

# Life as we make it

[Art & Culture](#), [Music](#)



My favorite book is called "The Perks of Being a Wallflower". It is a short book, barely over 200 pages but I have yet to read a better 200 pages. One of my favorite scenes in the book occurs in Part One where Charlie, the main character and narrator, is driving back from the homecoming dance in a pickup truck with his friends Sam and Patrick. They put in a mix tape, roll down the windows, and speed through a tunnel leading downtown. Inside the tunnel, the sound of the wind is sucked up and replaced with the melody of the song on the mix tape. The scene and all of Part One ends with the sentence "And in that moment, I swear we were infinite" (Chbosky 39). In that moment, Charlie felt "infinite", he felt free from all boundaries and limitations of life. Throughout the book it becomes clearer that Charlie suffers from depression but in this moment, he is freed from the negative thoughts that haunt his mind. Like Charlie, we often feel bound by many aspects of life; this is only natural. Our problems may not be as severe as Charlie's, but many of us often feel the stresses and pressures of everyday bearing down on us. As humans first of all, and as part of the American society second of all, we are often venturing to accomplish what is next before enjoying what we have just achieved. This is because we are in a constant rush to finish things before time finishes us. "I swear we were infinite". Infinite. Endless. What would you do if you had the ability to feel infinite? Moreover, what would you do if time suddenly did the impossible and became infinite? Since the very beginning, our world has been motivated by competition and competition is influenced by time. In the prehistoric era, cavemen and other hunter-gatherers competed to find nourishment. For hundreds of years European explorers challenged one

another to be the first to settle certain lands. In the mid 20th century America battled the USSR to try and send the first man into space. Whether it is a contest between people, countries, animals, etc., competition is ever present and we are always looking to cross the finish line before our opponent (or opponents) has a chance to pass us. Clearly it is human nature to always look ahead to the next aspect of life. However, constantly looking ahead could actually be holding us back more than pushing us forward. Maybe this is why, in regards to listening to music, Alex Ross claims, “ There is something thrilling about setting the player on Shuffle and deciding what to play next” (131). In his essay “ Listen to This”, Ross talks briefly about how he thoroughly enjoys listening to music on his iPod Shuffle because of the unpredictability of what song will come up next. The spontaneity of the Shuffle is what gives it its excitement. In a world where we are constantly planning ahead in order to fulfill our competitive instinct, the iPod Shuffle does the exact opposite. On the Shuffle, Lady Gaga can be followed by Beethoven, can be followed by the Red Hot Chili Peppers, can be followed by Nora Jones, etc. With the shuffle, there are no genres that segregate what you are listening to. Everything is just simply music. Ross explains, “ On the iPod, music is freed from all fatuous self-definitions and delusions of significance...music is music” (131). Ross’s vision of “ perfect” music can be achieved through the iPod Shuffle. A major reason why Ross enjoys the iPod Shuffle so much is because of the lack of control one has over the device. The Shuffle picks the song and the owner of the iPod listens to it, simple as that. This notion is quite opposite from American society where we always feel the need to be in control. Unlike the iPod Shuffle, which picks for us, in

the “ real world” we must choose for ourselves. We make our decisions based on what will provide us with the most favorable outcome. In a society so driven by competition, we are also inundated with selfishness, for; after all, one of the mantras of competition is “ Every man for himself”. Ross would want us to break loose from this “ Every man for himself” type of mindset. Instead, he would want us to sit back, relax, and listen to the music; one song at a time without worrying about whom in the world may be trying to surpass us. Ross describes his perfect kind of music as “ freed from all fatuous self-definitions and delusions of significance”. Ross’s ideal human society would adhere to this guideline as well. Oftentimes we seem to think that we are more important than we are. We have “ delusions” that we are more “ significant” than we are and the selfish state of mind brought onto us by competition leaves us feeling entitled. Like Alex Ross, Mark Edmundson would also delight in the concept of the iPod Shuffle because of its lack of planning and predetermination. In his essay “ Dwelling in Possibilities”, Edmundson, a professor at the University of Virginia, discusses in depth his concern for today’s college students. He explains that these students have an unparalleled “ hunger for life” where they want to accomplish everything at once. “ Be everywhere- that’s what the current technology invites, and that’s what my students aspire to do” (Edmundson 33). And, he elaborates, although this hunger is admirable, “ it’s part of what makes this student generation appealing, highly promising”, Edmundson claims that this also causes students to become “ radically vulnerable” (32). Today’s college students, and many other types of individuals as well, live by the saying “ Do it now, for later may be too late” (Edmundson 35). This way of life brings me

back to the question, what would you do if you had endless amounts of time? As a college student, I am fully aware of the pressures put on by family, professors, peers, and even friends, to be successful. Young people today are forced to put major focus on their future career, especially in this dwindling economy. Nowadays schools are starting to teach students about the importance of a higher education at a younger age than ever before, sometimes even starting in elementary school.