

1. ~~Mark your confusion~~ Read and make a variety of comments.
2. ~~Show evidence of active reading~~ Summarize the article in one sentence.
3. ~~Write a 1/2 page response~~ Create a 1/2 page response to the article.

Note: This week's AoW is actually excerpts from two different articles.

Why being a thinker means pocketing your smartphone

Source: Todd Leopold, CNN.com 10.23.13

There's a story about a man who spent his hours daydreaming. He may have been at Ford; he may have been at IBM. He was simply a man who spent his time in his office, feet up on the desk, looking at everything and nothing.

One day, an efficiency expert came by. The efficiency expert had been hired to cut costs and improve operations. He saw the man daydreaming, and he thought certainly this was some dead wood to cast on the pile.

The efficiency expert went to the boss -- Henry Ford or Thomas Watson or some other towering magnate of early 20th-century corporate America -- and offered his recommendations. Among them: Fire the daydreaming man.

The boss refused.

"But, sir," the efficiency expert replied, "every time I walk by his office he's staring into space. As far as I can tell, he does no work."

"That man," the boss replied, "once had an idea that saved this company millions of dollars, and he was sitting in just that position when he had that idea."

The story, of course, is probably apocryphal, but the idea behind it is as current as the latest iPhone app.

Which is: If you want to get any creative thinking done, shut off the damned smartphone and detach, reflect and recharge.

"You can't make headway without thinking about a problem for a long time, in collaboration with smart researchers from different fields, as well as reading a lot," says epidemiologist Caroline Buckee, one of CNN's 10 Thinkers for 2013. "But sometimes that hard work reaches fruition or comes together at a random time once you have let thoughts settle down."

We know this -- as surely as that 20th-century magnate knew it -- and yet we regularly ignore the advice. We surf the Web; we scan news on our phones; we keep our minds digitally occupied in a million ways. When we have a few minutes of down time now, we pull out our mobile devices instead of daydreaming.

It's no wonder Nicholas Carr raised so much interest with his 2010 book "The Shallows," which was an expansion of his Atlantic Monthly cover story, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" Carr's point is that we aren't thinking, we're browsing.

It is hard, some observers admit, to make time for thinking. John Seely Brown, the former head of Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center lab, worries about the generations who have known little but the cyberworld.

"I think kids today are afraid of being bored," he told CNN for a series on creativity. "And that (when you're bored) is when you imagine something."

When it comes to intuition -- which undergirds thinking -- mood makes a difference, too.

In his book, "Thinking, Fast and Slow," Nobel Prize-winning economist Daniel Kahneman mentions an experiment in which subjects were shown three words and were given two seconds to guess if they were linked.

"Putting the participants in a good mood ... more than doubled accuracy," Kahneman writes. Unhappy subjects, on the other hand, made guesses that were no better than random.

This is not to dismiss everything else we use to fill our brains. The Internet is a tool for thinking.

So are meetings, mystery novels, video games and quiz shows, for that matter. And sometimes thinking has to be done on the fly. Impending deadlines, to paraphrase Samuel Johnson's line about the prospects of being hanged, can focus the mind wonderfully.

But perhaps the best tool is time alone, feet up on the desk, staring at the ceiling. Motorola executive and CNN Thinker Regina Dugan may have put it best.

"I find that the quietest times of my life," she says, "speak the loudest."

Have smartphones killed boredom (and is that good)?

Source: Doug Gross, CNN.com 9.26.13

Take a look around today at people in line at Starbucks, on the train platform or waiting for their bags at the airport. Odds are, a huge chunk of them are staring down into a glowing mobile device --

passing time by checking on friends, catching up on texts or e-mail or playing a video game that would have required a PC or home console just a few years ago.

"That's me," said Jeromie Williams, a 36-year-old social media manager and blogger from Montreal. "If I'm on the bus. If I'm waiting in line somewhere ... The other day I was at a restaurant with a friend. He got up two times -- once to smoke a cigarette and once to go to the bathroom. As soon as his ass was off the seat, 'Boom!' iPhone in hand."

Thanks to technology, there's been a recent sea change in how people today kill time. Those dog-eared magazines in your doctor's office are going unread. Your fellow customers in line at the deli counter are being ignored. And simply gazing around at one's surroundings? Forget about it. Between smartphones, tablets and e-readers, we're becoming a society that's ready to kill even a few seconds of boredom with a tap on a touchscreen. Smartphone ownership in the United States, and elsewhere, hit a tipping point in 2012. More people now own a smartphone in the United States -- 45% of adults -- than own a traditional cellphone, according to a survey from the Pew Internet & American Life project.

And 42% of all mobile phone users say they expressly use their phone for entertainment when they're bored. (Presumably, non-entertainment uses like texting and e-mail would jack that number up even higher).

"I do everything with my phone," said Alexandra Reed, 39, a self-employed single mom from Charlotte, North Carolina. "I have five e-mail accounts for different things. I have two phones, one for business and one personal. I use apps -- Mapquest, Google, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google Plus, CNN, ESPN ..."

Is it a boredom killer? Absolutely, she said. "Even when I'm driving, I might have Facebook open," she said. "At a red light the first thing I (do is) just look at my phone. I get a little anxious if I see a notification and don't read it."

Researchers say this all makes sense. Fiddling with our phones, they say, addresses a basic human need to cure boredom by any means necessary.

Christopher Lynn, an anthropology professor at the University of Alabama, compares tapping at smartphones to smoking a cigarette. Both can be "pivots," he says -- things that quickly transfer us from the monotony of everyday life into a world of "unscheduled play."

"Smartphones are like cigarettes are like junk food are like chewing your nails or doodling ...," Lynn wrote in a May essay for the Evolutionary Studies Consortium. "Does the naked space of your own mind and the world around you send you screaming into oblivion when you walk across campus, across a street even? Pull out your smartphone and check your email again -- that car will swerve around you."

With their games, music, videos, social media and texting, smartphones "superstimulate" a desire humans have to play when things get dull, Lynn told CNN in an interview. And he believes that modern society may be making that desire even stronger. "When you're habituated to constant stimulation, when you lack it, you sort of don't know what to do with yourself ...," he said. "When we aren't used to having down time, it results in anxiety. 'Oh my god, I should be doing something.' And we reach for the smartphone. It's our omnipresent relief from that."

So, our phones are brutally efficient at addressing an ancient desire. But is that always a good thing? At Oxford, England's Social Issues Research Centre, researchers fear it is not. In their view, by filling almost every second of down time by peering at our phones we are missing out on the creative and potentially rewarding ways we've dealt with boredom in days past.

"Informational overload from all quarters means that there can often be very little time for personal thought, reflection, or even just 'zoning out,'" researchers there wrote. "With a mobile (phone) that is constantly switched on and a plethora of entertainments available to distract the naked eye, it is understandable that some people find it difficult to actually get bored in that particular fidgety, introspective kind of way."

Williams, the Montreal blogger, admits as much. "One thing that unfortunately I do miss out on is that sort of quiet time where I can think about something I want to write ... where, if I'm bored, I'm flipping open Word and punching something out," he said. "Instead, out comes 'Infinity Blade II' and I'm killing titans. Before smartphones came out, you had that down time where you sit on the bus and your mind just kind of wanders and you think of these amazing things. You get out that old thing called pen and paper and you jot it down."

Possible Response Questions:

- Are you afraid of being bored? Reflect.
- "I find the quietest times of my life speak the loudest." Comment/reflect on this quotation.
- Comment on the comparison made between cell phones and cigarettes.
- Chose a passage and reflect.