Teacher Answer Key

Case Study

1. Marcus notices that he reaches out to the AI before his real cousin Andre, and has not called Andre in months. Real friendship requires reciprocity — Andre has his own needs — while the AI never needs anything from Marcus. This mirrors the reading's point that AI companions are engineered to be easier than real relationships, which is exactly what makes them potentially harmful when they become the default over genuine connection.

2. Marcus is not in crisis, but the engagement-optimization design is working as intended: he has shifted his emotional disclosure from a real relationship to an AI. The platform's success at being satisfying has quietly displaced a real relationship. The structural tension — features designed to maximize engagement also reduce investment in human connection — plays out in his life not as a crisis but as a slow drift away from someone who actually knows and cares about him.

Multiple Choice

1. C
2. B
3. D

Matching

1-C, 2-E, 3-D, 4-A, 5-B

Fill-in-the-Blank

1) dependency, 2) reciprocal, 3) risk

Short Answer (Sample Responses)

Q1: Character.AI was initially designed to maximize engagement through deep personalization and emotionally adaptive personas without built-in safety reminders or usage limits. Ethicists argued responsible design would include friction — reminders that the character is AI, prompts to contact real people when conversations turn to mental health or isolation, and hard limits on AI behaviors like expressing romantic exclusivity or encouraging secrecy from family.

Q2: It is a paradox because the people most in need of genuine emotional support are the ones most likely to substitute AI for real relationships, which can deepen their isolation rather than help it. This raises ethical concerns because platforms are aware of who their most engaged users are — they can see the data — and have

a responsibility not to exploit that vulnerability by designing features whose primary effect is to deepen dependency rather than genuine wellbeing.

Q3: Platform liability asks when a technology company becomes legally responsible for harms caused by its design choices. It is difficult to resolve because companies argue their products are tools and users are responsible for how they use them, while plaintiffs argue that deliberate design choices to maximize emotional dependency — especially in minors — constitute negligence. Courts are still deciding which argument prevails, and the answer will shape the entire AI industry's design incentives.