



# What's on your mind?

This is a classic picture stimulus that never fails to engage interest and generate dialogue. It works with young people from Key Stage Three right through to adults.

Both the idea of phrenology and the image of a phrenology head are rich in possibilities, but this picture is extra rich because it shows the cover of a popular nineteenth century phrenological journal, and this has slogans like 'Home Truths for Home Consumption' and 'Know Thyself'. Here's one way to use this stimulus.

## 1. Provoke some discovery thinking

It can go up on the screen, but its good to print off copies so small groups can gather around the image for a couple of minutes to try to make sense of it. It is beneficial to let them struggle and then have them feed back to the whole class with their first impressions. It is also useful to prompt some of this discovery thinking with questions like 'What are we looking at?', 'Any clues about who this is aimed at?', 'What might the compartments be?', 'What is a journal?'

## 2. Convey some information about phrenology

- 2.1. Phrenology was a very popular nineteenth century practice.
- 2.2. It was based on the idea that the mind has distinct functions that are located in different parts of the brain.
- 2.3. People believed that the more developed a particular function is, the bigger that part of the brain is.
- 2.4. They also believed that the shape of the person's skull was determined by the relative development of each part of their brain .
- 2.5. Phrenologists looked at, or felt, the shape of a person's skull and used the information to make personal predictions, descriptions and recommendations.

## 3. Identifying concepts and question making

This stimulus is good when you're encouraging small groups to identify philosophically interesting concepts that come up in conversation. When you ask groups to share these, they might come up with: mind, brain and body, male and female, amateur and professional, science and pseudoscience, belief and superstition, self knowledge and knowledge of others, informal and formal learning, truth, health, history, psychology. Groups could be encouraged to focus on one of the particular areas or functions of the mind to consider its meaning and value, for

example stubbornness, conflict or love. Starting points for interesting question can emerge from discussion of these concepts.

#### **4. Concept analysis**

As well as helping generate a variety of questions for dialogue, this stimulus lends itself well to exercises that explore concepts. For example, what similarities and differences can we find between each of the three pairs of terms: mind and brain, mind and body, brain and body? Alternatively, you might ask participants to classify activities into science, pseudo-science and non-science. How about homeopathy?, astrology?, hypnosis?, meditation?, multiple intelligences?, learning styles?

#### **5. Meta-cognition, reflection and evaluation**

A fun reflective follow-up activity for a dialogue is to have small groups draw their own phrenology heads. Big coloured pens and big sheets of paper are great for this creative work. Perhaps ask them to show five themes (represented as areas of the mind) they think are important for modern living; or perhaps things they think school should be helping them to develop. Another alternative is to think what qualities philosophy is good for promoting. Sharing and justifying the choices gives more opportunities for evaluative and metacognitive thinking.

#### **Download**

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