

Mixed-Media Brain Portraits Inspired by Aleah Chapin

A HANDS-ON ART ACTIVITY
DESIGNED BY MONA
EDUCATORS

Materials

- [Video: Beautiful 3-D Brain Scans Show Every Synapse](#)
- [Video: Brain Imaging](#)
- Thick black (letter size) paper
- White pencils
- Oil pastels
- Permanent markers
- Polystyrene sheets (Shrinky Dink paper) cut into 2"x2" pieces (or adjust to match your paper size)
- Toaster oven or oven
- White glue
- Scissors
- Thick white (letter size) paper
- Printed brain coloring sheets (included at the end of this lesson)



*Student examples from Lucille Umbarger Elementary
Source: Shaina Langley*

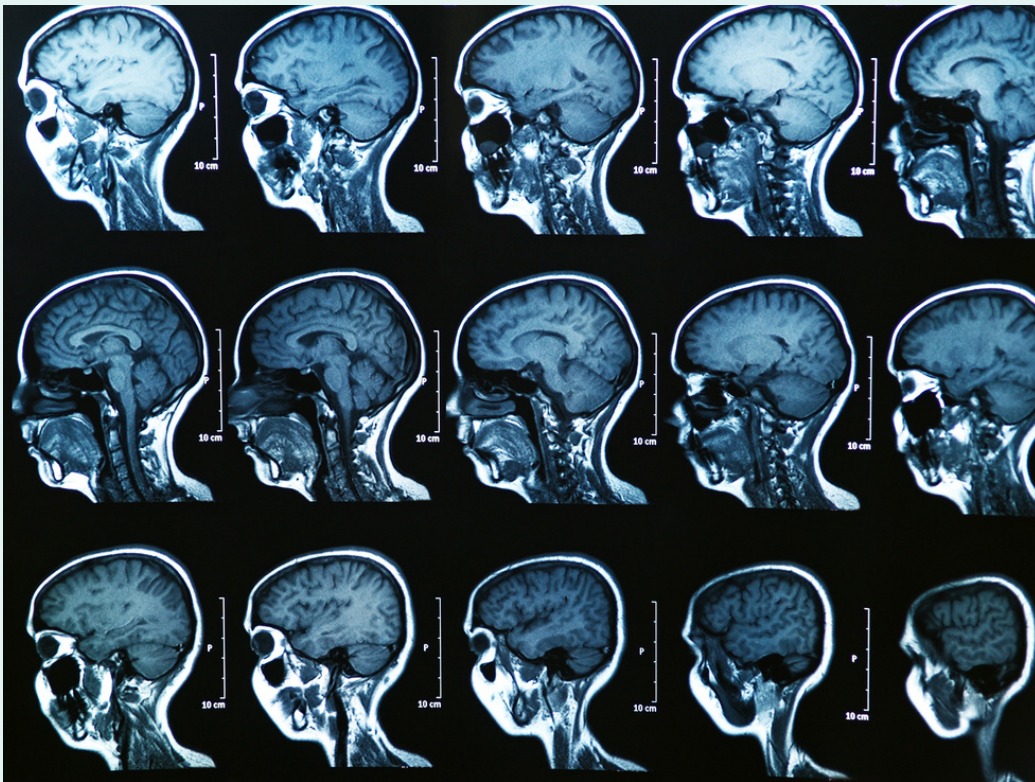
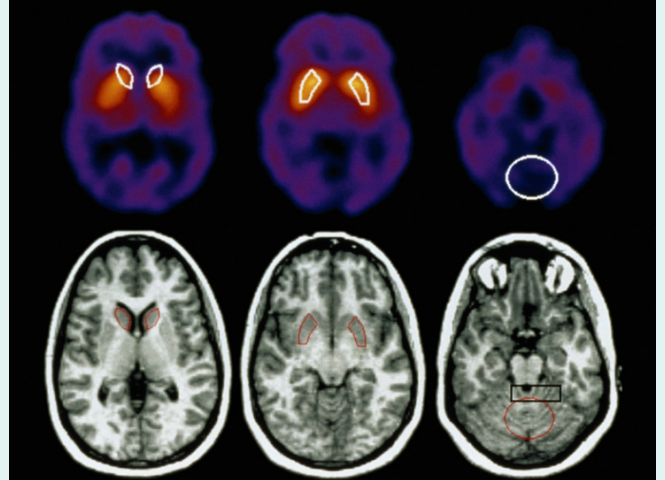
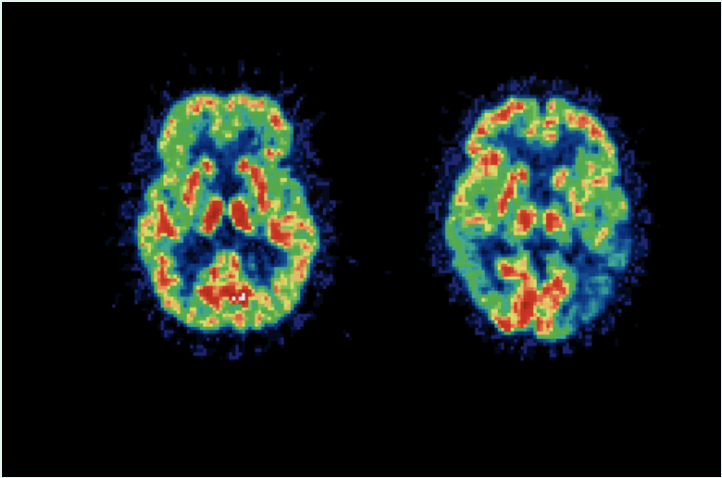
Description

During this activity, students will learn about their brains and explore some of the ways that art is connected to nature and science. Using the abstract self-portraits of Aleah Chapin as inspiration, students will make mixed-media portraits of their brains, including symbols of their interests and personalities.

Instructions

- 1)** Begin the lesson by showing students the attached videos on brain scanning and 3D imaging. You can also invite students to color in the brain coloring sheet with their oil pastels as a way to start the lesson or as a filler activity if they finish before other students or are waiting for their polystyrene sheets to bake or cool.
- 2)** Show students *The Enfolding* and *The Purging* by Aleah Chapin and use VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) to look closer and be inspired by her mixed-media work. Full size images of her art and information about VTS are included at the end of this lesson. After the VTS, please take a few moments to refer back to the brain scan videos and discuss/brainstorm what makes each student an individual (ie how our brains are similar and different, etc).
- 3)** Pass out black paper and oil pastels. You will need to either project or print out images of brain scans and brain anatomy to help students draw their brain's parts and functions. They can use the oil pastels in various colors to make a range of textures and patterns. Students may choose to draw additional interests and activities inside their brain shape before drawing 1-2 in the next step on the polystyrene sheets.
- 4)** Students will choose 1-2 symbols that represent activities or interests that are unique to them to draw with permanent markers on the sections of polystyrene sheets.
 - Adult help/supervision required: put the polystyrene sheets into an oven (after students have drawn their designs) to shrink the plastic and make it stiff. Follow the directions on the package.
- 5)** Once they have cooled, students will glue these on to their finished products.
- 6)** When their brain portrait is finished, they can cut it out and use the glue to mount it on the thick white paper.
- 7)** Once all the students have finished their portraits, allow them time to share their work with the class and explain the elements they chose to include on their brain scans, as well as their reasoning behind the placements.

Examples of Brain Scan Images



Learning and State Standards

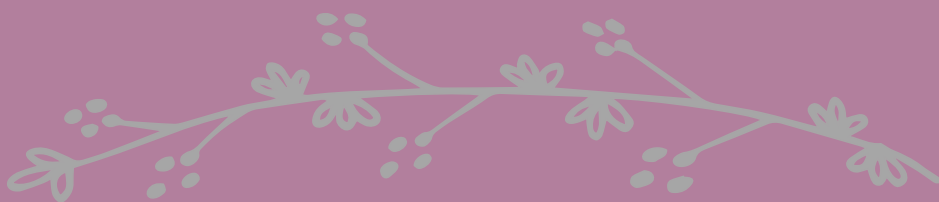
Fulfills **Washington State Arts Learning Standards:**

- **VA:Cr2.1.4** (Explore and invent art-making techniques and approaches)
- **VA:Cr2.2.4** (When making works of art, utilize and care for materials, tools, and equipment in a manner that prevents danger to oneself and others)

About the Artist: Aleah Chapin



Aleah Chapin is a portrait artist based in the Pacific Northwest. Raised on an island north of Seattle, Chapin's art has always been influenced by the light and landscape of the Pacific Northwest. She received her BFA from Cornish College of the Arts in 2009 and her MFA from the New York Academy of Art in 2012. Her work has been featured in exhibitions all over the world, and she was awarded the BP Portrait Award at the National Portrait Gallery in London, England in 2012.



”What you see in these paintings is a mirror of what I’ve been going through as an artist and as a human, really.”

-Aleah Chapin





The Enfolding, Aleah Chapin
Image Source: Aleah Chapin



The Purging, Aleah Chapin
Image Source: Aleah Chapin

Visual Thinking Strategies

MoNA's Education programs utilize Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), which is a research-based teaching method that promotes aesthetic development including critical thinking and communication skills. Here in the MoNA, we use VTS to engage students and general visitors with art encouraging them to observe closely, think critically and discuss respectfully; however, VTS can be effectively used across curricula. This approach teaches its participants how to take the time to observe closely, describe what they see in detail and provide evidence for their observations. Students learn that their reflections and thoughts are valued and appreciated in this inclusive teaching method.

In order to facilitate a VTS discussion, you first encourage viewers to take a quiet moment to observe the work you are going to explore. Then you ask the following questions and paraphrase the responses without adding any of your own judgements. You can insert additional vocabulary and point to specific parts of the artwork.

What's going on in this picture?

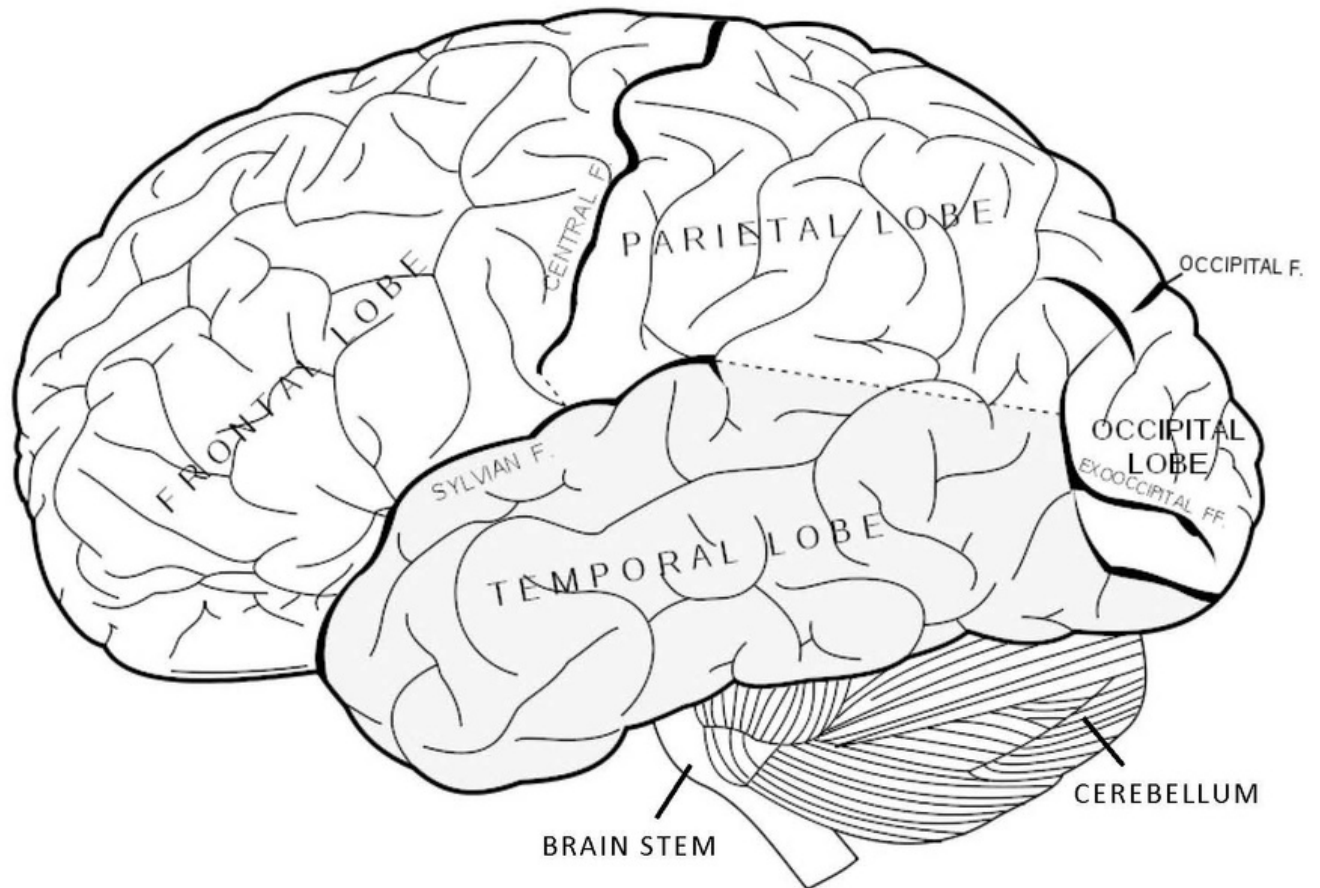
What do you see that makes you say...?

What more can you find?

Visual Thinking Strategy Links

If you are interested in learning more about VTS, [here is their website](#). If you already know and love VTS, but want help finding great images to use in your classroom, here is a [fantastic gallery](#). You can also visit this website for additional resources: www.monamuseum.org/resources-for-educators

Brain COLORING Sheet!



Frontal Lobe: Complex thinking, like reasoning, planning, and imagining

Parietal Lobe: Processes messages related to touch, taste, and temperature; controls muscle movement

Occipital Lobe: Processes sight

Temporal Lobe: Process hearing; memory retrieval

Cerebellum: Coordinates balance and fine movements

Brain Stem: Regulates vital functions, like heartbeat and breathing

Source:

<https://cohenlab.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/9761/2018/11/Brain-coloring-sheet.jpg>