

In the summertime

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The morning I was told to write something for the newspaper, Mungo Jerry snuck into my subconscious. Well, not exactly. It would be more accurate to say the song “ In the Summertime” played as I tried to wake up. It was successful. For all those unfamiliar with the work of the 1970’s British band, Mungo Jerry was a one-hit wonder whose name referenced a T.

S. Elliot poem. The group mainly churned out bubblegum pop records like their one-and-only hit “ In The Summertime.” I do not mean for this to sound condescending because, to be honest, I find “ In The Summertime” a work of pure genius. The song deals mostly with chasing women, but it is hard while listening to the raspy voice of Ray Dorset and happy-go-lucky melody of drums and banjos not to imagine barbecues, beaches, and bliss. Even in the coldest and darkest of winter days, if you listen to it you can’t help but feel your skin hot with summer sun.

Not unlike the season itself, the song enchants the listener with heart-warming poetry. Here lies the root of Mungo Jerry’s genius. The anthemic lyrics strike directly to the core of what summer represents for youth: opportunity, freedom, and romance. “ In the summertime, when the weather is high/You can chase right up and touch the sky.” Why is it, then, that summer has this effect on us? Sure it’s warm, but there is majesty in the snowy vacancy of winter, the crispness of fall, and the shimmering optimism of spring; so, why summer? The simplest answer is school, or rather, the lack thereof. The horror teenagers associate with the grind of the school year is alleviated come June.

Are we really that immature, though? Well, maybe. But do we truly love summer just because there is no school? Also, maybe. It would be overly dramatic and foolish to suggest our love of summer is not centered around the absence of school because it obviously is. However, it would also be nearsighted to assume we as students are so one-dimensional that freedom from school is the only reason. Rather, infatuation with summer lies deeper than not having to slave over essays or study ruthlessly for AP tests. Maybe, just maybe, we love summer for what it symbolically represents - what Mungo Jerry was trying to convey.

Summer is a time to “chase right up and touch the sky” and why? Because we can. Because we’re not tied down by limitations or guidelines we have to stick by. We do not become different people, though. Instead of metamorphosing into a new creature, we allow different versions of ourselves to seep through. They lie dormant all year waiting to be exposed by the summer sun. In addition, partially due to our freedom, summer is an exploratory time.

We watch new movies, listen to new music, meet new people, and try new things. Often this means going away from home. In travel we discover things we either did not know of, or did, but could not fully grasp. I know countless kids who come back from a trip or program with a completely new outlook on life. Even though getting away from home is clearly analogous to transformation, it is not the rule by which metamorphosis is governed. Even homebound, we change.

New York City in the summertime is not New York City of the school year. With time on our hands, we are able to explore perhaps the greatest city in the world and look at it not as a stressed high schooler but an appreciative spectator. Now, before this sounds too melodramatic, I want to affirm that I do not believe that in three months our entire personality is turned on its head. That is unrealistic. Summer is our opportunity to be different because of its length. Summer is a flickering, fleeting mirage.

Three sun-soaked months and then the leaves shed. This is the reason for our drastic alterations. If we find we do not like who we have become, we revert to our old selves. If we find we have grown, matured, altered in a direction we like, we let these parts of ourselves continue to grow in the fall. The length of summer also explains its romance. We know how short it is and yet are surprised when it comes to a close each year.

I'm going to make an unfortunate metaphor: Summer and sunsets have a lot in common. Sunsets fill us with anticipation, leave us waiting for their arrival for what seems like ages. Then, they happen. Bright and beautiful, they spread smiles across our faces, even against our will. It is hard not to smile when we see violent purples and shocking reds burst across a deep orange sky and a glowing orb.

But, then, in a matter of minutes, the sunset is over. The sun sets, lighting the clouds as it disappears because it surely doesn't want to say good-bye. You can almost still see it, if you close your eyes. The sunset is burned into our retinas. The only evidence of its mere existence is a dark bluish hue that

remains, stained across the bottom of the sky. Sounds like summer, doesn't it? All of this is what makes June, July and August so special.

We can explore different versions of ourselves. We can discover what lies under our nose all year round but we never pay attention to. We can have wonderful, intense relationships; both of friendship and romance. We have opportunities - more specifically, an ambiguous limitless well of human experiences from which we can extract what we want. It does not follow the rigidity that school must impose. In the summer we are jellyfish (not to create another unfortunate metaphor).

Well, maybe. Isn't it grand, though, the lack of shape? It should be. After all, summer is nothing more than a break - in particular, a break from the certainty of fall, winter, and spring. Concrete answers dominate our time at school. If summer represents a break from reality, it also represents a break from solutions; therefore, we can be an undefined, previously unexplored version of ourselves.

Maybe Mungo Jerry was right - the absence of school is not the real reason we love summer. Maybe our love of summer lies with how unsure the season is. The ambiguous beauty in forgetting what the date is. The glory of long sun-drenched days. The mysterious romance of sunsets.

The lack of worries, definitions, and labels. Maybe. Then again, what do they know? They never had to deal with the SAT's.