**Phineas Gage by John Fleischman**  
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002  

**Personal Phrenology Chart During Reading Activity**

**Context**  
This instructional routine helps students make a text-to-self connection with *Phineas Gage*. Part of the book discusses what scientists have discovered about the brain and what they used to believe; phrenology is one of those explanations. Phrenology, or “localized function,” is the belief that “the brain is divided into specific areas that control specific things” (35). This differs from current brain understanding in that these categories of the brain controlled personality traits such as self-esteem, kindness, and spirituality. People used to feel the bumps on their heads and look at a phrenology chart; the larger the bump, the bigger the virtue. With this activity, students will act as if phrenology were real and create their own Personal Phrenology Charts.

**Statement of Purpose**  
This Personal Phrenology Chart is a during-reading activity to help students connect text-to-self. Students will reflect on aspects and attributes that are important in their own lives. Students will also share these phrenology charts, which will help build classroom community. The Personal Phrenology Chart corresponds with the following Common Core Anchor Standards:

- Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Writing 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**Directions**

**Main Idea:** Before scientists understood the different parts of the brain, phrenology was a common explanation for how our brains work. On page 35, phrenology (or “localized function”) is explained in more detail. Phrenologists believed that certain parts of your brain controlled certain parts of your personality, such as “kindness.” Phrenology charts, like the one on page 36, was a way that people tested their personality; the larger the bump on their head in the spot that corresponds on the chart, the larger the personality trait.

**Materials needed:**
- Handouts
- Paper
- Pens, colored pencils, markers, or other art supplies
- Writer’s notebooks

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**Time:** Full class period

**Steps for Completion:**

1. Have students free-write in writer’s notebooks: Describe yourself. What do you like to do? What are you good at? (5 minutes)

2. Explain phrenology as found on pages 35–36 of *Phineas Gage*. Tell students that, using a model of a phrenology chart, they are going to make their own. Their phrenology charts don’t have to be scientifically accurate at all—this is more of an “about me” activity. Have students brainstorm some traits or hobbies that are important to them on the handout. (15 minutes)

3. Have students draw their own phrenology charts. They can trace the picture on the handout or they can create their own themselves. (30 minutes)

4. Have students write a one-paragraph reflection on their handouts, explaining the choices that they made. (10 minutes or homework)

5. When finished, display phrenology charts around the classroom.

**Assessment**

The finished phrenology charts will show students’ ability to connect to the text by reflecting on the parts of them that makes them who they are. The paragraph reflection will assess that there was some thought and meaning involved in the categories that they chose.
**Phineas Gage**

Personal Phrenology Charts

**Categories/Traits/Hobbies** (include at least 6):

1. __________________________

2. __________________________

3. __________________________

4. __________________________

5. __________________________

6. __________________________

**Reflection**

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Personal Phrenology Chart

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