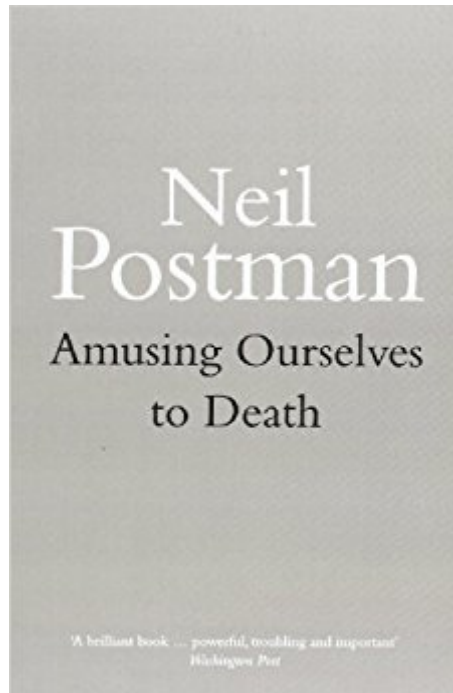




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# Amusing Ourselves To Death



## Synopsis

Television has conditioned us to tolerate visually entertaining material measured out in spoonfuls of time, to the detriment of rational public discourse and reasoned public affairs. In this eloquent, persuasive book, Neil Postman alerts us to the real and present dangers of this state of affairs, and offers compelling suggestions as to how to withstand the media onslaught. Before we hand over politics, education, religion, and journalism to the show business demands of the television age, we must recognize the ways in which the media shape our lives and the ways we can, in turn, shape them to serve out highest goals.

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## Customer Reviews

From the author of *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* comes a sustained, withering and thought-provoking attack on television and what it is doing to us. Postman's theme is the decline of the printed word and the ascendancy of the "tube" with its tendency to present everything murder, mayhem, politics, weather as entertainment. The ultimate effect, as Postman sees it, is the shrivelling of public discourse as TV degrades our conception of what constitutes news, political debate, art, even religious thought. Early chapters trace America's one-time love affair with the printed word, from colonial pamphlets to the publication of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. There's a biting analysis of TV commercials as a form of "instant therapy" based on the assumption that human problems are easily solvable. Postman goes further than other critics in demonstrating that television represents a hostile attack on literate culture. October 30 Copyright 1985 Reed Business

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"Amusing Ourselves to Death" is an amazingly written and well-argued book. As Postman notes: In the Victorian Era (mid-late 1800s), novelist Charles Dickens had as much fame as The Beatles in 1960, Michael Jackson in 1980, or Brad Pitt in 2014. The farm boy in the late 1700s carried a pamphlet of Thomas Paine's writings in his back pocket. Today, school-children carry iPhones with pictures of Eminem (boy) or Taylor Swift (girl). In the mid-1800s, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas debated in public FOR HOURS on the dire issues of their time. Today, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney have bite-sized debates where one side speaks for 1 minute and the other side gets a 30-second rebuttal. Clearly, the people then were different from the people now in terms of mainstream intelligence. The reason, Postman argues, is that the people in Dickens' era were children of "The Age of Typography," and the people today (us) are the children of "The Age of Show Business," or "The Age of Television." Reading was life to people in the older days; watching television is life to us now. And television, however entertaining, cannot be anything but sheer junk because it works through images, sensationalism, and emotional gratification. Writing, on the other hand, requires patience, detachment, memory, and reason. The result is that we are dumber than our ancestors. Incredulous? Pick up the book and let Postman prove it to you. This book was written in 1985, but don't be fooled; it still wields enormous relevance today -- The chapter titled, "Peek-a-Boo-World" as well as the "Information-to-action-ratio" theory outlined in it are particularly pertinent regarding the modern-day use of the internet, especially with portable laptops, tablets, and cellphones. With those gadgets, we have become, in short, a nation buried in triviality, as Postman predicted. Furthermore, television viewership today has not decreased with the rise of the internet, iPhones, and such. On the contrary, studies show that we still watch as much television as before, despite the alarmingly rising rate of electronic use. In this book, Postman focuses on politics, religion, education, and the news. These, he says, are serious topics that are downgraded to mere amusement because television, by design, works by making everything amusing. In effect, we come to expect everything in life to be entertaining when, in actuality, some things must be endured. Again, I urge you to read this book carefully. I've read it four times. Its ideas have allowed me to wean myself away from television and on to typography. Let it have the same effect on you.

Amusing Ourselves to Death is the spiritual sequel to Boorstin's The Image. Postman wants us to realize that there is something inherently inferior about the information we consume through visual media. Forget television designed for entertainment - which is at least honest - and focus in

something like a news segment. As far as its creators are concerned, the worst thing that it could possibly do is inspire or provoke you, two horrible emotions that risk you getting up and leaving your living room and missing the imminently scheduled set of commercials. The result is the unreality we find ourselves in, one where no one can recall the last time they actually DID anything with the information they were given from the television. You realize that the last thing we have to fear is a malicious Orwellian news industry, because what we have is so much worse: culture incentivized to be as shallow, fabricated and captivating as possible, at the expense of what is actually real or true or meaningful.

Love this book, timeless insight into the nature of cultural distraction that impedes most of us. I appreciated Postman's eloquence and grasp of the historic evolution of this distraction, from oral to the written word, to telegraph and tv. All becoming less contextual and place based and personal. I find the author a very engaging writer and I've already gone back and read all my highlights a second and third time. Even though this was written in the 80's, it is so relevant today as politicians and corporations seem to further mastering the art of distraction where facts and the meaning behind our experiences is obscured and even denied. I can't recommend this book high enough.

This is an eye-opener (if they aren't already open to any media!!). Internet has supplanted television in some areas and can be easily related to what is written, brilliantly, in this book. We should not forget about what video games can do as well. Western societies must read this book and check if what was written more than 30 years ago is right or not (it surely is right!). A great book that gives a lot of subjects for discussion (personally and not via the web, please!!). A must read!

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