

FLAME.



CONTRIBUTORS

Marissa Tekalign

Journalist

Reuben Rose

Journalist

Cally Gillard

Journalist

Cara Bell

Journalist

Abbie Bailes

Journalist

Sam Banks

Journalist

Izzy Harvey

Editor/Journalist

Angie Omairi

Journalist

Emily Huggins

Journalist

Elsie Rushton

Journalist

Evie Watson

Journalist

Amelia Naylor

Journalist

Alisha Waseem

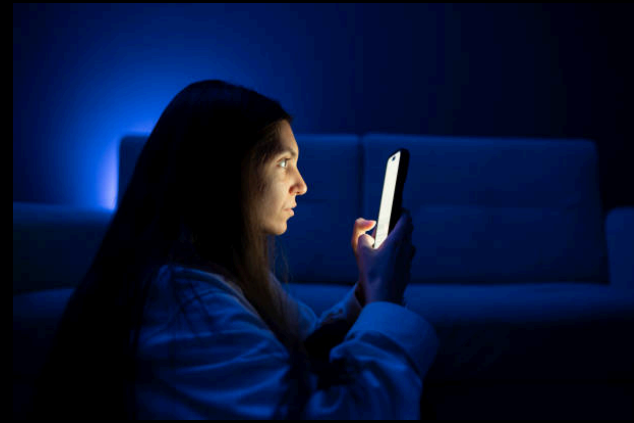
Journalist

Zoe Woodley

Journalist

FLEETING ADOLESCENCE: GROWING UP IN A WORLD THAT NEVER SLEEPS

By Reuben Rose



In a world dominated by screens and scrolling, one can't help but ask: How do teenagers cope? The truth is. We don't, not always. Between the monopolization of youth culture and the erosion of privacy, today's young people are struggling to find a place to simply exist, to feel, to breathe. Social media, once hailed as a tool for connection, now casts a long shadow over teenage life. According to the National Institute of Health's study, "The Growing Prevalence of Anxiety in Adolescents," depression and anxiety among teens have reached alarming levels. Apps designed to bring us together often leave us feeling more isolated than ever.

Many young people, myself included, have felt that quiet ache of comparison. The sense that everyone else's life is more exciting, more beautiful, more worthy. Phones have become our constant companions, but also our biggest critics. We check them before bed, wake to their glow, and carry them like extensions of our hands. School, once a place to learn and discover, now often feels clouded by exhaustion, anxiety, and the need to keep up with a world that never switches off. The harm, though, isn't only in the hours spent scrolling, it's in what we find there. Girls are fed images of perfection that twist self-worth into something fragile. Boys encounter anger and ideology that breeds division instead of understanding. The digital space, once promising endless freedom, now feels like an echo chamber, where truth is blurred and emotions are mined for clicks.

As musician Thurston Moore once said, "When youth culture is monopolized by big business, what are the youth to do?" That question feels more relevant than ever. Teen culture, once raw, rebellious, and beautifully human, is now shaped by algorithms. And in this storm of noise and expectation, many teens turn to substances or self-destructive habits, trying to find calm in chaos. Parents and teachers look on, desperate to help but unsure how.

What we need isn't just discipline or digital detoxes. We need spaces. Real ones. Places where teens can express emotion without judgment, where creativity can breathe again, and where growing up feels less like survival and more like discovery.

Holden Caulfield once called the world "full of phonies," and while that line from *The Catcher in the Rye* still resonates, it shouldn't be our destiny. School shouldn't just be a place to pass exams; it should be where we learn to live, to think, to question, to dream. The system may feel rigid, but it still holds the potential to spark change if we dare to make it more human.

Adolescence, as fleeting as it is, shouldn't be defined by burnout or digital mirrors. It should be about becoming, about finding who we are before the world tells us who to be. And maybe that's how we cope, not by escaping, but by reclaiming what it means to truly grow up in a world that never sleeps.

EVOLUTION OF POP MUSIC



By Emily Huggins

Pop music is everywhere – from the radio to your phone, you can't escape the catchiest melodies and recognisable tunes. But it hasn't always sounded the way it does today. Over the decades Pop Music has evolved massively and is constantly changing to match the taste of each new generation. Various songs are being reinvented with some songs being more successful and recognisable than others.

Back then songs were made to stand out on the radio as there was no Spotify or YouTube. They were built to last, designed so listeners wouldn't tire of them quickly. Music now is designed for short attention spans and quick streams many pop songs now are only 2-3 minutes long and less enjoyable. The fast production of music can allow songs to be made in a few days to a week on laptops needing no studio making them sound rushed and less personal to the artist. On platforms like TikTok, tracks can blow up overnight but then disappear just as quickly. The older decades of pop music built up their songs slowly making listeners stay and listen, however pop now grabs listeners in the first few seconds making them easily skippable.

In the 1950s - 60s Pop music was inspired by Jazz. It had catchy upbeat songs with simple lyrics. Some of the most popular artists were The Beatles and Elvis Presley. It made music exciting and it was a big change from the previous decades making it more rebellious and fun for the younger generation. The Rolling Stones for example changed the definition of Pop music.

In the 1970s-80s Pop music became more popular with the dance floor and discos. Songs started to include more modern instruments like synthesizers and electronic beats. Music Videos helped artists like Michael Jackson and Madonna become global icons. Their songs and names are still instantly recognisable today.

We head to the 1990s - 2000s where more bands were formed and Pop music was about teen idols like The Backstreet Boys and the Spice Girls. Pop music started to appeal to a much wider audience by blending with Hip-Hop and R&B. With the rise of the internet and CDs Pop Music started to blow up and spread much faster.

From the 2010s to now Pop music has become a lot more digital with the creation of Spotify and YouTube. Songs could now become viral and global hits in seconds. Pop started to mix and blend with many other styles making the charts seem a lot more diverse. Some popular artists that were formed were Billie Eilish and Harry Styles which are two pop artists but their music being completely different.

However, as the evolution of Pop Music keeps changing many people now prefer the older pop music styles because of nostalgia and memories and also personal preference. People now appreciate the authenticity of music compared back then to the modern reliance on technology and easy production in today's music. Music is now overplayed and everywhere stopping it from becoming personal and sentimental.

SOMBRE AND STYLE: A DEEP DIVE IN THE GROTESQUE SUBCULTURE OF GOTH.

By Abigail Bailes

When you hear the word 'goth' what comes to your mind? Black clothes? Sadness? Anarchy? Lamenting next to a grave stone as the flicker of a candle provides hi a purposeful ambience?

Often perceived as sinister and morbid, the goth culture is heavily misunderstood in society. By most, the goth community is seen as an act of teenage rebellion or a Halloween costume but behind the teased hair and 10-inch eyeliner, there is a culture rich, international, accepting community.

The goth subculture crawled out of its shadowy corner in the late 1970s, showing the world a whole new way to enjoy the macabre. With the help of the Punk movement leaving behind a culture rich soil, the goth subculture was able to plant its roots and grow into the community the world knows today. In 1979, Bauhaus (which is still an influential goth band to this day) released the song 'Bela Lugosi's Dead', with which many other bands came to be and followed this new melancholic bandwagon of the newly established goth genre in music. Also, with this The Batcave night club opened its door and acted as an enigmatic dwelling space to allow early goths (known as batcavers) to torpor. This simple act gave birth and evolved into the lugubrious subculture that we have come to terms to today.

Perhaps the most misunderstood part of the goth subculture is fashion. Usually seen as a 'Halloween costume', gothic fashion has its roots in the traditional Victorian mourning attires and the D-I-Y ethos that it has inherited from its big sister, the punk movement. Makeup is also a huge role in both genders to create the traditional goth look; a pale face, sharp contour, a wicked eyeliner and a bold black lip brings the sombre goth look together which was pioneered by Sioux Sie Sioux. Of course, this isn't needed to be goth as the goth subcultures' roots are rooted in its political beliefs and music.



Goth is often perceived as a rebellious phase against society. Although half of this is true the goth subculture is a state of mind to challenge certain ideals of society such as fascism, consumerism and homophobia.

They believe in anti-authoritarian leftist ideals. There is no such thing as a 'conservative' goth.

Although the goth subculture is a fairly recent discovery, the macabre of the gothic genre has been around centuries. The word "goth" can be traced back to a German tribe and has been used to describe medieval architecture in the renaissance period. Most noticeably the sombre nature of the gothic genre can be seen in the Victorian period with the rise of gothic literature. Most noticeably of this gory genre is Bram Stoker's Dracula and the rise of the vampires with many other authors following suit with this devilishly new trope. However, did you know Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's Carmilla was in fact the original vampire novel by a whole 25 years? The sapphic undertones in this novel paved the way for LGBTIQQ media. Overall, the gothic genre has introduced many to the way the macabre can be entertained

If you find yourself with a sombre goth, don't be wary most of us are not the rebellious, soul sucking ruffians media portrays us as. Thank you for reading and i hope you've learned a thing or two about the ghastly sinister subculture of goth.

WHY DOES MUSIC CONNECT WITH TEENS SO DEEPLY?



By Elsie Rushton

Everybody in their lives will experience music and it's a cultural language with most people having one an artist that they consider to be 'theirs' because music creates a sense of individuality. Music is an art form, a creative expression that everyone can understand and appreciate, with a multitude of extremely talented creators in the space.

All ages can enjoy the musical expression that fills our heads. The question is still, which group of people enjoy music the most? The answer is teenagers. Specifically, they make up 18% of all listeners, with most of their listening minutes coming from social platforms like TikTok or streaming services like Spotify or Apple Music.

One reason that teenagers connect with music is that they are still developing. Teenagers want to be able to make sense of and understand the world around them which helps them to discover the personality they want to shape. Music can help navigate these years, and musical preferences can give a unique sense of identity and a desire to have characteristics that make you unique or identifiable. Some examples of this are sports, hobbies and of course, music taste. A lot of artists have certain styles or aesthetics that go with them that might attract a teen to listen to them. For example, Lana Del Rey is very feminine and '60s reminiscent, which brings a large fanbase of teen girls, or The Weeknd with his nightlife vibe, which attracts more 'party animals'. Having a favourite genre of music can tell you a lot about a person. Genres themselves also reflect personality traits, making music a powerful mirror of identity during adolescence.

Since music is such an expressive form of art, teens often act like artists because they idolise them, which leads to a powerful sense of representation and self-projection. In your teen years, you are also making lots of lifelong friends, and a common interest to bond over is music, which can bring so many people together through the power of music since most people will enjoy at least a few songs. Friendships also form around music—whether it's sharing playlists, attending concerts, or going to festivals. Music has always been central to teen culture; for instance, 'Beatlemania'...". This craze brought a mass number of teenage girls together to celebrate the music of the Beatles which shows the meaningful effect that music has

Music is also a 'public diary' for some artists, where they express their thoughts and feelings, even the most personal emotions are conveyed through their melodies. A fitting example of this is Tyler, the Creator, with the 'Wolf Trilogy'. He talks about his struggles in a beautiful way, through music. This leads to a lot of teens listening to a song's lyrics and thinking, 'I experience these feelings too, this artist gets me.' which leads to a deeper connection.

In summary, teenagers are the demographic that to connect so deeply with music. It is one of, if not the most popular forms of culture across the world. Whether it's rock, pop, hip-hop or grunge, we can all agree that music is a fundamental part of teenage personality and self-development. It's shown teens that they will be able to connect so deeply to music that they will become obsessed. It can become one of their main interests as it is so popular and easy to relate to.

TAYLOR SWIFT: TURNING FEELINGS INTO FIGURATIVE GOLD

By Alisha Waseem

EXPLORING HOW THE POP ICON TURNS REAL-LIFE EMOTIONS INTO POETIC MASTERPIECES.



In honour of the release of Taylor Swift's latest album, *The Life of a Showgirl*, it's only right for me to take you all on a whistle stop tour of the most poetic lyrics the singer has ever written.

Love her or hate her, it is undeniable that Swift has made a success of herself through her impressive and unique style of songwriting. From a young age, the singer has established herself as a woman with a strong passion for writing – with her third album *Speak Now* being completely self-written, at the age of 18.

You may have seen people struggling in a game of 'Taylor Swift or Shakespeare', where you try and guess if a line was written by some famous dead man, (no shade because we love his work), or Taylor herself – and it's actually harder than it sounds. But then she did kind of admit that if she wasn't a singer, she'd be an English teacher.

As much as it's all good and fun for me to sit here and lecture you about how great she is, why would I do that when I could just as well take you on a whirlwind tour of some of her most powerful lyrics – and I mean the kind that make you stop mid-song just to go: "Well...ouch."

As much as it's all good and fun for me to sit here and lecture you about how great she is, why would I do that when I could just as well take you on a whirlwind tour of some of her most powerful lyrics – and I mean the kind that make you stop mid-song just to go:

"Well...ouch."

Instead of the boring old, "we lost contact" why not refer to that painful separation between two people as "the rust that grew between telephones"? – Maroon (*Midnights*, 2022)

Want a better way to describe energy? How about a "kaleidoscope of heartbeats under coats". – *Welcome To New York* (1989, 2014)
Right person, wrong time. Heart-breaking? Well how's "we learned the right steps to different dances" for painful? – *How Did It End?* (*The Tortured Poets Department: The Anthology*, 2024)

We all have bad weeks obviously, but Taylor sums it up pretty well when she says, "all my mornings are Mondays stuck in an endless February" – *Fortnight* (*The Tortured Poets Department*, 2024)

Sometimes we just feel like we're losing control of everything, but Taylor prefers, "all the pages are just slipping through my hands" – *Bye Bye Baby* (*Fearless TV*, 2021)
Victim to a backhanded compliment? Hit them right back in the face by telling them they're "so casually cruel in the name of being honest" – *All Too Well* (*Red*, 2012)
On the struggles of growing up: "I was so ahead of the curve; the curve became a sphere". – *This Is Me Trying* (*Folklore*, 2020)
Moving on? Easier said than done: "I rewind the tape but all it does is pause on the very moment all was lost" – *Evermore* (*Evermore*, 2020)

Plans going down the drain, doesn't that just feel like "papercut stings from our paper-thin plans"? – *Death By A Thousand Cuts* (*Lover*, 2019)

And the list goes on...

So, whether you love her music or don't understand the hype of it all, it's an indisputable fact that the singer has serious songwriting skills. Her lyrics may seem like a complex labyrinth of words, but they are felt profoundly by people all over the world. The truth is, the tapestry of a Taylor Swift song is nothing but ordinary feelings woven together into metaphors.

There may be a great debate about the singer's success, but when it all comes down to it, Taylor Swift isn't just a popstar. She may just be our very own great American poet – glitter, guitars and all.

JOURNALISM: A HELP OR A HINDRANCE?

By Izzy Harvey



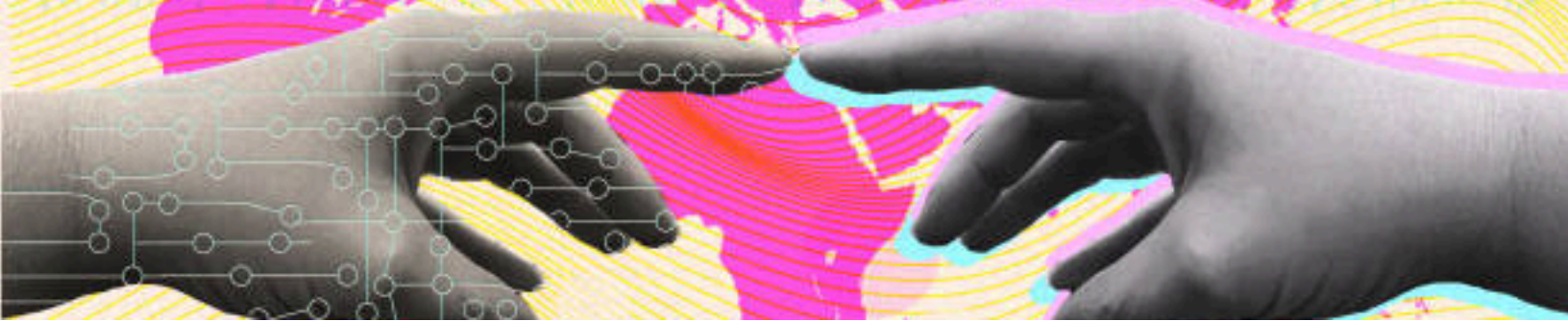
AI or artificial intelligence is always transforming the journalism industry in ways which are both innovative and yet unsettling. Some newspapers and outlets welcome this tool, using it to handle everyday reporting while freeing up staff to focus on deeper investigations. Others argue that relying too heavily on AI risks damaging the accuracy and credibility of the news.

Readers might be surprised to learn that a news story or an article has not always been produced by a human. More and more, newspapers and broadcasters are experimenting with AI to produce content – which raises big questions about creativity, trust, and the future of journalism.

Within journalism AI has been used and adapted to benefit the industry and the way it works at such a rapid pace to help the reporters to keep up. One way in which journalism has been dramatically impacted is by automated reporting which enables AI to generate news articles on routine topics such as the sports scores and the weather updates to allow journalists the freedom to have more time to report and investigate more complex stories. However, there's a downside. Relying too heavily on AI leaves room for mistakes – from biased outcomes to inaccurate or misleading information. Earlier this year, the BBC found that 51% of AI-generated answers to news questions had significant issues, and 19% of those citing BBC content introduced factual errors such as incorrect dates and numbers.

This raises the question: how is AI affecting journalists and their careers? Well, the rise of digital and AI-driven journalism impacts journalists by demanding new skills like visual storytelling, data analysis, and social media engagement. Journalists face challenges with declining newsroom resources, the rise of misinformation being spread and the growing demands for speed which requires a more adaptable, multi-skilled approach to their work. These changes require journalists to be adaptable, digitally literate, and able to navigate the rapid pace of information while maintaining ethical standards to ensure credible reporting. At the same time, journalists face challenges like shrinking newsroom resources, the rise of misinformation, and the pressure to publish faster than ever.

Although in spite of this, AI has benefitted the standard and pace at which journalists can produce work. For instance, AI offers extensive access to information online in great depth to allow reporters to vastly expand their research on a subject and this allows a more detailed knowledge through research on their investigation. Another aspect of journalism that AI can assist massively is reporting data as AI's ability to identify patterns in large datasets supports more insightful reporting, enabling deeper analysis and uncovering stories that might otherwise be missed. So, this shows how there are two sides to how journalism can help and hinder journalists in their endeavor for news consumption.



As artificial intelligence becomes a normal part of everyday life, many people are starting to question the ethics and credibility of using AI to write news reports. From my research, it's clear that human editors are more important than ever. While AI is efficient, it lacks the intuition and empathy needed for investigative work, storytelling, and ethical oversight. Editors oversee AI-generated content, check facts, and provide the critical and creative judgment that technology cannot replicate.

This collaboration lets editors focus on strategic tasks, maintain journalistic integrity, and build public trust through transparency. It also highlights why human involvement is still vital – AI can produce content quickly, but it cannot always be trusted due to inaccurate data or the risk of spreading misinformation. Not everyone in journalism agrees on AI's role. Take Susan D'Agostino, for example. In her July 2025 article "AI is Polluting Truth in Journalism," she argues:

"Misinformation is hardly a modern invention, but with AI as an amplifier, it now spreads faster, adapts smarter, and arguably hits harder than before. This surge comes as independent journalism –the traditional counterweight to falsehood–faces economic decline, shrinking newsrooms, and eroding public trust."

According to D'Agostino, AI is not helping modern reporting; instead, it is contributing to the decline of journalism. She has been reporting on AI for years across four continents, so her perspective is informed by extensive experience.

In contrast, the New York Times presents a more optimistic view:

"Generative AI can assist our journalists in uncovering the truth and helping more people understand the world. Machine learning already helps us report stories we couldn't otherwise, and generative AI has the potential to bolster our journalistic capabilities even more."

This shows that AI can be a powerful tool for journalists, helping them research faster, analyse information, and produce stories more efficiently. Both examples illustrate that opinions on AI in journalism are divided, shaped by personal experience and perspective.

Each of these journalists have made their own well-informed decision with their own personal experiences and knowledge which is why their opinions are so different. Now I put it to you. You have all of the information but where do you stand with the advancements of AI within the journalism industry? Do you believe that AI will only help to develop and advance the industry, or do you think it is just the beginning of the decay and destruction of journalism as we know it?

SHOULD A.I. BE USED IN EDUCATION?

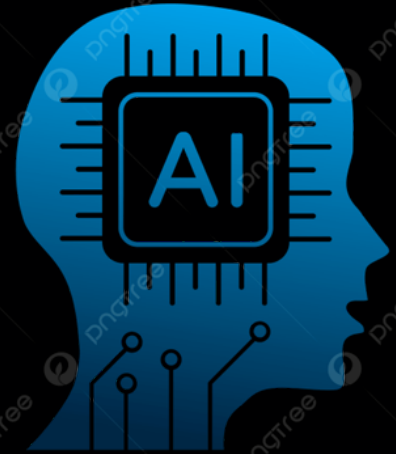
By Evie Watson

We've all heard of artificial intelligence (A.I.) and the dramatic headlines warning that it might ruin our futures. But is it really the end of the world—or simply another useful tool?"

Many of you will have used A.I. at some point recently, whether it is the A.I. answers on Google or to get your homework done. But should it be allowed in places of education? This controversial topic has been mentioned a lot in the past couple of years when A.I. started becoming popular. I am sure most students have heard their teachers mention the topic while checking homework, as apps such as Gauth A.I. which can help students' complete tasks quickly.

However, if students keep using A.I. for work they are less likely to learn and are more likely to struggle in exams, after not learning what they are truly capable of can and cannot do. Some pupils argue that because the website explains the answers it may help them to grasp and get a better understanding especially on questions they do not understand or know how to answer.

Universities have already begun setting rules. In some cases, A.I. may be used for assignments and essays—but not to complete the work entirely. Students must also explain how they used it.



Students may use it to search for research and summarise journals. Many people have deemed it helpful for coursework as it is more efficient and less time consuming. But on the other hand, it is easy to receive inaccurate information from A.I. sites as it is easy to change and manipulate the sites mess with the system. As well as this the use of A.I can lead to an increased risk of plagiarism which often affects grades

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So, you can vote now.



What
happens
next?

Written by
Marissa Tekalign.

In less than two years, I'll be allowed to help decide who runs the country. Last week, I had to raise my hand to be escorted to the toilet.

If that sounds absurd, that's because it is. My government says I'm nearly old enough to choose who runs the country, yet my school says I'm too young to go to the bathroom alone. At sixteen, we're both the future of democracy and the punchline of a joke adults haven't even realised they're telling.

Lowering the voting age looks great in a headline. Politicians love it because it's simple, symbolic, and easy to boast about in interviews. But symbols don't pass laws, educated citizens do. And citizens need to be educated *now*, before it's far too late.

We're told that young people don't care about politics, but maybe the question is if politics cares about us. Giving over 1.5 million young people the vote was meant to give us a voice. But a ballot without any knowledge behind it is just paper.

The problem isn't apathy; it's access. Lowering the voting age means nothing if the same institutions still treat us like children. You can't raise a generation of voters by keeping them on a short leash, and if Westminster wants an engaged generation, it can't just lower the voting age, it has to raise the standard of civic education.

The solution isn't to lower the bar for engagement — it's to raise the quality of preparation. Civic education shouldn't be an optional afterthought; it should be the fourth pillar of the curriculum. Students should leave school understanding not just how to vote, but how power *works*; how laws are made, budgets passed, and policies challenged.

If nothing changes, we'll end up with a generation of young voters who have no idea what they're doing. That isn't fair for *anyone*, but it doesn't have to be that way. If our government can put its money where its mouth is and actually deliver what it promised—*genuine youth enfranchisement, not performative policy*—then we could build a generation that doesn't just inherit democracy, but knows how to defend it.

The government can promise change all it likes but real enfranchisement takes more than a headline. Until then, *here's what we can actually do*:

- **Register now** — check GOV.UK or your local council.
- **Get ID** — apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate if you don't have an accepted photo ID.
- **Decide how to vote** — in person, by post, or by proxy; apply early for postal/proxy.
- **Find your polling station** — look it up by postcode or on your poll card.
- **And most importantly, educate yourself!** — take time to research the parties, candidates, and local issues that matter most to you. Read manifestos, check credible news sources, and look for what each candidate actually plans to do for *your* community.

Did you know?

12

Around 8.2 million eligible voters are missing from the electoral register. Don't

LIGHTS, CAMERA, RENDER! THE STORY OF CGI

By Amelia Naylor



CGI or computer-generated imagery, allows filmmakers to create strange new worlds and characters which were once only seen through stop motion animation and prosthetic makeup. But how did we get here? But how did it all begin?

It first started in the 1940s with the pioneering work of John Whitney who experimented with mechanical animation techniques on custom made devices built from World War 2 anti-aircraft machinery. He later collaborated with Saul Bass, a graphic designer, to create the animated opening scene for Hitchcock's *Vertigo* in 1958. He later teamed up with graphic designer Saul Bass to create the animated opening for Hitchcock's *Vertigo* in 1958.

The 1960's saw lots of firsts including the first 3D animation, the first aircraft simulation, the first digital morphing, the first motion capture, and the first talking CGI character, to name just a few. This decade of experimentation laid the foundations for CGI in Hollywood. By the 70s, CGI continued to adapt and made its way into the movies, *Westworld* in 1973, *Alien* in 1979 and the *Star Wars: A New Hope* in 1977, where it is shown in the trench run briefing sequence, introducing the technology into Hollywood. In *Star Wars*, the trench run briefing sequence introduced audiences to CGI technology for the first time.

As computer power started to vastly increase so did CGI bringing brand new cinematic experiences into the 80s, in films such as *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* in 1986, *The Abyss* in 1989, and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* in 1989 which used the first all-digital composite, the process of digitally assembling multiple images to make a final image, to show the rapid aging and eventual death of character Walter Donovan. As computers became more powerful in the 1980s, CGI allowed filmmakers to create entirely new cinematic experiences. Films like *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986), *The Abyss* (1989), and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) used CGI in exciting ways. For example, *Indiana Jones* used the first all-digital composite – digitally assembling multiple images – to show Walter Donovan rapidly aging and dying.

The 90s saw CGI make an appearance in even more popular blockbuster films including *Jurassic Park* in 1993 which revolutionised the world of film and visual effects. Developed by Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) an American visual effect, computer animation, and virtual production company, blending together computer-generated dinosaurs with practical animatronics created the photorealistic creatures on screen. While only about six minutes of the film's dinosaur scenes used CGI, these new elements were groundbreaking for their size, motion, and seamless integration with the physical world, forever changing the film industry and setting a new standard for special effects. Another big hit from the 90s was the animation film *Toy Story* in 1995. This was made entirely by CGI and was the first film made by the famous Pixar animation studios, who went on to produce a long list of other popular animated films. Other films following close behind were *Titanic* in 1997, using CGI mixed with miniature models to show the ship sinking and *The Matrix* in 1999. Other hits followed, including *Titanic* (1997), which mixed CGI with miniature models to show the ship sinking, and *The Matrix* (1999), which pushed digital effects even further.

By the 2000s CGI had become a huge part of the filmmaking industry and advanced significantly. This is seen in *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* in 2002 which used AI to create the character Gollum for the first time.

The 2010s to present, continued to see groundbreaking developments for special effects. James Cameron led the way with the release of *Avatar* in 2009 where he used motion capture suits to create the incredibly life like characters and immersive experience of the movie. *The Rise of the Planet of the Apes* followed close behind also using motion capture suits to create life like features, movement and emotions of the apes. James Cameron led the way with *Avatar* (2009), using motion capture suits to create incredibly lifelike characters and immersive worlds. *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* also used motion capture to bring apes to life, capturing realistic movement and emotion.

I think it's safe to say CGI has had a long journey from stop motion animations to the incredible detail of the digital environments and characters made now by complex computers. It's thanks to John Whitney and his World War 2 anti-aircraft machinery all the way back in the 1940s. It's thanks to pioneers like Whitney that filmmakers can now create worlds that were once unimaginable.

HAUNTING THE NARRATIVE: AN EXPLORATION INTO NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

By Sam Banks

I originally planned my article for this issue of FLAME to focus on Paul Thomas Anderson's new movie 'One Battle After Another', a simple movie review able, perhaps, to reach the heights of my critically acclaimed Bob Dylan review. Instead, after choosing to not to go the cinema (a decision absolutely not made by the lack of money I had at the time), I cut my losses and chose to watch a movie that's been sitting in my watchlist for nearly a year now, looming over me- Akerman's Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles.

Focusing on the slow, mundane life of a widowed housewife in the 70s, Jeanne Dielman clocks in at a runtime of just under 3 ½ hours. So, far from an easy watch. What makes it even harder to sit through, is the incredibly slow pace the film moves at. Take, for example, the 2 minute 30 second scene of an unchanging camera angle posed at Jeanne, as she peels a potato. That's it-nothing else.

And the film repeats these dull cooking scenes throughout, often with Dielman temporarily leaving the shot for a few seconds, giving the viewer nothing to see other than an empty kitchen until she comes back. Of course, this is done purposefully. It's these scenes that give Jeanne a small moment of control, in a life devoid of any. She's unable to escape the strict socially enforced life of domestic labour and means of prostituting herself at home for money. Yet, throughout the film, both her and Akerman force the viewer to sit through the intentionally dull 3 ½ hours, to gain even a small understanding of what her life was like.

And this is where the film really begins to shine. Not within what it has to show, but who it's targeted at. When experiencing a work of art, it's important to understand not what the artist is trying to say, but even who they're speaking to. Someone like Jeanne, who commits herself, for no fault of her own, to this tedious life of domestic chores and vapid conversations with her son, who's wholly disinterested in her, wouldn't have any time to sit down and watch a film like this-nor would anyone in a similar position.



Akerman's directed this movie for those privileged men (and women) of a higher class, showing them the harsh realities of how some people live. However boring the 3 ½ hours may be-and believe me, whilst certain parts are oddly hypnotising, by the time I had reached the third and final day I was considering if I ought to watch the rest of the movie another day-it's nothing close to what someone like Jeanne would face in her day-to-day life.

This is what captivated me the most about Jeanne Dielman. Sure, I can understand why Akerman would twist the narrative structure in such a bold way. I get it, she's using it to symbolise yadda yadda...but it's not as if she has to do this? It's perfectly possible to create a movie all about the invisibility of a housewife's life without boring the audience. I mean, look at any reviews of the movie and you'll find a litter of comments talking about how it's a 'slog' and the 'only reason people say they like it is to seem cool'. It's clear her choice of such an atypical narrative structure has alienated a potential audience.

Yet 'Jeanne Dielman' is far from the only work that has chosen to twist its narrative structure, regardless of the consequences that may bring. Another example that comes to mind is Franz Kafka's 'The Trial'.

JEANNE
DIELMAN, 23,
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Throughout the novel, we follow our protagonist Joseph K, a man who is convicted of a crime by an unknown authority, yet is never told what crime he has been prosecuted for. As with all Kafka novels, the text is draped in surreal and inexplicable events. In order to mirror Joseph's confusion, Kafka writes in long, intentionally confusing sentences, describing events that seem to defy physics. He spends paragraphs focusing on complex legal systems and laws, and writes everything in this overwhelming stream-of-consciousness style. And sure enough, every review of 'The Trial' seems to echo the same statement-what the hell was that?

Naturally, similar to Akerman, Kafka's choice here is intentional. His writing style forces the reader to feel the same way Joseph K would have-lost and overwhelmed. Yet, just like 'Jeanne Dielman', it leaves a large part of the audience feeling disappointed, and unwilling to finish the work in question. So why distort the narrative structure in such a controversial way?

At the end of the day, it's entirely up to the individual whether or not they want to try to watch or read something so challenging. It's an entirely understandable reason for not bothering to interact with a piece of art. I mean, perhaps people could understand wanting to read a challenging, or confusing book, but why bother with a film that's intentionally boring? Is the point of art not something which can be enjoyed? A movie which is set to be purposefully boring seems to contradict that entire idea.

And it's that which I want to really focus on. The idea that entertainment, or enjoyment, is an overrated function of art. That some works are made, not with the idea to entertain the audience, but to educate them, to explore a part of the world they wouldn't have even normally have given a moment's thought to.

Now, that's not to say that all art should be focused on this. Nobody has the time or patience every day to sit down and watch some 3-hour art house film (at least not me). Sometimes, you want to turn on some casual action or comedy flick to wind down to. Perhaps you want cheering up, or perhaps you want to relieve a childhood classic-or show it to someone new. To me, that's what film, and literature, is all about. Balance. Just like life is filled with moments of high intensity, difficult challenges, it's also littered with relaxing at the end of the day, binge eating unhealthy food and watching cheap reality shows, so is literature.

This isn't to say it's wrong to never watch any slow, 'pretentious' black and white art house films. Each person's taste is entirely subjective, and it's up to you to decide what to spend your time watching. However, if you happen to have a spare few hours one day, consider putting on Jeanne Dielman, or picking up a copy of The Trial. You might not like it, but at least you'll know. At least you'll have tried. And hey, it's not like Dielman herself would even have the time to watch herself. So, count yourself lucky.

SCREENS, SLANG, SPEECH: THE DIGITAL EVOLUTION OF ENGLISH

By Zoe Woodley

In recent years, social media has become one of the most powerful influences on how young people use language. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat create new words almost daily, many of which quickly spread through schools and friendship groups. Words like "rizz" (charisma) and "delulu" (delusional or unrealistic) are now common in conversations between young people. The viral phrase "skibidi" was officially added to the English dictionary in August, showing how internet culture is increasingly shaping what is called "real" language.

Slang has always been a way for young people to create identity, build friendships, and mark themselves as part of a group. Using the latest terms shows cultural awareness and helps students connect with their peers. However this can also create generational divides. Younger generations may adopt slang enthusiastically, while older generations may not understand these new terms, or struggle to keep up. A major factor in this shift is YouTube, particularly American creators. Influencers use words which are then picked up by British viewers. Students often mix this American slang with British slang, creating a hybrid style of speech. British YouTubers reinforce this mix, switching between UK and US slang to appeal to international viewers. The result? Students in the UK increasingly speak a blend of British and American slang that reflects global online culture.

here are many mixed views on how slang affects students. Some people worry that frequent slang use may slip into formal, academic writing in exams, leading to weaker exam performance. Examiners have occasionally noticed students using informal terms in GCSE and A-level essays, where more precise vocabulary was needed. On the other hand, some linguists argue that using slang does not replace standard English but instead adds to a student's language range. Most young people are able to "code switch", shifting between slang with friends and more formal English in academic settings. This skill could even be seen as evidence of flexibility and creativity with language.



Critics often claim that slang is "ruining English", yet history shows the opposite. Shakespeare himself introduced hundreds of new words that were once seen as unusual but are now common. Similarly, slang from past decades, like "cool" and "chill" are now part of everyday English. The addition of "delulu" and "skibidi" to the dictionary suggests that today's internet slang could be on the same path.

While some words disappear quickly, social media slang may reflect wider cultural shifts. It shows how language adapts to new forms of communication, from memes to viral challenges. For students, slang seems to be more than just a trend, it is a reminder that language is living, creative, and constantly evolving. Will the slang of today disappear with online trends, or will it form part of the English that future generations inherit?

THE REALITY OF LIVE SERVICE GAMES



By Angie Omairi

The Reality of Live Service Games

You never had to buy a live service game — it was free. And you knew you wouldn't have to spend anything at all for that game. Or so you thought. Before you know it, you're dropping cash for bundles, outfits, and virtual currency. What happened? This is the reality of live service games.

Live service games are designed to captivate you, and not just with gameplay. Limited-time offers, fear of missing out (FOMO), evolving content, and continuous updates all keep the game fresh and engaging. Turns out, the real game isn't the one you're playing — it's the one being played on you.

How It Works

First, the game is advertised almost everywhere, all the time. Everyone seems to have it, and everyone seems to play it. Eventually, you decide to download it, just because it's free. That's where the trap starts.

Live service platforms like Roblox host millions of user-created experiences, so there's always something tailored to your interests. These games can be addictive — but it's not just the games themselves.

In-game purchases are a huge part of live service games. Skins, emotes, battle passes... we don't need them, so why do we want them?

Fortnite: The Big Example

Let's start with one of the most popular live service games — Fortnite. Fortnite is a free-to-play online game launched in 2017 by Epic Games. It blends fast-paced combat, building mechanics, and a constantly evolving world. It's known for its battle royale mode but also offers creative tools, live events, competitions, and collaborations that make it a global social and entertainment platform.

Fortnite has an in-game currency called V-Bucks. You can earn V-Bucks from the Battle Pass, which is like a collection full of skins (cosmetic outfits), emotes (dances or gestures), V-Bucks, and other cosmetics. It's free and built into the game. You get a few V-Bucks from the free Battle Pass, but not many skins or items. If you upgrade to the full Battle Pass, though, you can unlock up to 10 skins, tons of cosmetics, and 1,200 V-Bucks!

To earn everything in a Battle Pass, you gain XP (experience points) by playing Fortnite — and that's how you get attached.

Battle Passes are good deals, but earning free V-Bucks takes a long time. And it's not really the Battle Pass most people care about — it's the shop.

The Fortnite Item Shop rotates daily, and when a celebrity skin, iconic character, or themed bundle drops, it's only available for a limited time. You never know if it'll come back. That urgency, mixed with personal interests, makes it hard to resist. Themed cosmetics can cost a lot, which is why most people just spend real money on in-game currency.

Roblox: A Different Kind of Live Service Game

But Fortnite's not the only game competing for cash. Let's take a look at another one of the most popular games in the world — Roblox.

Roblox is a free-to-play online platform released in 2006 where users can create, share, and play millions of games made by other players. It uses its own virtual currency called Robux for customization and in-game purchases. Unlike Fortnite, Roblox doesn't have a Battle Pass to earn Robux. You can use Robux to buy customization items for your avatar or spend it in other people's experiences. There aren't many ways to earn Robux, but most people rely on two main ones. One is by creating their own game that other users pay to play, often through "VIP passes" or other perks. The other, of course, is by buying Robux with real money.

Even though earning Robux is harder than earning V-Bucks, more people are choosing Roblox. As of 2025, Fortnite has over 110 million monthly active players, which is impressive — but Roblox beats that with over 380 million monthly active users!

So why do people prefer Roblox over Fortnite?

On Roblox, people can create their own games, worlds, and experiences using Roblox Studio.

Fortnite's creative mode is improving, but it's still limited by Epic Games' tools and rules.

Roblox also emphasizes social interaction — chat, friends, avatar customization, and shared experiences. Many Roblox games are designed around hanging out and roleplaying. Fortnite is more fast-paced and competitive, which can appeal less to younger players who just want to chill and chat.

And while it's technically easier to get virtual currency on Roblox by creating games, most people (especially younger players) would rather just play than spend time developing. So, once again, most people just buy it.

The Real Reason We Spend

So, why do people almost always end up paying for live service games? Even though they're free to download, it's easy to get attached because of continuous updates. When you've played for a long time, you start feeling connected to the game, which can lead to buying in-game currency.

It's not just about outfits or upgrades — it's about feeling invested. You've built memories, friendships, and maybe even part of your identity around that game. So when a new popular item drops or a limited-time bundle appears, it's hard to say no. That's the power of live service games: they don't just ask for your time.

They earn your loyalty.



AN AUSTEN ARGUMENT



By Cally Gillard

Emma and Persuasion are two Jane Austen novels that have been adapted into films many times. My favourite versions are the Emma film made in 2020 (starring Anya Taylor-Joy and Johnny Flynn) and Persuasion made in 2022 (starring Dakota Johnson and Cosmo Jarvis). Emma was praised for being “total perfection,” while Persuasion was criticised as a “disaster.” This made me wonder—why does everyone love the movie Emma so much (myself included)? And why does Persuasion “fail to convince as a worthwhile Austen adaptation”?

Emma is often described as “one of the most delightful films of 2020.” It features playful and unique characters that make the story so intriguing, with music that perfectly enhances each scene. The film follows our protagonist, Emma, who is self-absorbed and delights in matchmaking others purely for her own amusement. The story is witty and comedic, and the filmmakers really leaned into this tone. The characters are ridiculous, laughable, and entertaining—which is probably what makes it such a hilarious and charming movie.

Persuasion, on the other hand, takes a more modern approach to Austen’s story, bringing contemporary themes into Regency England. Many believe it didn’t do well at the box office because of its lack of emotional depth and weak characterisation. In the original book, the protagonist Anne (although persuaded by others) breaks off her engagement and later feels deep regret. In the film, however, she doesn’t seem to show much remorse and instead blames other people. The movie also uses fourth-wall breaks as a form of narration, so we always know what Anne is thinking. Unfortunately, this makes her come across as smug rather than sorrowful, making it harder to sympathise with her. Critics from sites like The Guardian have made similar observations.

Another issue is that the movie feels rushed. Perhaps the director wanted to include as many scenes and characters from the book as possible, but as a result, the pacing suffers—Anne and Frederick’s relationship moves from friendship to romance far too quickly.

I also think part of the difference in audience reaction comes from the stories themselves. Persuasion is a harder story to relate to; not many people can connect with a woman who breaks off her engagement because she was persuaded to, and then regrets it for eight years. Emma, on the other hand, is filled with lively characters and amusing moments, making it easier to enjoy and emotionally connect with.

Overall, I love Emma and I also really enjoy Persuasion. Most people who’ve seen both films consider Emma to be “one of the best movies of 2020.” Emma is my second-favourite Jane Austen story (nothing beats Pride and Prejudice!), and the 2020 adaptation is amazing. Although Persuasion is often seen as a “disaster” and isn’t in my top three, I still think it’s a good story and a movie worth watching.

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