

The big idea: should we embrace boredom?

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- How often do you feel bored? What jobs or tasks do you find very boring? Why?
- What do you do when you feel bored? How good are these things at making you feel less bored?

2 Key words

a. Find the words from the wordpool in the article. Then complete the definitions with the words.

a waste of time
adds up to

alone
depressed

electric shock
evidence

experiment
increased

meaningless
psychologists

1. When something _____ a number, it equals a certain amount.
2. _____ is the information that shows something is true or real.
3. A(n) _____ is a test to learn more about something or see how it works.
4. When you feel _____, you feel sad and unhappy, often for a long time.
5. When you are _____, you are without other people.
6. _____ is a phrase that means you spend time doing something that doesn't help you.
7. _____ is when something does not have a clear meaning or purpose.
8. _____ are people who study humans and the way they behave.
9. A(n) _____ is a sudden and painful feeling you get when electricity passes through your body.
10. When something _____, it became bigger in size, shape or number.

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. The number of visitors to Italy _____ last year.
2. We did a simple _____ in science class with water and salt.

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3. Jayden sat _____ at lunch because his friend was not at school.
4. There is no _____ that the man took your bag.
5. Alice said that watching that TV show was _____ – it was boring and nothing happened.
6. Faaz felt _____ after he lost his job, and he just stayed in bed all day.
7. Don't touch that wire! You might get a(n) _____.
8. All the food and drinks for the party _____ more than £200.
9. Some people talk to _____ to help them feel better when they are sad or worried.
10. The play was _____ to me because I didn't understand it at all.

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- 1 In 2014, scientists did an experiment where they asked people to sit alone for 15 minutes. The only thing they could do was press a button that gave them an electric shock. Almost half of the people pressed the button. The experiment showed that “people prefer doing to thinking”, even when the only thing to do is painful.
- 2 Now that we have smartphones, we have something that can stop us feeling bored, even if it's not good for us. We often use our phones just for something to do. This isn't *always* a bad thing. However, smartphones make us feel that we need to use our time well. To sit and do nothing is seen as a waste of time. But when we do nothing, we're often thinking quite hard.
- 3 Psychologists agree that boredom is an important emotion. According to Erin Westgate, a professor of psychology, we become bored when we believe something to be meaningless. But when we are bored, we should realise that we need to do something more interesting. However, if people don't do this, they may find themselves becoming even more bored. This can make them depressed or unhappy.
- 4 There is evidence that shows that people are becoming more bored, and that this is because of smartphones. In a study from 2024, scientists found that the number of students in China and the US who described themselves as bored increased in the years after 2010, when smartphones became popular. We often pick up our phones because we are bored, but that actually makes it worse. One study, for instance, found that people who were bored at work were more likely to use their smartphones – and then felt even more bored.
- 5 The average American spends more than four hours a day on their smartphone and more than seven hours a day in total online. That adds up to 17 years of their adult life. When we are bored, we should try not to pick up our phones. Instead, we should try to talk to family or friends or try something different or new. The people who are happy to be bored, at least for a short time, may actually feel less bored. It could even be the first step towards a more meaningful life.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if the statements are True or False according to information in the article.

1. In the 2014 experiment, people had to sit alone for half an hour. True / False
2. Most of the people in the experiment pressed the electric shock button. True / False
3. According to Professor Erin Westgate, we feel bored when something seems meaningless to us. True / False
4. Using smartphones when we feel bored helps us feel better. True / False
5. American students felt more bored after smartphones became popular in 2010. True / False
6. The average American spends more than seven hours a day using their smartphone. True / False

4 Key language

a. Find the words in bold in the table in the article. Then complete the table with the other word forms.

Verb	Noun	Adjective	Adverb
-	(1) _____	painful	(2) _____
(3) _____	(4) _____	meaningless / meaningful	(5) _____ (6) _____
-	emotion	(7) _____	(8) _____
-	scientists	(9) _____	(10) _____
(11) _____	boredom	(12) _____ / (13) _____	(14) _____

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b. Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets. Use the word forms from the table in the previous activity.

1. My tooth feels very _____, so I think I need to see a dentist. (pain)
2. Can you tell me what this word _____? (meaning)
3. We were so _____ in the history lesson that we fell asleep. (boredom)
4. When Penny lost her dog, she felt very _____. (emotion)
5. A doctor can give you _____ advice for how to stay healthy. (science)

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Think about how much you use your phone. What online activities are useful, and which ones feel like you are wasting your time?
- Would you try a 'digital detox' (e.g. not using your device for a certain number of hours or days per week)? Why or why not?

6 In your own words

a. Work in groups. Follow the instructions to complete a class survey on boredom.

Step 1: Create your questions.

Write 6-8 survey questions using these ideas to help you. Then ask your questions to other groups and make a note of their answers.

- How often do you feel bored during a typical week?
(Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Very often)
- You're waiting for a train but have no phone battery. What do you do?
- Put these activities from most to least boring: *lectures, social media, household chores, waiting in queues.*
- When you feel bored, what's the first thing you reach for? Why?

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- How long can you sit quietly without feeling bored?
- Do you think you get bored more or less easily than your friends? Why?

Step 2: Analyse your data for patterns or interesting findings.

Step 3: Prepare a three-minute presentation. Include details about:

- your research focus and key questions
- the most surprising discovery
- one recommendation based on your findings