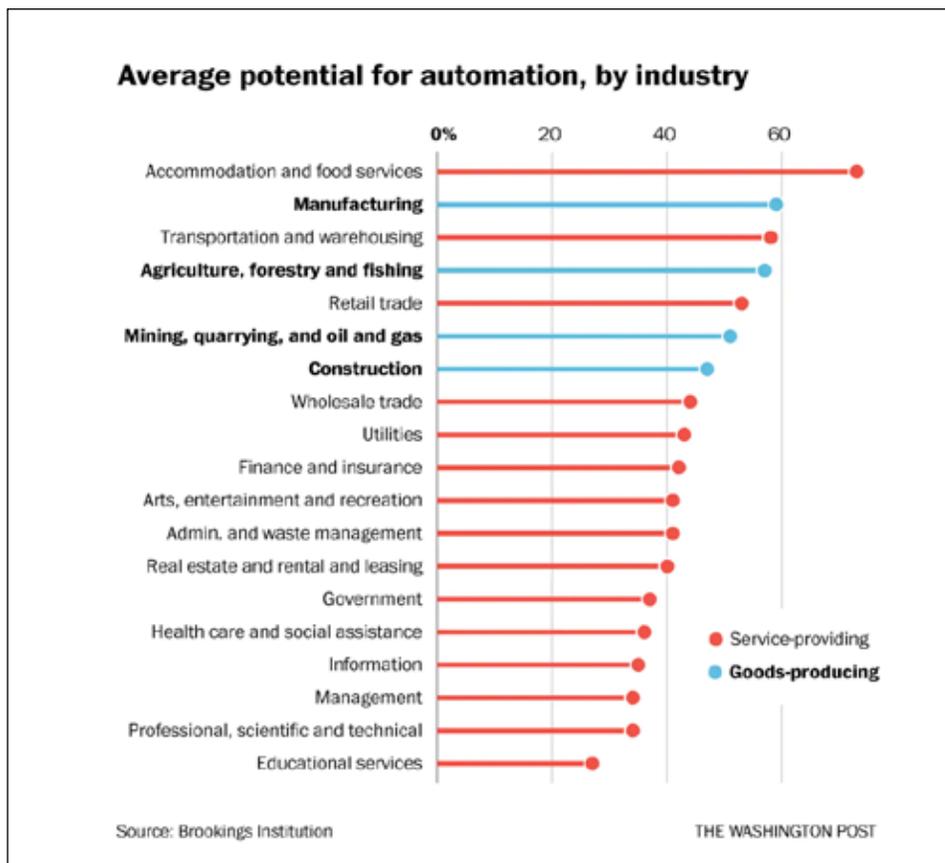
Middle-income work has evaporated in recent decades. Americans are now divided between the high-paid employees who design



MARVIN JOSEPH/THE WASHINGTON POST

A security robot patrols Washington Harbour in 2017. Automation, long a threat to production workers, will soon also transform the work of lower-paid service workers such as security guards

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**Robots are ready**

The economy is near full employment — the point at which everyone who wants a job has one. The unemployment rate has been at or below 4.0 percent for 10 straight months.

But the labor market for robots has room to grow. As wages rise and human help gets pricey, companies have experimented with alternatives.

My colleague Peter Holley has tapped into a deep vein of corporate automation efforts in recent months. Cooler-sized robots deliver food for \$1.99 at George Mason University. Tall, slim robot assistants patrol Giant supermarkets in search of spills and hazards. Walmart planned to install 360 floor-cleaning robot zambonis by the end of January. A start-up called Robomart hopes to start running mobile supermarkets in robotic minivans in the Boston area in partnership with Stop & Shop.

But while many businesses dabble, few have gone all-in — yet.

“While you begin to see more kiosks in Panera in the boom period,” Muro said, “the real urgency may occur for companies if there’s a recession in the next two to three years.”

The big players are lining up. Amazon reportedly plans to add as many as 3,000 cashierless stores by 2021 to augment its cashierless digital storefront. Sam’s Club and what Bloomberg calls a “fleet” of competitors are following suit.

machines, the low-paid workers who sweeps up after it, or the even lower-paid service workers who serves fast-casual sandwiches to the other two.

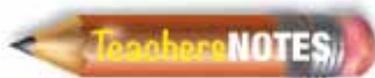
In an upcoming paper from Review of Economics and Statistics, economists Nir Jaimovich of the University of Zurich and Henry Siu of the University of British Columbia found that 88 percent of job loss in routine occupations occurs within 12 months of a recession. In the 1990-1991, 2001 and 2008-2009 recessions, routine jobs accounted for “essentially all” of the jobs lost. They regained almost no ground during the subsequent recoveries.

Firms in cities hit hardest by the Great Recession raised their skill

requirements for new employees and invested more in technology, according to economists Brad Hershbein of the W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research and Lisa Kahn of the University of Rochester.

Their 2018 American Economic Review analysis of almost 100 million online postings collected by Burning Glass Technologies in 2007 and 2010-2015 found strong signs companies were replacing workers who performed routine tasks with a combination of technology and more skilled workers. The effect was especially pronounced for “cognitive” workers such as office clerks, office administrators and salespeople.

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Host a Panel

In addition to preparing students to be good citizens of a democracy, critical thinkers, engaged lifelong learners, teachers are preparing students for the workplace. With skills in the basics of reading, writing and mathematics, schools have added requirements in keyboarding, science, languages and new approaches under the umbrella of STEM. The arts, debate, journalism and media studies are often part of the student's program of studies.

A guest speaker may be brought in for enrichment. A parent, a member of the community, a visiting actor or musician who is performing in your community, or honored guest lecturers or faculty members at a nearby college are all possible invitees.

Here are suggestions for your class to host a panel of three to four experts. Students will learn a great deal from the exchange and from helping to organize and prepare for the event.

1. Decide on a Topic.

Any class could host a panel representing different perspectives on a topic.

- Physical Education students could hear from a college recruiter, a former student who went to college on an athletic scholarship, a collegiate athlete who was injured and could not continue on that career path
- English students could engage with actors, authors, poets and playwrights. These might be professionals who are performing nearby, community theatre companies or students who have achieved recognition. See if the U.S. poet laureate is speaking in your area. Be sure literary-art magazine staffs are invited to attend.
- Science students could learn from staff of science-focused museums, professors and professionals engaged in projects near by or through contracts for special programs. Try to include someone who has spent years on a project, perhaps still waiting for an excavation to provide evidence of settlements.

2. Brainstorm Different Perspectives or Areas of Expertise.

Think of three or four points of view on a topic. For example if you focus on working while a student, your panelists might include

- A student who works after school, on weekends or on every break,
- Someone who knows the labor laws, wages and your communities' opportunities for student employment. This may also include volunteer opportunities.
- A business owner or manager who employs student workers. Ask her to include training, wage differences, tips, benefits and employee out-of-pocket expenses.

3. Brainstorm and Select Three to Four Individuals to Invite as Panelists.

- Confirm date, time and place of the panel. When and where panelists are to arrive. Make sure all administrative paperwork and notification is in place.
- Clarify the purpose of the panel for yourselves and the panelists.
- Confirm who will be the audience, how many students from your class and other teachers' classes.
- Write and send invitations. Be sure to ask for a short bio and if the panelist wants AV, if you have the capability to allow for slides, website connections and videos.

