

IS IT TOO LATE TO CREATE? A STUDY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND  
ADULT CREATIVITY

by

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HONORS THESIS

Submitted to Texas State University  
in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
graduation in the Honors College  
May 2020

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thank you to my Thesis Supervisor and guiding force throughout this process, Dr. Claire Canavan. My respect for you has only grown from this experience and I would not have been able to complete my thesis without your generosity of time, thoughtful advice, and unwavering support on this project.

To my loved ones, thank you for your commitment to my growth and ensuring that I always have a support system to follow my passions and pursue my creativity. Having your support, even by way of a simple comforting text message or heartfelt phone call, reminds me to keep working towards my goals and pursue what brings me joy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .....	vii
ABSTRACT .....	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. THE GENRE AND FORMAT OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE .....	3
III. THE PROCESS OF WRITING A CHILDREN’S BOOK .....	8
IV. CHILDHOOD CREATIVITY .....	11
V. ADULT CREATIVITY .....	15
VI. METHODS FOR INCREASING CREATIVITY IN ADULTHOOD .....	20
VII. CONCLUSION .....	26
REFERENCES .....	28

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration	Page
1. <i>Is It Too Late to Create?</i> Page 9 and 10 .....	9
2. <i>Is It Too Late to Create?</i> Page 3 and 4 .....	12
3. <i>Is It Too Late to Create?</i> Page 5 and 6 .....	16
4. <i>Is It Too Late to Create?</i> Page 7 and 8 .....	17
5. <i>Is It Too Late to Create?</i> Page 13 and 14 .....	21
6. <i>Is It Too Late to Create?</i> Page 11 and 12 .....	24
7. <i>Is It Too Late to Create?</i> Page 15 and 16 .....	26
8. <i>Is It Too Late to Create?</i> Page 17 and 18 .....	27

## ABSTRACT

The following paper details the dissonance between childhood and adult creativity through in-depth discussion and research on the children's literature genre, patterns of creativity in children and adults, and methods for increasing creativity in adults. The paper correlates with the self-published book included in my thesis titled *Is It Too Late to Create?* that explores adult creativity in the children's literature format. Sections of the work include research-based discussion on the stigmas and misconceptions of children's literature and adult creativity to prove that creativity is valuable at any age. Children's literature is often considered a lesser genre due to its audience and playfulness, but these misconceptions are challenged with analysis of the format and references to renowned children's books and authors. My process of writing, illustrating, and self-publishing a book in the children's literature format is then put into perspective with this analysis of the genre. Patterns of creativity in children and adults are next explored through academic articles and secondary research studies of these populations as well as how they relate to pages from *Is It Too Late to Create?*. Finally, methods for overcoming the obstacles facing adult creativity are offered with reference to proven techniques. With these topics considered, the paper and correlating children's book establish the importance of creativity at every age.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Creativity acts as a form of inspiration, meditation, and expression all throughout our lives in different capacities. In childhood, creativity is a daily activity, encouraged by parents and teachers as an essential part of healthy development. But this outlook soon takes a turn as we enter adolescence and shift from creating for the purpose of expression to creating for a grade, then again as we enter adulthood to creating for a career. The cause of this shift can be blamed on an assortment of societal influences: from familial expectations to capitalistic definitions of success, even our own self-doubt can be the cause. Through the creation of my own children's book, a discussion of the children's literature genre, and exploration of creativity at different ages, this paper offers methods of reconnecting with childhood creativity in adulthood.

Children's literature and creativity intertwine as many books we read as children encourage and form our notions of creativity. Because of this connection, I employ the children's literature form into my thesis through a self-published book, *Is It Too Late to Create?*. The book deviates from the genre and aims to inspire adults to regain their creative spark through the traditionally child-focused format. Through cartoon-like illustrations, the book appeals to adults' nostalgia for children's literature while at the same time addressing adults' concerns of faltering creativity. Discussing the stigmas and misconceptions surrounding children's literature also exposes the aversion adults have towards childlike content and activities, hinting at why creativity is also seen as a lesser trait in adulthood.

Another key topic of my thesis is the patterns in both child and adult creativity and how these stages in our creative lives differ. Through research and discussion of



these creative patterns, I highlight their differences and similarities that may improve adult creativity. Noting the patterns in childhood that encourage creativity helps pinpoint ways we can now incorporate similar practices into our adulthood. Deconstructing the stereotypes and stigmas of adult creativity expose what insecurities keep adults from their full creative potential.

Methods of increasing creativity in adults is explored through academically supported approaches. Integrating creativity into adult life relies on understanding the societal, physical, and mental barriers of doing so. The practices I offer work against the anti-creativity influences plaguing adulthood and work to incorporate simple creative activities into everyday adult life. These include simple habits that can help boost our left-brain way of thinking and options for new creative outlets as well. Being creative as an adult is not limited simply to hobbies or stereotypically creative careers. Anything can be done creatively depending on one's mindset. These unconventional methods of creativity are often the most effective and yield the best results.

My thesis is based around my self-published children's book for adults, *Is It Too Late to Create?*, and the discussions of creativity throughout my paper. Both works discuss and challenge the shift in creativity throughout age through children's literature and research-based analysis on creative patterns.

## **II. THE GENRE AND FORMAT OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

Children's literature, specifically children's picture books, can be described by varying sets of characteristics: short prose, engaging illustration, and child-appropriate themes. As a genre, these qualities are often misinterpreted as simple, preventing adult readers from appreciating the form and the prevailing messages within these stories. These misconceptions regarding children's literature exemplify adult society's aversion to childlike activities and values, including creativity. The common characteristics of children's literature, from prose to visual aspects, encourage creativity and imagination in young readers, but these can also impact adult audiences if given the chance.

The artwork within children's books are immediate identifiers of the genre. These works employ vivid colors, engaging characters, and imaginative visuals to assist their prose and engage with the creativity of their young audience. The characters, settings, and plots of children's books establish the reader's involvement with the story through relatability and imagination. Characters are written and drawn in ways that can relate to children, often by casting the story's main character as a child or young animal, thus establishing an emotional connection with the reader. Children relate to the innocence of animals, so many children's authors and illustrators set these as their protagonists. Although children's books are typically shorter than other genres, this limited prose requires authors to write meaningful messages for children with far more conciseness and approachable language. This displays children's authors' ability to convey their point without the benefits of advanced literary devices or extensive explanations of their point. They must get their message across within the limits of the form and within the mindset of children.

Aside from the genre's visual identifiers, children's literature is also characterized by its purpose. Children's books originated in the seventeenth century as a way to spread Puritan lessons of morality (Collins 179). This usage has long been debated for the limited and often biased reflection of the single authors' morals and the discussion "continues to shape how works for children have been written and received" (Collins 179). This original purpose has since been altered for modern audiences. Modern children's books are a bit less forward with their moral lessons, either by hiding the moral lesson within the pages or by simply acting as a form of entertainment for children. The original audience has also changed since the seventeenth century. Contemporary "children's picture books are typically aimed at novice or pre-readers, and assume a dual audience: the child learning to read and an adult who is reading with and for the child," so that both the child and adult reader can engage with the work (Collins 180). This shift of audience and purpose allow for more variety in the genre. Appealing to both children and the adults assisting these young readers requires engaging material suited for both. This may be through the visuals used or the prose, as seen through "sly visual references and jokes that are intended to capture an adult reader's interest, but that are expected to go over the child's head initially" (Collins 181). As children's literature has evolved so has the authors of these works' responsibility to share balanced and unbiased messages to all their audience.

A portion of my knowledge on this topic has been formed from my time in Texas State University's Children's Literature course. Through the course's study of children's literature, both its history and contemporary iterations, I gained a greater appreciation for children's literature and the work behind this often-underrated genre. Children's books

are often categorized as a lesser facet of literature, citing their young audience and seemingly simple prose. Yet despite these commonly held misconceptions, children's literature holds just as much, if not more, importance as other areas of literary studies. With this younger readership comes greater responsibility to provide meaningful and well-guided stories, stories that bear the task of shaping new generations' mindsets and perceptions of both the world around them and their views on reading itself. For a children's author, if they choose to adhere to that title, their work not only reflects themselves but also the lessons they want to share with a malleable audience.

Despite the impact books within the genre hold, adult readers tend to perceive these works as useless past a certain age. The value and message of a story does not suddenly vanish once the reader reaches a certain age, on the contrary, these stories can take on new meanings to fit the reader's situation. Looking back on stories I read in my childhood, such as the Margery Williams' *The Velveteen Rabbit* and Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*, I now look back on the stories in completely new lights. What once was a simple story about a stuffed animal rabbit or tree is now a tale of loss, change, and devotion. Despite what the genre's name may indicate, children's literature is in no way limited to children. Adult readers instead appreciate these stories in new and distinct ways. To leave behind these stigmas of children's books as lesser, adult readers must reconnect with the mindset of younger readers, through creativity and open mindedness. Knowing these stigmas surrounding children's literature only encouraged me to write my thesis in this format. With my book, I hope to challenge the stigmas of children's literature and prove that childlike, creativity-driven works can be just as impactful and informative as works traditionally aimed towards adult audiences. Formatting my book in

this way also connects to the overall meaning of the work; creativity and adults' dwindling connection to it. What better way to remind adults of their childhood creativity than to present it in a childlike way?

The stories within children's books, while misconstrued as simple and lighthearted, can take on difficult lessons while blending with the playfulness needed to engage young readers. Examples of these intertwining themes include Maurice Sendak's renowned book *Where the Wild Things Are*, which discusses childhood anger through imagination and adventure. The story, written in 1963, deviates from the children's literature genre as Sendak describes feeling "free of the label of 'children's book writer'" while writing the story (Stoler). Sendak deviates from the genre to share more personal stories with younger audiences and adults. In a 2004 interview with *PBS*, Sendak explains his complex relationship to the children's literature genre, discussing how he "hid inside. . . this modest form called the children's book and expressed [himself] entirely" (Sendak). In a separate interview from 1980 with *Time*, Sendak voices his concerns with the children's literature label:

People tend to take children's books less seriously as a literary form. Those of us who work on children's books inhabit a kind of literary shtetl. You always have the sense that whatever you're saying is considered less because of its form. It's funny: you never hear William Faulkner described as a writer of adult books. But people like me are described as writers of children's books. Children's books are serious. *In the Night Kitchen* and *Wild Things* are as serious as I can get. I wonder if people know how serious I am. (Stoler)

These concerns regarding the genre account for Sendak's integration of adult themes into his works. Sendak incorporates adult themes, such as anger and repression as seen in *Where the Wild Things Are*, into the children's book format to share valuable lessons with his impressionable audience while also speaking to issues relatable to adult readers. By writing stories without strictly aiming them towards children, Sendak expresses himself with his writing, stating "I don't write books for children. I write them for myself. Children happen to like them" (Stoler). This is a quality I attempt to mimic in *Is It Too Late to Create?* by discussing adult concerns with creativity while engaging with the traditional children's literature form through illustration.

While the children's literature genre is typically categorized according to its audience, I, alongside Sendak, believe the genre should be better known for its lessons within the stories. Understanding and using the children's literature format as a platform for my story fits with the work's lesson of how to reconnect with childlike creativity in adulthood.

### III. THE PROCESS OF WRITING A CHILDREN'S BOOK

One of my favorite aspects of children's literature is its intertwined relationship to illustration. The inclusion of illustration allows for a both visually and textually vivid story. With these qualities and benefits of the children's literature genre in mind, I decided to write my own story within this field. The inclusion of visual art alongside the prose of my story allows for both child and adult readers to engage with the work. The more I study the genre of children's literature, the less I feel I must be confined to it. Like Sendak, I see my work as transcending age barriers and reaching a multitude of audiences. So, while I do consider *Is It Too Late to Create?* to be written in the children's literature format, I see it as a book for all ages. My process and motivations for *Is It Too Late to Create?* may not fit the traditional mold for a children's book, but despite these differences the work is heavily influenced by the genre.

In terms of my experience writing and illustrating *Is It Too late to Create?*, the process of writing a story in this format differs greatly from the academic papers I have become accustomed to throughout school. The closest writing form I can compare my story to is poetry due to the short prose and rhythmic phrasing used throughout. These poetic qualities are meant to pace the story and allow readers to spend time on both the words and illustrations of each page. I purposefully allowed myself minimal phrasing for each spread as a way of mimicking the short phrases in early children's literature. This allows the illustrations on the page to speak for themselves and enhance the writing, rather than be overshadowed by it. I admire the focus on visual art in children's books; I often find myself wishing the novels I read could have the same integration of art to stand alongside their textual descriptions as a way to engage with readers visually alongside the

text. Children's literature allows my two passions, writing and illustration, to coexist and mingle in one body of work that speaks using both.

The blending of my words and illustrations not only became my favorite part of the work, but also the most difficult part to plan. As someone who prefers to work in organized stages, planning the phrases and illustrations for each page tested my ability to textualize my ideas. I would almost immediately have a plan for the illustration and then struggle to find fitting words that matched with the page's illustration. This led to the book's poem being written as I drew for each page, instead of first writing a full poem first as I had originally planned. Although the writing process did not go as I had planned, the outcome was a more cohesive work that truly integrates the words and pictures. The challenges of the book allowed me to reassess how I normally plan and organize projects, especially since I was on my own schedule for completing the work. In the process, I inadvertently became more aware of my personal writing and illustration process and how to manage when aspects of a project do not go exactly according to plan.



**Illustration 1. Is It Too Late to Create? Pages 9 and 10.** depicting the main character excitedly admiring art supplies from outside a store window. The spread shows how the text of the page is limited and allows the illustration to be the main focal point.



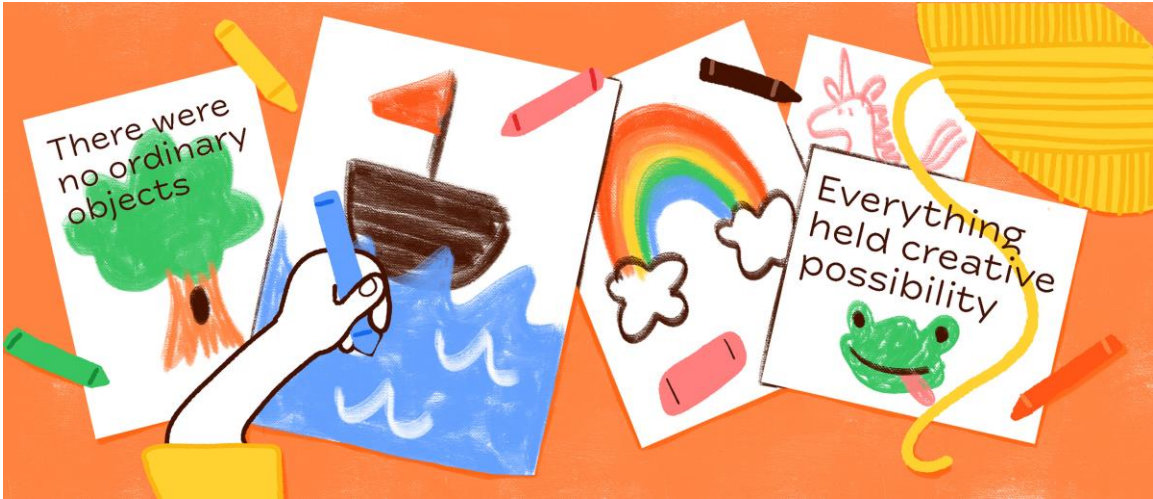
Becoming a children's book author and illustrator has long been on my list of goals. The career incorporates my loves of writing and illustration and fits my cartoon-like art style. Despite these appeals, I struggled with the financial and societal repercussions of pursuing a career in children's literature. As previously mentioned, children's books are not typically considered the peak of high art literature due to the stigmas it faces and a career in it may not yield a high paying or regular salary. Like most authors, children's books authors cannot guarantee the success of a work, so the pay can be uncertain. For these reasons, I had put this dream on the backburner of my career aspirations. These concerns of a career in children's literature also tie in with stigmas of creative careers in general. But with the opportunity to try my own hand at it and go through a beginner version of the book-making process, I have come to realize how accessible and worthwhile a career in children's literature is. Even if my book never reaches past my circle of friends and family, I will still know the impact writing it had on my creativity.

#### **IV. CHILDHOOD CREATIVITY**

For many, creativity is a cornerstone of their childhood memories. Drawing their favorite imaginary creature, building pillow forts, finger painting in their kindergarten classes, these experiences are common among children. Yet these examples of creativity-driven childhood activities beg the question as to why adult creativity is treated so negatively in comparison. What is it about pre-adolescence that makes society encourage creativity and how does this change as we age?

Society treats children according to their association with innocence. Small? Check. Physically weak? Check. Yet to be exposed to the harsh realities of life? Check. These assumptions lead adults to teach in certain ways and carefully curate what lessons are offered to their children. Creativity is one lesson that allows parents or adult guardians to shape how their child views the world. By encouraging a child to think in imaginative or creative ways, we are subtly and unknowingly discouraging negative thinking. While this is a positive lesson for children to learn, it is later harshly undone as the child enters middle school. Now faced with unavoidable problems that require more than creative thinking, the lessons of creativity drilled into their head begins to fade from memory. This is not to discourage the teaching of creative practices to children, on the contrary, these creative lessons children receive must be continued throughout their adolescence. If schools were to encourage more projects and assignments based around creative thought processes and solutions instead of following strict grading rubrics or answer keys, students may have a greater chance at maintaining their creativity as they age. Often the courses that offer the most creative learning opportunities, such as the fine

arts, are considered electives, compared to STEM courses which are usually required core courses.



**Illustration 2. *Is It Too Late to Create?* Page 3 and 4.** The pages show a child's desk covered with art supplies and colorful drawings, depicting how children's creativity is full of color and unorganized excitement.

Imagination is a prime example of how children express their creativity. The act of conjuring up imaginary friends, places, and situations speaks volumes to the uninhibited nature of creativity we experience in our youths. Children's imagination, often referred to as pretend play, can hint at the individual's creativity later in life. It is "speculated that pretend play abilities in childhood are associated with creative production in adulthood," and indicate how they will process information and handle situations due to the "[s]imilar cognitive and affective processes [that] occur in both pretend play and creative production" (Russ 22). The imaginative thought processes we establish and practice as children directly ties to our abilities to creatively problem solve later in life and thus is essential for child development. Creative thought process are often attributed to pretend play in childhood: "creative artists and scientists describe the importance of pretend play in their childhood and describe processes in their creativity that are similar to processes expressed in pretend play" showing the usefulness of these

practices (Russ 24). Pretend play not only influences how children think, but also establish positive associations with creativity. Pretend play “could set the stage for wanting to engage in creative activities and experience the joy of creation” based on the fun of the activity (Russ 24).

Aside from the shift in how parents and guardians teach children as they age, how does the child’s value of creativity and imagination change? At some point, just as the adults in the child’s life change their view of teaching, so does the child’s perception of creative thinking versus labor. As we age, the work we put into the world becomes more important than ideas we had for doing so. In a study completed in 2019, groups of adults were asked to assign ownership between the laborer and idea giver of a project. The study found that, while children below the age of six attributed more ownership to the idea giver, “adults favored the laborer over the idea giver” (Burgmer 827-28). These results “revealed a clear labor-valuation effect among adults” while 6-year-olds favored the idea behind the project more than the work done (Burgmer 827). Creativity becomes mystified as we age and “because perceivers cannot observe mental effort (i.e., generation of a creative idea) as much as they can observe physical effort (i.e., labor when executing an idea),” it becomes more difficult to pinpoint the value of creative thought (Burgmer 839-40). The valuation of labor over ideas stems from how we are taught; the product receives the grade, not the idea.

The way children perceive creativity versus adults is mainly differentiated by how each group values imagination and creative thought. The cycle for learning and unlearning creativity as we age is circular and repeats itself. Unless we are able to combat

the unlearning of creativity with ongoing practices of it at all ages, generations of children in the future will continue to struggle with creativity in their adulthood.

## V. ADULT CREATIVITY

Creativity ages just as we do. It shifts with our schedules, correlating with the stage of life we are in. Take the term “blue period” used to describe a stage of Van Gogh’s art, thus reflecting his mentality at the time. But while creativity may change in terms of style or medium throughout life, it is not always linear. Just as creativity thrived in our youth, that spark often fades with age. To counteract this shift away from creativity, we must dissect the societal and personal obstacles facing adult creativity.

Donald Capps’ article “Child’s Play: The Creativity of Older Adults” from the *Journal of Religion and Health* addresses the shift in common stimuli of creativity, such as curiosity, playfulness, and pleasure seeking and how they alter and decline with age (630). As explained with pleasure seeking, “the role and the quality of aspiration change in old age” as overall “there is a reduction in the intensity of striving” towards goals as we age due to experiences with limitations or failures that encourage self-doubt (Capps 634). In childhood, goals had no caveats or limitations, there were simply endless possibilities. With age, anxieties develop as well as a sense of realism when considering new ventures.

In terms of physical age barriers from creativity, elderly adults face the possibility of ailments such as hearing-loss, declining eyesight, and deteriorations of motor functions, but Capps argues that adapting to these obstacles in itself is an act of creativity (641). Creatives such as artist Georgia O’Keefe and poet John Milton struggled with visual impairments in their later lives, Milton going completely blind, yet both continued their work through creative and adaptive means (Capps 643-644). Some of these artists’ greatest works emerged from the time they struggled with sight through the help of

assistants and new methods of creating. While creativity may be stifled by personal or societal limitations of age, it is certainly possible for adults to create masterful creative works later in life despite physical limitations. While physical limitations of age cannot always be avoided, mental limitations on creativity can be reversed and retrained to embrace creativity in adulthood.



**Illustration 4. *Is It Too Late to Create?* Page 7 and 8.** This spread from the story shows a typical adult workspace featuring reminders of obligations and a much cleaner, professional layout compared to the previously depicted child's desk on page 3 and 4.

Capitalistic focuses on labor and money are significant barriers between adults and their creativity. Measuring creative pursuits off of their monetary value instead of their psychological value. As we age, we are subtly pushed towards traditional careers and means of earning a living by parents, educators, and peers. Children's dream jobs switch from artist to vet to corporate data analyst. While each of these career options possess their own unique form of creativity, they are viewed very differently based off of the types of creativity they employ. Creative careers, such as designers, writers, or musicians, are not seen as the typical nine-to-five jobs society has come to strive for. Instead they are viewed as a less serious or less realistic way of supporting oneself.

Society sees the professional artist as an oxymoron. Education systems also encourage this value disparity through their programs. Collegiate STEM programs often “focus on its technical aspects and theoretical concepts instead of developing creativity” in their students (Silvia 117). The Pew Research Center found that “the median earnings for college graduates with an arts and humanities bachelor’s degree are about \$50,000,” and “\$68,000 for those with undergraduate degrees in science, engineering and related fields” (Grieco). This monetary difference is a clear statement on how creative fields are viewed as lesser in comparison. Much of this focus on profitability stems from capitalist values. Capitalist societal values of individualism, ownership, and labor are reflected in how children are raised to view their creativity as contributions to that society. This shift is relayed in my book’s plot, as the story continues, we see the main character’s artistic side fade with age. From the initial excitement shared between child and parent for a drawing, comes disdain for the main character’s interest in art instead of schoolwork and lucrative work. Children are receiving mixed signals from adults; creativity is acceptable to a certain point, until that creativity distracts from stereotypical ideas of success.





**Illustration 3. *Is It Too Late to Create?* Page 5 and 6.** The pages depict the growth of the main character from a child, teenager, college graduate, and finally suitcase-clad adult as the guiding figure in their life gives them less and less encouragement for their creativity.

The valuation of adult creations is often the biggest obstacle to tackle for those struggling with their creativity. Even if one builds the courage to attempt creativity in adulthood, the value of these works is often undermined by society's idea of value and what is worthwhile. In the labor-focused society that capitalism entails, many creative endeavors are seen as fruitless and within this capitalistic structure, any activity that does not result in measurable value is a waste of time. Pascal Burgmer's article "Ideas Are Cheap: When and Why Adults Value Labor over Ideas" questions the valuation of effort in creativity. Not only has capitalism invaded how we view the monetary value of art, but also the physical labor required to complete a piece of art. The argument against these capitalistic values is not to undermine works of labor or science, "by no means stop appreciating effort and hard work, but rather take some time to consider the invisible labor done by creative minds as well" (Burgmer 840). Because "perceivers cannot observe mental effort (i.e., generation of a creative idea) as much as they can observe physical effort" the creative process behind a project is not always as celebrated as the result (Burgmer 839-840). Therefore, pieces that may appear simplistic may go underappreciated. This devaluing of simple or imperfect art further alienates those seeking to try new mediums. Each of these obstacles factor into the sense of guilt felt from creating for pleasure and not for value.

Creative guilt goes hand-in-hand with self-doubt, the fear that what you make will not be as good or as worthy as someone else's. In Steven Pressfield's book *War of Art*, he discusses and challenges self-doubt and other obstacles of creativity through short but

impactful chapters. Pressfield argues that “[s]elf-doubt can be an ally” and “serves as an indicator of aspiration” (39). Instead of casting a shadow on your creative aspirations it proves your desire to excel in it. Self-doubt and fear of failure leads people to never try in the first place. Art does not have to be skillful or famous to be valuable, the value lies in its effect on your mentality.

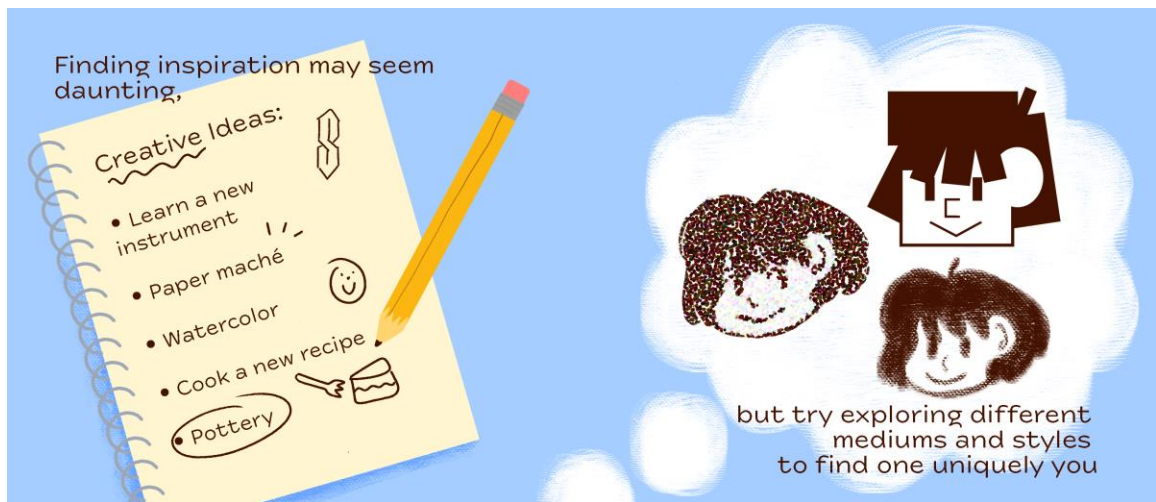
Adult perceptions of creativity, although deterred by societal influences, are not unfixable. The creative thought processes we used as children are just as accessible and instrumental to our wellbeing as ever, the only differences are the made-up limitations society puts between adults and their creativity.

## **VI. METHODS FOR INCREASING CREATIVITY IN ADULTHOOD**

Returning to one's childlike creative mindset is harder said than done. The process can take time and effort to fully reintegrate creativity into adult life, but once done the methods yield worthwhile results. Becoming more creative as an adult is not as glamorous as self-help books may make it look, getting back into our creative habits can be messy and full of mistakes. The art and creative ideas we initially come up with may not be our best but consider these warm-ups for future creations. These research-based methods provided by renowned creatives are stepping off points for reigniting adult creativity and when put to the test can improve the damaged relationship between adults and creativity.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the adult environment is a major deterrent restricting adults' willingness to be creative. The stressors adults face limit much of the stimulus needed to increase creativity. Certain environmental factors work against these stressors and enhance creativity. Data gathered from a 2014 study was "designed to focus on the environmental context of becoming creative as interpreted psychologically by the participants" as they underwent surveys and tests to evaluate what increased their creativity (DeRobertis 137). The study's procedures proved that "creativity is most likely to occur when three internal (psychological) conditions are present: openness to experience, an internal locus of evaluation, and the ability to experiment with things and ideas" (DeRobertis 138). These three factors foster an environment conducive to creativity, in both children and adults. Yet these factors are more commonly experienced during childhood. Children are faced with less critical judgement than adults when it comes to creative endeavors. Childhood environments offer acceptance unrelating to

monetary or academic value and do not rely as heavily on outside evaluation, a trend that begins in later academic settings through grading. In order to recreate these environments and factors in adulthood, adults must challenge society's stigmas and misconceptions surrounding creativity by seeking value from themselves and not society. Participants also found an "exciting allure that was connected to the promise of producing something novel": creativity can be encouraged simply by looking at an opportunity as a way to create something unique and new (DeRobertis 140). In treating creative activities as a chance to display originality and innovation, adults are much more likely to participate. Incorporating this excitement for innovation into daily activities can act as incentive for being more creative.



**Illustration 5. *Is It Too Late to Create?* Page 13 and 14.** These pages offer a variety of creative activities the reader can try as well as different examples of artistic mediums that may help form the reader's personal art style.

As professional dancer and choreographer Twyla Tharp mentions in her book *The Creative Habit*, one of the most intimidating obstacles a creative can face is the fear of the blank canvas. The fear of beginning a creative endeavor can prevent one from pursuing the project at all (Tharp 5). This fear often stems from self-doubt and can

become an artist's greatest enemy when attempting to reclaim their creativity. To diminish the intimidation surrounding new projects, Tharp emphasizes the importance of knowing "how to prepare to be creative" (Tharp 9). Sure, you could try tackling the empty space head on, but by practicing and training your mind with creative exercises the blank canvas will not seem so intimidating in the first place. These practices are part of a "process that generates creativity—and you can learn it," thus making it habitual (Tharp 9). Specific methods she offers include the forming of creative rituals, "automatic but decisive patterns of behavior—at the beginning of the creative process," that stave off the fear of creating and initiate creativity (Tharp 15). Another option is to list fears and distractions that prevent us from pursuing our creativity. This can include addressing your fear of failure or cutting out multitasking from your creative routine, both of which can help you refocus on positive creative stimuli (Tharp 26). Exercises in building creative habits are offered throughout her book, each meant to form lasting routines that make creativity easier to approach and integrate into adult life.

Creative career options are steadily becoming more accessible and lucrative through new forms of work. A major limitation of creativity in adulthood is how it is regarded as a career in society. Through lower wages and negative social stereotypes, creatives are constantly reminded of how little their work is valued. While careers in STEM fields still earn on average higher paid salaries, those interested in artistic careers have many more options in the contemporary job market through freelancing and a growing need for creatives in existing fields. Creative careers often entail freelancing alongside unrelated part-time jobs. These "practices of multiple jobs with low-paying wages made pursuing creative occupations risky and tenuous," but recently "the

precarious economic status of artists was, to some degree, stabilized by establishing public patronage and commissioning support systems” (Wyszomirski 5). While these changes are beneficial to the number of opportunities for those pursuing artistic careers, it comes at the price of uncertainty. Margaret Wyszomirski comments on this change in her paper “Professional Self-Structuration in the Arts: Sustaining Creative Careers in the 21st Century”:

Today, working in the arts places one on an unclear and uncertain career path that belies the norms of a sequenced succession of jobs, acquired skills, and other characteristics of conventional occupational careers. Career success has often been viewed as highly unpredictable and prone to a “star system” in which exceptional rewards and recognition seemed to accrue only to a lucky few.

(Wyszomirski 5)

This uncertainty in the success of a creative career is what keeps many from pursuing them fully. Despite these uncertainties, careers in the arts are increasing in value as society evolves.

Even if art is not the backbone of your career, creativity can be implemented in the workplace through divergent and imaginative thinking. Creative problem solving is a key component of every job, a quality that employers look for when hiring. A myth of creativity pointed out in R. Keith Sawyer’s book *Explaining Creativity* is that in order to be considered creative, one must fit within the widely held mold of what a creative is. Who is this creative we all picture in our heads? According to Sawyer, “most readers are likely to hold to the modern conception of the artist—a unique and inspired individual who expresses and communicates his or her unique vision through the artwork” (15).

This image of the artist assumes that to be creative art must be your livelihood and that everything you produce must come out as a one of a kind masterpiece. On the contrary, every individual and career field has the potential for creativity, not merely the painters or poets we may identify with it. Tharp also discusses this misconception. She recognizes how others in different fields may face creative slumps, thus offering solutions for all career types. As she mentions, “[c]reativity is not just for artists,” it is for “businesspeople looking for a new way to close a sale; it’s for engineers trying to solve a problem; it’s for parents who want their children to see the world in more than one way” (Tharp 7). Each of these, although not the stereotypical creative careers, apply creativity to what they do.



**Illustration 6. *Is It Too Late to Create?* Page 11 and 12.** The spread shows two different aspects of creativity. The left an example of creativity in the workplace through a progress report, while on the right creativity through a relaxing hobby.

Just as creativity and artistry are not limited by profession, they also extend past the creations we see in museums. Creativity takes shape in many ways, from a messy attempt at pottery to a paint-by-number recreation of a well-known piece. Creativity is not validated based off skill, rather how it makes you feel. Integrating creativity on a regular basis can be simple. These can include the “creative things people do in everyday

life, such as dabbling with musical instruments, scrapbooking, fiddling around with recipes, or making cat memes” (Silvia 113). Although mundane, these small creative acts can have significant impact on our mental health when done regularly. Creativity does not have to be done in a professional, lucrative, or competitive to be important. Creative outlets act as stress relief and can improve mental health. In the past year, I took up crochet solely to ease anxiety and build dexterity. Separating my crocheting as purely a hobby and way to relax took the pressure away from it having to be perfect. Self-doubt and the other forms of anxieties that limit adult creativity can be remedied simply by readjusting how we view what we make.

Implementing creative habits and practices into adult life has many benefits, not only for our careers, but our mental health and wellbeing. The value of creativity is immeasurable and considering the many ways it can be added into everyday routines, the process is well-beyond worthwhile. Creativity, while easy to lose track of in adulthood, “is one of the most positive, life-affirming traits of humanity, and people in all walks of life report that they feel at their peak and in flow when they are being their most creative” (Sawyer 10). Creativity is far from lost and our connection to it can be regained, it just takes a conscious effort to incorporate into adult life.



## VII. CONCLUSION

Creativity, in both senses of art and ideas, has immense impact on our lives at all ages. As shown through discussions of children's literature and childhood creative patterns, creativity was initially a learned process, which thus can be relearned. The benefits of doing so, as detailed throughout the paper, prove the value of addressing and challenging the stigmas facing creativity. Both personal and societal stereotypes of creativity lead to its rejection in adulthood, yet these stereotypes are changing as people become aware of the benefits of creative thinking and careers. The research provided by accredited creatives validates the argument for adult creativity and offers methods of increasing creativity. Alongside my self-published children's book, *Is It Too Late to Create?*, my paper emphasizes the importance of creativity in adulthood.



**Illustration 7. *Is It Too Late to Create?* Page 15 and 16.** On the left, the character's younger and adult self interact by sharing a paintbrush, symbolizing the handing off of creativity from one to the other. The adult character is now connected to their younger self and creativity.

Creativity's association with childhood is one of its many obstacles in integrating with adulthood. Adults must address the negative stereotypes of childlike behavior to accept creativity into their lives. While creativity connects us to our childlike selves and

memories of childhood, it is not a lesser activity because of this and is not limited to childhood. These stigmas of creativity relate to adult stigmas of childlike behavior and must be challenged in similar ways. Childlike and creative aspects of life are equal in value to others that society deems valuable. Just as the children's literature genre is viewed as lesser in value to other genres, childlike activities and creativity are undervalued. These stigmas are challenged and proven wrong throughout the paper and act as motivation for adults to embrace these aspects of themselves.



**Illustration 8. *Is It Too Late to Create?* Page 17 and 18.** The final pages of the book emphasize retaining creative practices throughout adulthood, no matter the stressors. On the left showing the stressors that may be on the character's mind, such as money or schedules, while still showing them pursuing creative activities on the right page.

With the research and methods provided, the paper emphasizes the importance of creativity at all ages and advises on how it can be regained. The stressors of adulthood, although distracting, must not prevent adults from embracing their childlike and creative sides. Instead, these pressures of adult life act as reasoning for adults to practice creativity and improve their mental health through it. Based on the discussions of creativity's benefits, and the various methods for practicing it, it is never too late to create.

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