

Big Head (20 minutes)

By Patrick O’Neil

Illustration by Christian Meesey

Curriculum developed by Kate Kesner

Synopsis: The author and narrator, Patrick, struggles with issues of identity, inclusion and loneliness as he thinks of how having a big head has impacted his life.



Vocabulary

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| 1. vacant | 5. extremities |
| 2. deformed | 6. prominences |
| 3. burden | 7. segues |
| 4. anomalies | 8. “magnus caput capitis” |

Pre reading writing prompt

Think of a way in which you stand out. Do you think about it often? Does it impact the way you present yourself in public? If you don’t stand out, do you like or dislike fitting in? Please journal your answer for five minutes.

Pre reading discussion prompt (class wide or in pairs)

Have you ever felt obligated to act a certain way because you thought people expected it of you? When has that felt enjoyable and when has it felt upsetting? Please write down your answer or share it with a partner or your class.

Post reading discussion questions (class wide or in pairs)

1. Provide an objective summary of the text, focusing on the action rather than what you like or dislike about it. Next, identify two central themes in the story. How does Patrick’s views on these ideas seem to change over time?
2. A hook is an opening statement in an essay that attempts to grab a reader’s attention. Do the opening two sentences grab your attention? Why or why not?
3. Can you identify a moment in which the narrator contradicts themselves? What does this show about his personality?

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4. Think about a marginalized group in your community or within the media you watch. What are the accepted forms of behavior or roles that group is expected to play? Do you think someone not of that marginalized identity would be expected to behave that way?

Post reading writing prompt:

1. Even though “Big Head” is mostly the internal monologue of the narrator, the author punctuates his thoughts with strong dialogue and scenes. In 500 words or more, write about a character trying to make a big decision (such as whether or not to get married, to move to another country, or to engage in espionage.) What thoughts and memories come up as the character is considering the decision? Do they talk to anyone about it? Please include dialogue and vivid description, noting the setting and some sensory details such as sight, hearing, and smell. Have the character come to a decision at the end.