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# SCIENCE SAYS YOU MAY BE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT— FOR YOUR CREATIVITY.

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## ore. Bored. Boredom.

Are there any words in the English language duller than these? They're so empty. They're so *nothing*.

Except, according to scientists, boredom actually is *something*—something important. Just like sadness and anger and joy, boredom

is an emotion. It's a feeling that relates to your mood, or the things happening around you, or even the people you're hanging out with. And like all our emotions, boredom has a purpose. That purpose isn't always positive. Then again, neither was the anger you felt when your little brother "borrowed" the popsicle you were saving to eat after dinner, and you wanted to sock him in the nose.

Sometimes, though, boredom can be your friend.

## » GOOD & BORED

OK, boredom might not seem like your friend when you're forced to wait in the doctor's office *forever* with nothing to do. And it might not seem like it when you're at Grandma's house and all she wants to talk about is stuff that happened when Ronald Reagan was president. And it definitely doesn't seem like it when your English Language Arts (ELA) teacher makes you break down sentences into parts of speech. Yeah, you're bored. The question is, what are you going to do about it?

According to psychologists, feeling bored can inspire you to be really creative. They've got the studies to prove it. In one, researchers asked a group of people to copy numbers out of a phone book—BORING! Another group got to skip this monotonous task. Then, both groups had to figure out things to do with two disposable cups. The bored phone-book group found many more cool uses for the cups than the other group. They seemed motivated to push out of their boredom and to think inventively.

Read  
my  
LIPS.

I'm face-  
meltingly  
BORED!

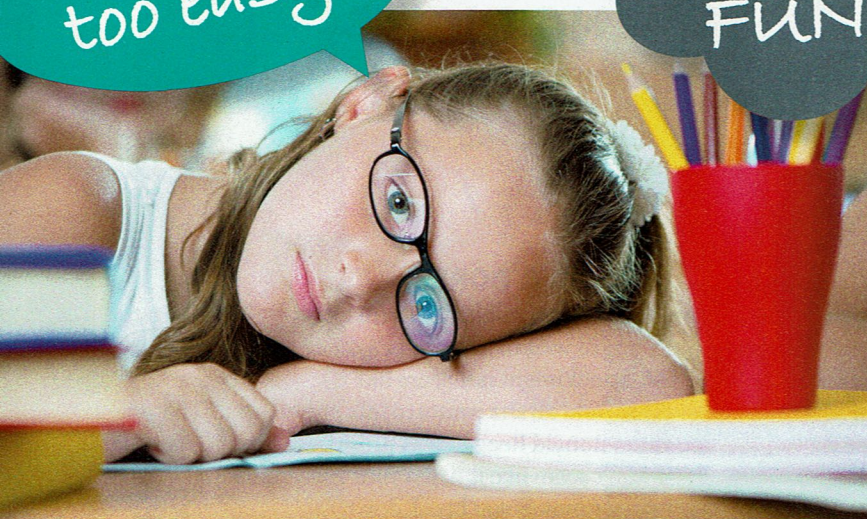
Backseat  
BOREDOM is  
at its MAX!!!





This is too easy!

NOT FUN!!!



Now that you know that boredom can be a gateway to awesomeness, ask yourself what creative thing you could do at the doctor's office instead of complaining about the wait. What questions could you ask Grandma about how things were different when Reagan was president? Could her answers inspire you to create a project about her life? In these situations, you have the power to move beyond your boredom.

## » BORED & STUCK

Unfortunately, not all boring situations are created equal. (See "What Kind of Bored Are You?" on page 13.) Some of the trickiest types happen at school, or places like it. "When you're at home, you can engage with a whole range of activities to get out of being bored," says Anastasiya Lipnevich. She studies boredom in kids as a professor of educational psychology at Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. "But when you're at school, stuck in a lesson that doesn't interest you, you don't have the opportunity to escape."

According to Lipnevich, kids who are bored from being either under- or over-challenged in ELA, or math, or social studies avoid those subjects like the plague. *Forever*. Imagine wanting to be a novelist when you grow up but never developing the reading and writing skills you need to succeed because fourth-grade ELA was so epically boring to you. That would be tragic! So, what's a bored ELA student to do? Lipnevich says you've just got to learn how to cope with your boredom. Sound hopeless? Well, you learned how to cope with your anger instead of punching your brother, didn't you? One way is to figure out why you're bored. Is the work too hard for you? Or too easy? After you figure it out, you might (very nicely and politely) tell your teacher, "This is too easy for me. Can you please give me something else to do?"

Sometimes, boredom catches you by surprise. One night, Lipnevich took her son to a concert. Her son plays the violin, and she was sure he would think the concert was fun.

"But it was really long, and he was getting really bored," she says. "His teacher is always telling him to hold his violin up. So, I started pointing out how the violinists on stage were holding their violins—not just up, but every which way. He got interested in that and his boredom disappeared."

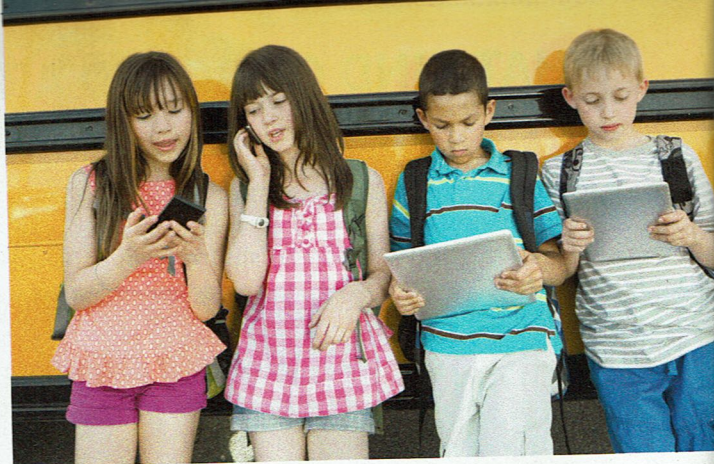
Other times, being distracted from your boredom is necessary for more than getting you through a concert. You may need it to keep you from doing something that's not so good for you. Edward Abramson is a clinical psychologist and author of *Emotional Eating: What You Need to Know Before Starting Another Diet*. He studies how boredom can make people want to eat—even when they're not hungry. He remembers being on a long, boring car trip with two little boys. "One of them kept saying, 'I'm hungry, can we go to McDonald's?'" Abramson says. "To distract him I said, 'Do you have a dog?' I knew he did. Then I asked, 'What's your dog's name? Can he do any tricks?'" Low and behold, as the boy started talking about his dog, his "hunger" went away.

Bored grownups, though, might need to do more than talk about their dogs to distract them from eating. "They have to look at their routines, find situations where they're bored, then change them," says Abramson. A guy who does his (boring) ironing right next to the fridge might have to move his ironing board out to the garage. A woman prepping for a test in a subject that bores her might have to

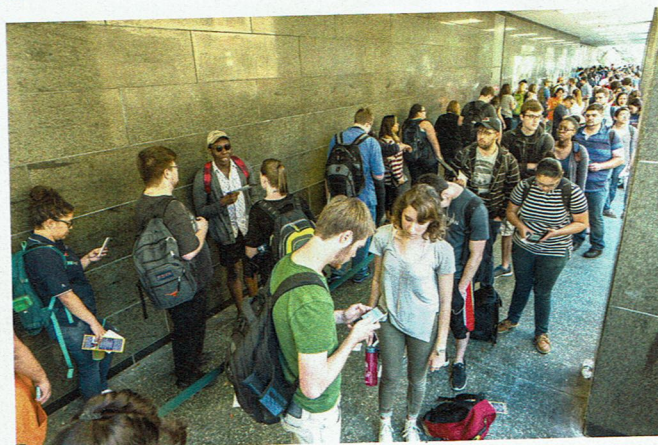
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**“As a society, we are generally over-stimulated”**



*continued from page 12*

study in the library rather than in a diner. A simple change to get you away from your boredom-related habits can have very positive results, Abramson says.

### » Forgetting How to Be Bored

Some scientists are afraid we're forgetting how to be bored, though. They think that's a problem. "As a society, we are generally over-stimulated," says Lipnevich. A lot of that has to do with constantly using technology. Even people who know better can fall into the technology trap. Says Abramson, "I've gotten to the point where whenever I have to stand on line at the supermarket or the bank, the first thing I do is take out my phone."

When you always have a device to look at, listen to music on, and communicate with friends through, you never have a chance to let your mind wander. And Lipnevich thinks that means we might have less tolerance for boredom when we do feel it. Without boredom, what happens to creativity?

In 2015, radio station WNYC aired a weeklong challenge called "Bored and Brilliant" on a show about technology. Every day, thousands of listeners who signed up to play along had to do one thing to detach, just a bit, from their phones.

In the process, participants hoped to feel more creative. One day they had to carry their phones away from their bodies. One day they had to delete their most addictive app. Other days they had to give up taking photos or texting, or make one small observation about the world around them.

For the last day of the challenge, an artist named Nina Katchadourian devised an experiment. She instructed listeners to do the most boring thing imaginable: watch a pot of water boil. When that was accomplished, she told them to build their dream houses using only what was in their wallets. Some listeners made columns out of rolled-up dollar bills. Some made cute little huts out of stacked credit cards. They made footpaths out of coins, and ocean waves outside a "beach house" from receipts folded accordion-style.

Many listeners were impressed with their own tiny-house-building skills. They were also amazed at how hard it was to give up being bored when there was a boredom-zapping device nearby. Even if it meant their precious creativity was at stake!

**Lela Nargi** is a journalist who lives in Brooklyn. When she's bored, she likes to watch people out the window and make up stories about them. Actually, she likes to do that even when she isn't bored!



# WHAT KIND OF BORED ARE YOU?

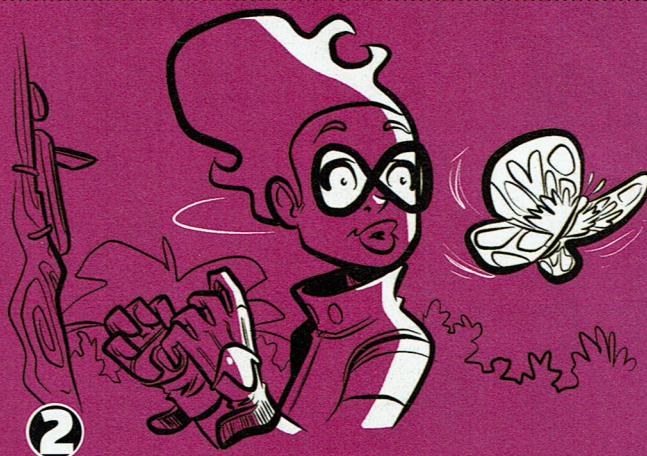
Back in 1986, researchers came up with the boredom proneness scale, or BPS. The point was to tell how likely you are to feel bored. (Next time you're bored, why not take the BPS test for yourself? Search for the quiz online.)

But the BPS team assumed there was only one kind of boredom. In 2013, Anastasiya Lipnevich worked with a team of researchers on a boredom study. They built on earlier research by members of the team to find that there are actually five kinds of boredom. Wow, boredom already seems a lot less boring!

In order of least to most awful, the five kinds of boredom are:



**1 Indifferent boredom**, when you feel relaxed and not really that disturbed by your boredom. Maybe you're just daydreaming, and liking it.



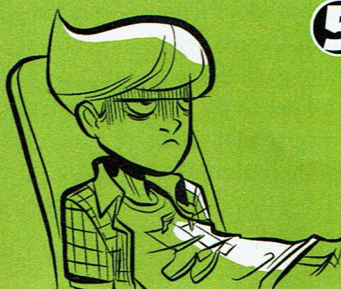
**2 Calibrating boredom**, when you're open to being distracted from your boredom. Think: Lipnevich's son who got interested in a detail at an otherwise boring concert, or Edward Abramson's young friend who passed the time on a road trip by chatting about his dog.



**3 Searching boredom**, when you feel restless and are actively looking for ways not to be bored anymore. This is where you'd ask your teacher for another activity. If another activity isn't available, you might be tempted to secretly read your book under your desk, says Lipnevich.



**4 Reactant boredom**, when you feel really disturbed by your boredom and highly motivated to find something else to do—but not necessarily in a good way. Someone might defy a teacher who won't give another task by sharpening a pencil for 15 minutes instead of working.



**5 Apathetic boredom**, when you are totally disgusted with your boredom but not motivated to change it. Lipnevich says this kind of boredom is sort of like being depressed, or feeling helpless. Kids experiencing apathetic boredom will probably need quite a bit of help from an adult to recognize how they feel and to change it.