

Why Does Everyone Watch Something Different Now?



Built from *The Death of the Monoculture: Why Nothing Is Everywhere Anymore* by Patrick Kim, Culture Editor

Grades 4–8 · About 45 minutes · ★ everyone · ★★ older readers

Name _____

Date _____

1. Before You Read

★ Name a show, song, or video that everyone in your class knows. Was it easy or hard to think of one?

★ Ask a grown-up what they watched on TV when they were your age. Did all their friends watch the same thing?

2. The Short Version

Read this first. Older readers: read the full article too.

Ask grown-ups what they watched on TV as kids, and people the same age often name the same few shows. Back then, almost everyone watched the same things at the same time. In 1983, more than a hundred million Americans watched the last episode of a show called M*A*S*H together, on the same night. Patrick Kim calls that time the **monoculture**: an era when almost everyone watched, heard, and talked about the same things.

Patrick says the monoculture happened because there were so few choices. There were only three or four TV networks, a few dozen radio stations, and one Top 40 chart. If there is only one well, everyone drinks from it.

Then the internet arrived. Now there are streaming services, playlists, gaming soundtracks, and short video clips. An **algorithm** picks things just for you, so everyone watches something different.

Patrick says this change was good in some ways. In the old days, a small group of TV bosses chose which stories got told. Now a Korean drama can top the charts in Kansas, and artists can find fans without anyone's permission.

But something was lost too. Shared stories help strangers find common ground. Today, people can know everything about their own favorite things and nothing about their neighbor's.

Shared moments still happen at big events, like a World Cup, a stadium tour, or a movie opening. Patrick's advice: watch something at the same time as another person.

3. Word Bank

Word	What it means
monoculture	a time when almost everyone watches, hears, and talks about the same things
scarcity	when there is only a little of something, not enough for everyone to have lots of choices
algorithm	a set of computer rules that picks what to show you next
gatekeeper	a person who decides what gets in and what stays out
fragmentation	breaking into many small pieces

★ Use **algorithm** in a sentence of your own.

4. Check Your Understanding

★ 1. About how many Americans watched the last episode of M*A*S*H in 1983?

- ☐ About ten thousand ☐ About one million ☐ More than a hundred million

★ 2. In your own words, what was the monoculture?

★ 3. Patrick says the monoculture "wasn't a golden age. It was a plumbing situation." Why did almost everyone watch the same things back then?

★ 4. Name two ways people find new music today, according to the article.

★★ 5. Patrick says that for some people, the end of the monoculture felt "like a jailbreak." For others, it was a loss. Name one thing that got better and one thing that was lost.

5. Patrick's Attention Map

Patrick studies attention: how a crowd gets put together, and who controls what it sees. Most of the time, he says, everyone watches something different. Fill in the map for the old days of the monoculture and for today. Then pick one thing your whole class or family watches together and map that too.

★ **Our shared thing:** What does your whole class or family watch together?

	Back then (from the article)	Today (from the article)	Our shared thing
Who is watching? How many people, and are they watching the same thing?			
Who decides what people see? Follow the pipes.			
What brings people together? Why do different people gather around it?			

★★ Which gathers more different kinds of people: a big show from the monoculture days or your shared thing? Why?

6. Think Deeper

★ Patrick writes that the internet "blew up the well and replaced it with an ocean." What was the well, and what is the ocean? Would you rather have the well or the ocean? Why?

★★ Patrick worries that we "stopped rehearsing the skill of caring about the same thing at the same time." Why might that skill matter? How could your class or family practice it?

7. Write Your Report

Write a short report answering this question: **Is it better when everyone watches the same things, or when everyone can watch something different?**

- **My answer:**
- **Reason 1 (from the article):**
- **Reason 2 (from the article):**
- **One thing the other side would say:**
- **My conclusion:**

For Teachers and Parents: Answer Key

Word bank sentence: Answers vary; check that the student uses algorithm to mean computer rules that choose what to show someone.

1. More than a hundred million.
2. Answers vary. The monoculture was a time when almost everyone in a country watched, heard, and talked about roughly the same shows, songs, and movies at roughly the same time.
3. There were very few choices: three or four TV networks, a few dozen radio stations, one local movie theater, and one Top 40 chart. With so few channels, the biggest show was enormous, so everyone watched the same things.
4. Any two of: playlists, gaming soundtracks, fifteen-second video clips, streaming services.
5. Got better: in the old days, a small group of TV executives chose a narrow set of stories, faces, and sounds, and people outside that band were left out. Now a Korean drama can top the charts in Kansas, small groups of fans can keep a niche style of music going, and artists can build careers without a gatekeeper. Was lost: shared stories that help strangers find common ground, like everyone talking about last night's episode. Now there are many deep communities with almost no bridges between them.

Attention map (sample answers): Back then, who is watching: almost the whole country at once, such as more than a hundred million Americans watching the last M*A*S*H on the same night. Today, who is watching: everyone watches something different, each person on a personal "channel of one," and fans form many small, deep communities. Back then, who decides: a few TV networks, radio programmers, and a small number of executives who chose a narrow band of stories. Today, who decides: the algorithm, playlists, and clips, and artists can reach fans without a gatekeeper. Back then, what brings people together: there was only one well, so everyone shared the same shows and talked about them the next day. Today, what brings people together: big events people choose to join at the same time, like a World Cup, a stadium tour, a movie release that turns into a costume party, or a song everyone hears for a month. Shared-thing column and comparison: answers vary; look for specific groups of watchers, a reasonable idea of who or what decides what they see, and a clear reason people gather.

Think deeper: Open answers. For the first, the well is the small number of channels everyone shared in the old days; the ocean is the endless supply of shows, music, and videos online today. Strong answers give a reason for their choice, such as more choice and more kinds of stories (ocean) or more things in common with others (well). For the second, strong answers explain that caring about the same thing helps people understand each other and find common ground, and give a real way to practice, such as a family movie night or a class watching a big event together.

Report: Look for a clear answer and two reasons from the article. Reasons for "the same things": shared stories help strangers find common ground, the monoculture created everyday conversations that held people together, and without it people know a lot about their own corner and little about their neighbor's. Reasons for "something different": the old

system left out many stories, languages, and communities; today a Korean drama can be a hit in Kansas, small fan communities can thrive, and artists don't need a gatekeeper. A strong answer may also use Patrick's middle path: keep the choices, but show up on purpose for shared events. Check for a fair statement of the other side and a conclusion that matches the answer.