

The Great Brain



By

John D. Fitzgerald

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

The Great Brain

By John D. Fitzgerald

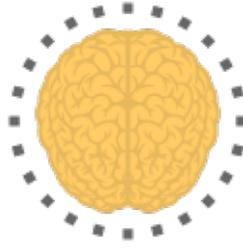


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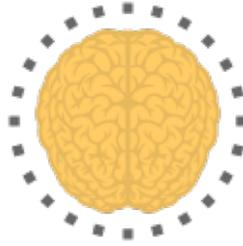
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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on 1 chapter of *The Great Brain* and is comprised of five of the following activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases... including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story ... **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include loyalty and friendship, courage, racism and tolerance, the importance of community, personal growth.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Identify *anagrams*
8. Listing compound words
9. Identifying parts of speech
10. Identify/create *similes*
11. Identification of root words

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.
6. Complete a Story Pyramid

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

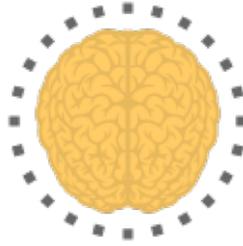
1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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Synopsis

The best con man in the Midwest . . . And he's only ten years old. Tom, a.k.a. The Great Brain, is a silver-tongued genius with a knack for turning a profit. When several boys from school get lost in Skeleton Cave, the Great Brain saves the day. When Mr. Standish, the new schoolteacher, turns out to be the meanest thing on two legs, everyone knows that he'll regret the day he faced the Great Brain. Whether it's saving the kids at school or helping out Pegleg Andy or the new kid in school, Basil, the Great Brain always manages to come out on top – and lines his pockets in the process. [Courtesy of the publisher]

Author Biography

John D. Fitzgerald

John D. Fitzgerald was born in Utah and lived there until the age of eighteen, when he began a series of interesting careers ranging from jazz drummer to foreign correspondent. He wrote several adult best-sellers, including *Papa Married a Mormon*, which was set in the same Utah environment as the Great Brain books. His most beloved works, however, are his children books, which have been enormously popular since Dial's first publication of *The Great Brain* in 1967. By 1975, Fitzgerald had published six more Great Brain books; a seventh, *The Great Brain is Back*, was discovered and published after his death. John D. Fitzgerald died in Florida, his home of many years, at the age of eighty-one.



[Biography courtesy of the publisher]

The Great Brain



By John D. Fitzgerald

Name: _____

The Great Brain

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Chapter 1



Before you read the chapters:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The main character of *The Great Brain* is Tom Fitzgerald a ten-year-old con man, bent on swindling every nickel from all of the kids of his hometown of Adenville, Utah. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. Who would you say is your *most favorite* character ever? What made you select this character?

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Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

| | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| denounce | dumbfounded | conniving | capitalize |
| catastrophe | contraption | indignant | skeptical |

1. Mama was quite _____ when we told her how our neighbor had insulted her cooking.
2. Our teacher, Mrs. Smythe, was completely _____ at Cindy's unusual question.
3. Most of the people were quick to _____ the dictator's cruel deeds.
4. Tom was quite a _____ little swindler.
5. I think most of the class were quite _____ about whether he could be trusted.
6. The pop bottle experiment turned out to be a _____ for our group.
7. The Chicago Black Hawks failed to _____ on their power play.
8. That was quite a _____ Sam built for the Science Fair.

Questions



1. Describe the **setting** of the story in Chapter One.

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2. What did J.D. and his brothers rely on to ensure that the other boys in Adenville were tolerant and understanding?

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3. What was Papa's biggest weakness?

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4. What was Mr. Harvey doing in the Fitzgeralds' backyard?

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| |

5. Today we call a water closet a _____.

6. What business venture did Tom come up with as a result of Mr. Arnold's presence. How did he involve J.D.?

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7. Describe how his plan backfired. Do you think this was fair of his mother? Why or why not?

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8. Why did the Fitzgeralds' new water closet attract so much attention in town?

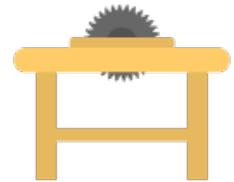
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Language Activities



A. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in the first chapter of *The Great Brain*.

| Word | Anagram | Clue |
|---------|---------|--------------------------------|
| male | | Breakfast. |
| resent | | More uptight. |
| golden | | Yearned. |
| closets | | Not too far away. |
| thrust | | Certitudes. |
| arms | | Male sheep. |
| brains | | Scottish for <i>children</i> . |

Now find two additional words from the first chapter which have interesting anagrams to see if you can stump a classmate.

| Word | Anagram | Clue |
|------|---------|------|
| | | |
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B. A Quatrain Poem Celebrates Brains.

The **quatrain** is a popular form of rhymed verse. It is a poem of four lines, is usually light and can be humorous. The following quatrain is the first four lines of the famous poem, *My Brain*, written by the famous poet, Atrocious Halitosis.

*My brain's so big my head did swell,
You bet - it serves me very well.
I finished school when I was ten,
But they sent me back to start again.*



Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A - A - B - B**. Other rhyming schemes include: ABAB, AAAA, AABA, ABBA, ABBA, and AAAB.

Your task is to write your own quatrain poem. You may choose a rhyming scheme that fits with your own personal creation. The theme should have something to do with the themes established in the first chapter of our novel (like *con man* or *toilets*).

The Quatrain Poem

Title: _____

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Bonus Question.

What clue do we have in the above poem that the poet may not be as smart as he/she thinks?

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C. A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. An example from Chapter One is: ... *in a house that smelled like a backhouse?*

What is being compared in this example?

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Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) the flushing of a toilet

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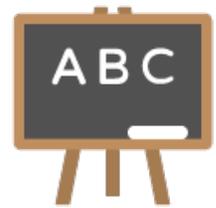
b) the taste of an oatmeal cookie

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c) your choice

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D. Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here's one such example: from Chapter 1: ... *Tom and I were on our big back porch.*



Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| The taste of a sour pickle. | |
| The sound of a horse neighing. | |
| Your choice. | |

E. 5 Ws and an H.

Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

Extension Activity



Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A story-board can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel. Complete the story-board below illustrating the events described in the first chapter of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 |
| 5 | 6 |