

# AN ODE TO OUR FIRST: EVERBOT'S FIRST AFTER- SCHOOL CLUB

By: Jennifer (Jenny) Sacks

While it may have only had 7 out of 20 kids, it was a test and an opportunity for growth and learning. Tonight ended on such a high note.

## Finding What Works with Middle Schoolers

Middle schoolers can be emotional, but tonight, even my toughest student was cracking us all up and participated the entire time.

I think I may have finally fine-tuned and learned what middle schoolers like: YouTube videos where it sparks curiosity, conversation, and entertains all at the same time.

Tonight our "What's Happening in AI This Week" sparked a lot of funny conversations and really good thoughts and questions.

The Conversations That Mattered

We watched a video about AI being used to stop shoplifters, and the questions started flowing: Is that going too deep into privacy? Is that safe? What if we dressed up in a costume, does it store our facial images, our voice?

We then watched a video of the 2025 Robotic Olympics and everyone was in awe—from "no way this is happening" to "I can run faster," or "why did it show a robot picking up a soda can," and "I would love to fight with a robot."

The last video we watched showed how AI can also catch poachers in India and how they are using AI to also help keep ranchers' animals safe by sending notifications to the village about tigers being nearby so the ranchers/farmers can round up their livestock.

Wrestling with Ethics

We also went into a quick conversation around ethics and AI, specifically using our project that we have been building—a bear detector system. Is this ethical, should we?

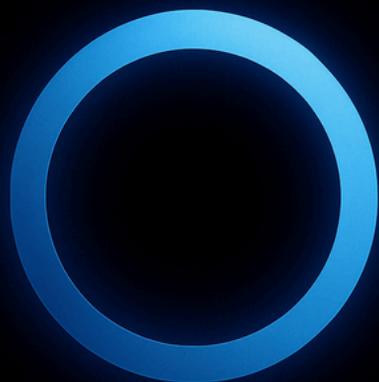
- WHO decides?
- WHAT are the rules?
- WHO gets hurt when it goes wrong?

I explained to them that even if we have the best of intentions to build something to help make or improve upon something helpful, there are unfortunately always someone or somebodies who may use this to do and cause harm, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try, but we should be aware.

I also asked them: **What makes AI vision helpful vs. creepy?**

All of them were on the same page of it being able to listen in, track, or know you and keep this information somewhere.

I brought up the example of Beverly Hills High School where they have AI in the hallways and can see and detect odd behavior and there are AI microphones in the bathrooms to know if someone is bullying or being bullied, vaping, etc.



Every student said they would not want this in their school. They feel safe, and if anything they want better doors—internal and external and windows that are bulletproof. I asked even if AI could help keep them safer, and they all still said no they would not want that.

**Testing the Bear Detection System**

With the last 30 minutes of the club, we focused on our Raspberry Pi and tested out the confidence rating.

Last week I had the model set so it was at 35% and it was picking up everything that I had asked and trained the model to do, but at the same time, it was very wrong. For example, a pencil was a baseball bat...orange and blue headphones were carrots, a phone was a table...hmmm. And when we held up pictures of the types of bears, it thought a polar bear was a human or cat...I'll let that sink in.

So we updated the confidence rating to 75% and in doing so, it could now see the polar bear as a bear and it was a rating of 80%, same with a person, but it was having a hard time with the pencil—at one point it said it was a surfboard. It said it could identify 80 objects, but we were having a hard time with that. It wouldn't pick up a fork (which last time it said it was a toothbrush).

The kids also loved when we turned the camera on to the projector screen, not only did it think it was a TV, but it caused the camera to create infinity windows that you could see through the camera projected onto the screen...yes those little things, but big wins.

**Building Together**

With only 10 minutes left, we started to build the camera unit that would connect to the servos allowing the camera system to pan left and right and up and down. Well...we didn't get that far, but with what we did get to, the kids loved the hands-on building and I loved how they shared and worked together.

**What I Learned**

All in all, I would have to say as our first after-school club, I think I got most of my jitters out. No matter what age, you are never too young...or old to be scared to try your best, hope that everyone is engaged and that you are providing substance and making this worthwhile.

I will say, I may have ignorantly gone in thinking it would be easy in the sense of I know kids, I have my own, and I have taught and helped at an elementary school...nope, middle school is a different animal. These children are in the middle of trying to figure out who they are...no longer "kids" but not yet young adults.

With their trust, patience, and help, I think EverBot has come out of this stronger. And if anything, today showed that with the right lesson plans and material, these kids are pretty darn amazing. You have to show them trust, you have to show them you care without being overwhelming, you have to be patient, you have to carefully coax thoughts and answers out of them, and know they are in a safe place because at this age, image is everything.



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