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Teacher Activity

Thinking About Our Thinking

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- roleplay situations in which teens and adults may behave differently and consider why;
- read to understand how the teenage brain develops;
- consider how the science of the teenage brain may affect decision-making;
- develop and justify an opinion on the importance of understanding their own brains.

Overview

In this activity, students will explore how their thinking works and the science behind their decisions. Students will begin by reading an article that introduces the idea that adolescents should try to understand their own brains and then will be challenged to decide whether they agree with this assertion. In pursuit of finding additional evidence to support or refute their opinion, groups will rotate through a series of stations that highlight the differences between adolescent and adult brains and introduce students to the science of what is happening in their brains. The session will conclude with an independent reflection in which students use their notes from the station activities to develop their own written response to whether teenagers should understand their own brains and why.

Grade Range

5–8

Timing

60 minutes

Materials Needed

- Capture Sheet, one per student
- Why Teens Should Understand Their Own Brains article, (tinyurl.com/teensandtheirbrains), one per student
- Station Materials, set up in advance in different sections of the classroom
 - Station 1:
 - Station 1 Sheet, eight copies
 - Station 2:
 - Station 2 Sheet, eight copies
 - Station 3:
 - Station 3 Sheet (half-page), eight copies



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- Devices with internet access, four
 - Station 4:
 - Station 4 Sheet (half-page), eight copies
 - Excerpts* from The Human Brain is Literally Awesome article (tinyurl.com/thebrainisawesome), enough for half the class
- *Specifically, the sections titled:
- Brain Structure Changes During Adolescence
 - How Does Brain Organization Change During Adolescence?
 - Independent Reflection sheet, one per student

Procedure

1. Warm-Up Activity

- Begin by passing out a copy of the *Why Teens Should Understand Their Own Brain* article to each student.
- Read the article's headline aloud, and then instruct students to read the article and annotate (highlight or underline) for details that will help them decide whether they agree or disagree with the author's assertion.

Tip: *Depending on the age and ability level of your class, students may read the article in pairs or together as a full class.*

- When students are done reading, take a quick class-wide vote to gauge students' immediate impressions. After learning who agrees, who disagrees, and who is unsure of the author's opinion that teens should understand their own brain, ask students to share details from the text to support their reasoning.
2. Explain that students will now rotate through four different stations in pursuit of additional evidence around whether or not teens should understand their own brain. To prepare students for their station activity:
- Show students where they can find each of the four stations.
 - Explain that each station contains a set of directions. The first step each group should perform at each station is to carefully read the directions.
 - Pass out one Capture Sheet to each student. Explain that they will record notes on their Capture Sheet at the end of their time at each station. This is included in the station directions.
 - Divide the class into eight groups, and explain that two groups will work side-by-side at each station.
3. Then give each group a station at which to begin (two groups per station). Explain that groups will have about 10 minutes at each station, and instruct them to get started!
4. Set a timer to keep groups on track, and give a warning when two minutes remain so students have time to jot on their Capture Sheets. Then guide groups in rotating to the next station until groups have visited all four stations.
5. Wrap-Up: Finish the session by passing out the Independent Reflection sheet and encourage students to reflect on what they have learned. This sheet may either be used as an Exit Sheet that students pass in at the end of the session, or it may be assigned as homework so students can continue their reflection at home.



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Extensions

Share the following resources with your students to help them continue exploring the connection between their own brains and healthy decision making:

- Lesson Plan: [The Impact of Peer Pressure](#)
- Video: [How Alcohol Affects Your Developing Brain](#)

National School Standards

National Health Education Standards

- Standard 8: Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health, and other factors.

Common Core ELA Standards

- W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Should pre-teens and teens try to understand their own brains?

You will rotate through four stations as you collect evidence to help you develop a response. At each station, jot notes to answer the questions listed in the boxes below.

Station 1

Based on what you role-played, how do you think pre-teens and teens generally make decisions? In other words: What influences them?

Station 3

There are reasons behind why pre-teens and teens make the decisions that they do... and many of them have to do with the brain! Jot notes about this brain science below.

Station 2

Based on what you role-played, how do you think adults generally make decisions? In other words: What influences them?

Station 4

How does the brain change during adolescence? Record the gist of two or three changes:

Step 1

Take turns roleplaying at least three of the situations below. Try to vary the actors so everyone has a chance to participate. For each one, roleplay how you believe most pre-teens or teens would behave (and not how they *should* behave).

- Your friends are having a sleepover on Saturday night. You ask your parents if you can go, and they say they would like you to spend time with your family instead. How do you respond?
- You're at a birthday party, and one of the older kids holds up a cup and says there's alcohol in the drink. They ask if you want some. How do you respond?
- You're trying out for the basketball team. One of your peers just told you that your friend is telling people that you'll never make the team. How do you respond?
- Your sibling borrowed something you love and lost it. You're so angry. How do you respond?
- You're at the convenience store and your friend really wants a soda. Neither of you has enough money. Your friend says they can just stick it under their sweatshirt and no one will notice. How do you respond?

Step 2

Discuss the following questions with your group members:

- Why do you think pre-teens/teens would respond in these ways?
- Who or what can influence your decision-making?
- Do you think pre-teens and teens are more likely to react based on their emotions or based on their thoughts and reasoning? Why?

Step 3

Think about what you discussed at this station. Then jot on your Capture Sheet how you think pre-teens and teens generally make decisions. In other words: What influences them?

Step 1

Take turns roleplaying at least three of the situations below. Try to vary the actors so everyone has a chance to participate. For each one, roleplay how you believe most adults would behave.

- One of your friends invited you to a barbeque on Saturday, and you're really looking forward to it. You mention the party to your best friend, and they said they would prefer to spend the night just with you because you have been busy lately. How do you respond?
- You're at a birthday party and the host asks you if you'd like to have an alcoholic drink. You know you shouldn't because you have to drive home. How do you respond?
- You are trying out for the town basketball league. Someone just told you that one of your neighbors is telling people that you'll never make the team. How do you respond?
- Your sibling borrowed something you love and lost it. You're so angry. How do you respond?
- You're at the convenience store with your family and your child really wants a snack. But you just realized you left your wallet at home! Your child is beginning to get upset. How do you respond?

Step 2

Discuss the following questions with your group members:

- Why do you think adults would respond in these ways?
- If you were in the shoes of an adult, what do you think would impact your decision-making?
- Do you think adults are more likely to react based on their emotions or based on their thoughts and reasoning? Why?

Step 3

Think about what you discussed at this station. Then jot down on your Capture Sheet how you think adults generally make decisions? In other words: What influences them?

Station 3—The Brain & Decision Making

STUDENT CAPTURE SHEET

Watch the *Why the Teenage Brain has an Evolutionary Advantage* video available at youtu.be/P629TojpvDU.

As you watch, listen for how the science of the teenage brain influences decision-making.

Pause the video every minute to jot notes on your Capture Sheet.

Share your notes with your group members if time remains once the video is complete.

Station 4—Brain Changes

STUDENT CAPTURE SHEET

With a partner, read the excerpts from *The Adolescent Brain is Literally Awesome* article. It's okay if you don't understand every word... The goal is to get the gist!

As you read, annotate (highlight or underline) how the brain changes during adolescence. Then use these annotations to fill out your Capture Sheet.

