

Boredom is not a problem to be solved. It's the last privilege of a free mind

- By Gayatri Devi, www.theguardian.com

Lean in to boredom, not your smart phone screen. You'll learn more about yourself and the world around you than you think



Confessing to boredom is confessing to a character-flaw. Popular culture is littered with [advice](#) on how to shake it off: [find like-minded people](#), [take up a hobby](#), find a cause and work for it, [take up an instrument](#), read a book, clean your house And [certainly don't let your kids be bored](#): enroll them in swimming, soccer, dance, church groups – [anything to keep them from assuaging their boredom by gravitating toward sex and drugs](#). To do otherwise is to admit that we're not engaging with the world around us. Or that your cellphone has died.

But boredom is not tragic. Properly understood, boredom helps us understand time, and ourselves. Unlike fun or work, boredom is not about anything; it is our encounter with pure time as form and content. With ads and screens and handheld devices ubiquitous, we don't get to have that experience that much anymore. We should teach the young people to feel comfortable with time.

I live and teach in small-town Pennsylvania, and some of my students from bigger cities tell me that they always go home on Fridays because they are bored here.

You know the best antidote to boredom, I asked them? They looked at me expectantly, smartphones dangling from their hands. Think, I told them. Thinking is the best antidote to boredom. I am not kidding, kids. Thinking is the best antidote to boredom. Tell yourself, I am bored. Think about that. Isn't that interesting? They looked at me incredulously. Thinking is not how they were brought up to handle boredom.

When you're bored, time moves slowly. The German word for "boredom" expresses this: *langeweile*, a compound made of "lange," which means "long," and "weile" meaning "a while". And slow-moving time can feel torturous for people who can't feel peaceful alone with their minds. Learning to do so is why learning to be bored is so crucial. It is a great privilege if you can do this without going to the psychiatrist.

So lean in to boredom, into that intense experience of time untouched by beauty, pleasure, comfort and all other temporal salubrious sensations. Observe it, how your mind responds to boredom, what you feel and think when you get bored. This form of metathinking can help you overcome your boredom, and learn about yourself and the world in the process. If meditating on nothing is too hard at the outset, at the very least you

can imitate William Wordsworth and let that host of golden daffodils flash upon your inward eye: emotions recollected in tranquility – that is, reflection – can fill empty hours while teaching you, slowly, how to sit and just be in the present.

Don't replace boredom with work or fun or habits. Don't pull out a screen at every idle moment. Boredom is the last privilege of a free mind. The currency with which you barter with folks who will sell you their "habit," "fun" or "work" is your clear right to practice judgment, discernment and taste. In other words, always trust when boredom speaks to you. Instead of avoiding it, heed its messages, because they'll keep you true to yourself.

It might be beneficial to think through why something bores you. You will get a whole new angle on things. Hold on to your boredom; you won't notice how quickly time goes by once you start thinking about the things that bore you.

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