

## Youth and the Universe

We were born with the gift of arrogance. When we were children, we assumed we had something to contribute. Our dreams were saturated with presidential speeches and game-winning goals. In that time, authority was to be revoked; design was to be demolished. There were no limits. We mattered because we were bold and brave. I can only wonder, as I sit in a classroom and struggle to insert myself into a discussion, where that confidence has gone.

As new-adults, we are told that we must find a purpose. It is a command that dictates life in a succession of independent clauses structured by commas: go to university, find a passion, and change the world. But school becomes an assembly line. An education turns into a gift that is to be unpackaged and stored in the basements of our minds. Eventually, we will grow to be greasy gears shifting within the arm of society—the epitome of our aspirations. This bleak future forces me to ask what is difficult to answer. Why exactly do I matter?

I believe that I matter because I am conceited enough to believe that no one will ever see the world as I do, that no one could ever express what I am capable of writing. I possess a distinct lens through which I observe the world. All that I say, do, and think will lead to my concept of success, something that cannot be achieved through a job or trophy. My goal is, instead, focused on perceiving what's around me to the best of my ability with no exact destination in mind. You may say this is a child's way of thinking. To that I ask, what's wrong with being childish?

I matter because I refuse to grow up. Though I am numbed to the extreme emotions of youth, in which all the little things are life-altering, I retain some form of childish curiosity and awareness. I gape at the monarch caterpillars that munch on butterfly weed at the side of my house. I splash in rainy puddles as I walk my dog, coating my socks and tennis shoes in sticky mud. The mess of it all doesn't bother me; the utter chaos enlightens me. While authors from Woolf to Salinger mourn the loss of innocence, I feel like I will never quite grow out of my pigtails. I can easily see myself in ten or twenty years doing things that aren't age-appropriate—engaging in snowball fights, running through sprinklers, and cannonballing into pools. I matter because I don't mourn the loss of youth. To me, it is never truly gone.

Like many others, I like to sit on my deck and gaze at the night sky. The chilled wind that glazes autumn leaves drifts into the background. Gravity becomes a forsaken thought as I float towards the murky black expanse. I am suddenly aware of the weight of promise that my ancestors saw in the stars. When confronted by the universe, my Earthly emotions feel trivial. None of it seems to matter.

Yet, I believe this is why we matter. Not because we have something to offer but because we simply exist. It dawns upon me that it is all a miracle. Everything from the Goldilocks zone to pure genetic luck is this war that we have waged against impossible statistics. With this realization, I see that our purpose is not something that we find, that it has very little to do with fate or destiny. We create our purpose. My purpose is something that I have created.