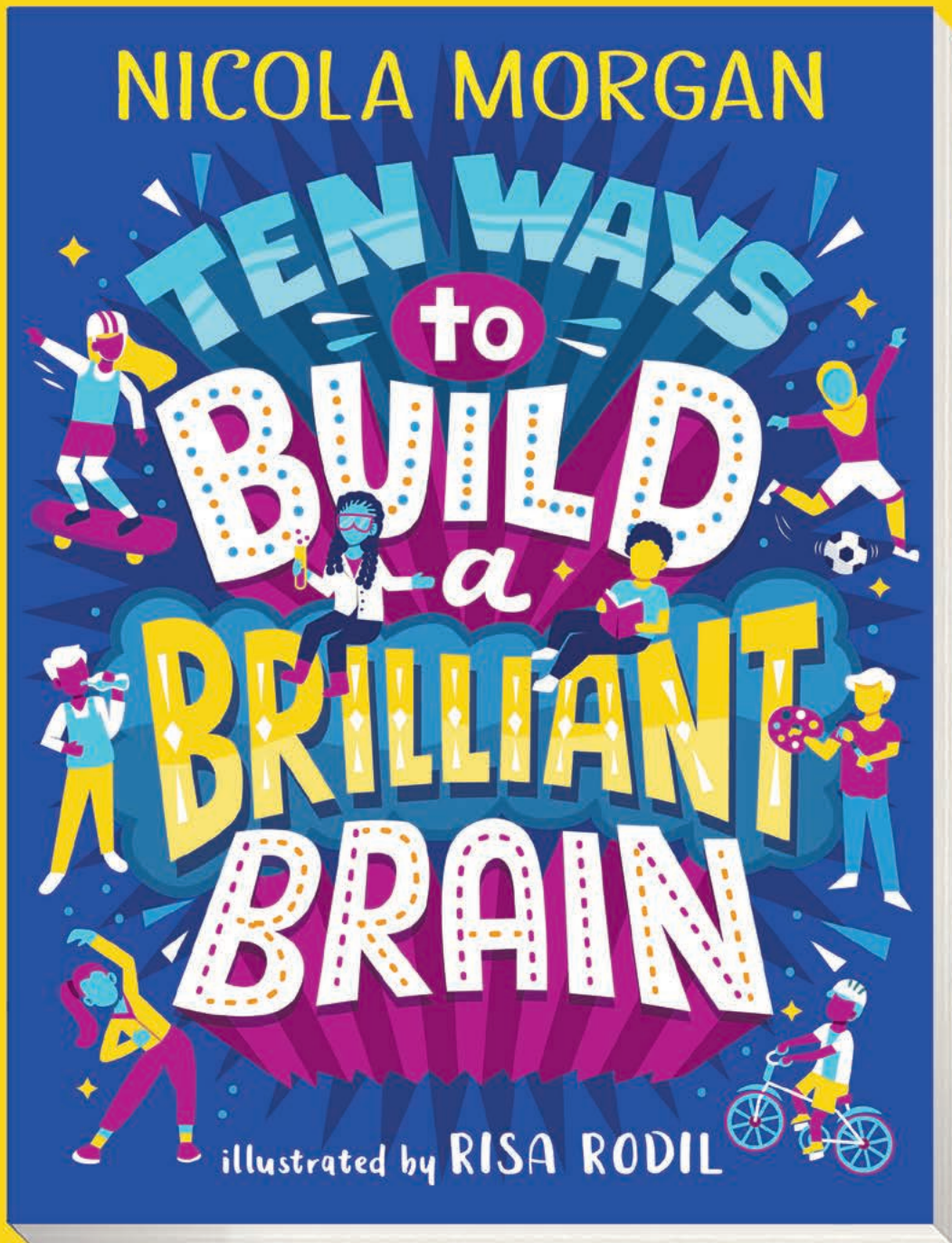


# MAKE YOUR BRAIN BRILLIANT!



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## TEACHERS' NOTES



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# TEN WAYS to BUILD a BRILLIANT BRAIN

BY NICOLA MORGAN AND ILLUSTRATED BY RISA RODIL

*These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.*

**These notes have been written with Key Stage 3 in mind.** There are some themes in this book that are best suited for pupils aged 11+. However, some extracts could be chosen to support pupils in years 5 and 6.



## Before You Start:



- This book consists of an introduction, ten chapters and a short glossary. Each chapter has a short quiz at the end/task to complete that allows pupils time to apply their new learning.
- Throughout the book, there are questions in speech bubbles that pupils have asked – the author thanks pupils from years 7 and 8 at Stockport School, Manchester for their questions.
- As this book is about the brain, pupils may generate sensitive questions or draw on personal experiences that are emotional to discuss. Within the chapter synopsis below some of these issues are raised to prepare staff for any difficult conversations.
- Share the title of the book with pupils – *Ten Ways to build a Brilliant Brain* – and ask them to predict what the ten ways might be. Pupils could work in small groups or pairs to generate a list. *What might your brain need? What is a brilliant brain?* Pupils could share their ideas and compile a class/group list of common themes. This list could be referred to throughout reading the book.
- The introduction “Meet Your Brain” (pages 4–16) could be used to generate pupils’ prior knowledge. Share page 5 with pupils as a starting point. *Are you surprised by any of the things that your brain does?*
- Read pages 6 and 7 with pupils – this double spread explains how the book works. Pupils may benefit from a table being displayed to collect new learning:

Brilliant Brain Facts	Brilliant Brain Boosts	Questions from You



- Pages 8 and 9 may generate some sensitive conversations that need mediating depending on the experience and maturity of your class. For example, there is content about neurodivergent brains; dyslexia; dyspraxia; Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC); ADHD and ADD. Some pupils may value the opportunity to talk about themselves whereas others may choose not to contribute to these conversations.





- Pages 10–13 are full of information regarding the biology of the brain – including a great visual explanation. Many pupils will be intrigued by the diagram on pages 12 and 13. These pages would be a good opportunity to ask retrieval questions.
- Pages 14–16 deal with what headaches are and how to protect the brain. **There is some content here that you may want to pre-teach or omit from reading in a class context** – headaches and how some may be serious; how we can be awake for brain surgery; contact sports and brain injuries including heading the ball and some reference to “alcohol, drugs and ‘legal highs’”.
- The author refers to her website on page 174 ([www.nicolamorgan.com](http://www.nicolamorgan.com)). You may wish to explore her website before reading the book.
- As there are a number of activities and tasks for pupils to complete throughout the chapters, it may be beneficial for pupils to have a journal or notebook to jot down any wonderings or queries.



### Reading Notes:

- Although this book outlines ten ways to build a brilliant brain, it is not necessary to read the book in chronological order. You could dip in and out of the chapters to support topics or conversations in school. Sometimes previous chapters are referenced where there is an overlap in themes or topics. However, it is not necessary to read the whole book in full.
- This brief summary of each of the chapters in the book may be useful in guiding sensitive conversations around the themes raised:

Chapter and title	Main Message (and points)	Theme
1 “Grow Brain Connections”	<p><u>The Main Message:</u> How to build lots of strong connections between your neurons so your brain can become more brilliant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth and fixed mindset (including a mindset quiz on pages 22 -25)</li> <li>• How to grow connections</li> <li>• Spaced Learning</li> </ul>	The outcome of the Mindset Quiz – some pupils may need some support with their score and what it means.
2 “Fuel Your Brain”	<p><u>The Main Message:</u> Humans need energy that comes from food and drink. Your brain uses lots of energy. If it doesn’t get enough, it can’t do the best job for you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High- and low-calorie foods</li> <li>• Foods good for the brain</li> <li>• Brain food on a budget</li> </ul>	<p>References to calories – some pupils may be sensitive to these references.</p> <p>Reference to diabetes.</p> <p>Reference to food supplements and dieticians.</p> <p>References to energy drinks.</p>



<p>3</p> <p>“Be Active”</p>	<p><u>The Main Message:</u> Physical activity strengthens your body but it also powers your brain, improving mental health and helping you learn. Being active is easier when you understand the benefits and when you find activities that you can really enjoy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endorphins (happy chemicals) and dopamine</li> <li>• Spending time outdoors – exercise and activities</li> </ul>	<p>Reference to self-esteem.</p> <p>Exercise – an hour a day.</p>
<p>4</p> <p>“Sleep Well”</p>	<p><u>The Main Message:</u> Sleep is not a waste of time! It’s vital to every aspect of health. It boosts your brain in lots of ways. Learn how to get a good night’s sleep and what to do when you can’t.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different stages of sleep</li> <li>• REM sleep and NREM sleep</li> <li>• Benefits of deep sleep</li> <li>• Good sleep hygiene</li> <li>• What to do when you cannot sleep</li> </ul>	<p>Male brains are slightly bigger than female brains.</p> <p>Reference to dreams and nightmares.</p>
<p>5</p> <p>“Make Friends”</p>	<p><u>The Main Message:</u> Humans are wired to make connections with other people but sometimes friendships are difficult. Why friends and supporters are good for the brain and how to build good bonds with the right people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dopamine and Oxytocin</li> <li>• Teenage brains</li> <li>• Social brains and problems</li> <li>• Who’s in your team?</li> <li>• How to work at friendships, including making new contacts (social media)</li> </ul>	<p>Peer pressure.</p> <p>Social media.</p> <p>Introverts and extroverts.</p> <p>Sharing photographs – (below legal ages/naked or in an inappropriate or sexual way).</p> <p>Loneliness; depression and mental health.</p> <p>Social media – who are you communicating with?</p>



<p>6</p> <p>“Bounce Back”</p>	<p><u>The Main Message:</u> No one likes bad things happening to them. Everyone needs strength to bounce back and find confidence after a setback, whether big or small. This ability to bounce back is often called resilience. And resilience, like all skills, begins in the brain.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with failure</li> <li>• Tips for perfectionists</li> <li>• Using coping strategies and support networks</li> <li>• Journaling</li> </ul>	<p>Anxiety.</p>
<p>7</p> <p>“Be Curious”</p>	<p><u>The Main Message:</u> Humans are wired to be curious because learning brings advantages. But curiosity can get us into trouble or danger. And it can be distracting if we’re trying to concentrate. We need to be curious but we need to do it thoughtfully.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarity and novelty</li> <li>• Uni-tasking</li> </ul>	
<p>8</p> <p>“Be Creative”</p>	<p><u>The Main Message:</u> Humans are a brilliantly creative species. We don’t only copy what our ancestors did; we do things differently, creating new ideas, inventions, tools and brilliant things. The brain has evolved to allow us to be creative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What being creative means</li> <li>• How being creative helps the brain</li> <li>• Visual art, music and writing</li> </ul>	<p>Negative feelings.</p> <p>Brain transplants.</p>

<p>9</p> <p>“Love Books”</p>	<p><u>The Main Message:</u> If you already love reading, the good news is that it’s brilliant for your brain. Reading opens and grows your mind.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits of reading for the brain</li> <li>• Reading e-books or print?</li> <li>• Finding your style of book</li> <li>• How to enjoy books more</li> </ul>	<p>Dyslexia.</p>
<p>10</p> <p>“Take Breaks”</p>	<p><u>The Main Message:</u> Your brain won’t be brilliant if you make it work hard all of the time. Work is important. Taking breaks and having fun help the brain to flourish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a break?</li> <li>• Relaxation and calming</li> <li>• Two types of stress</li> <li>• Breathing techniques</li> <li>• Mindfulness</li> </ul>	<p>Managing stress.</p>



- Throughout the book, questions are posed to generate discussion with pupils.
- There are a number of tasks and challenges throughout the book for pupils to complete. These could be linked to journaling, which is one of the ways suggested to “build a brilliant brain”.



### Revisiting the book as a whole:

- Pose the question *Which way was the most important?* Display the ten chapter titles and ask pupils to rank them in order of importance. Pupils may prefer to rank them in order of interest. As there are 10 chapters, pupils could rank them as a diamond in 1-2-3-2-1-1. Share different collaborations with pupils. Give pupils time to justify their choices.
- Challenge pupils to annotate a chapter of their choice with their own life experiences – pupils could choose the chapter. Encourage them to add in more examples.
- It would be interesting to gauge what type of “read” pupils thought this book was. Suggest the following;
  - *When reading the book, did it feel like a self-help journal? Why? Why not?*
  - *What was the main purpose of this book – to report, to inform, to explain, to persuade, to instruct or to entertain? Why do you think this?*
  - *What did you like about the production and style of the book? Think about how the book was organised – how the information was presented on the page and the illustrations.*



- Who do you think the target audience for this book is?



### After reading:

- Share pages 174 and 175 with pupils. Design a reflective task where pupils can write a letter/email/speech/song/poem or ode to their brain. Encourage pupils to reflect on what they have learnt – new knowledge and perhaps gratitude for their brain. Pupils may have identified some changes that they want to make that they can incorporate into their writing.
- Share the illustration on pages 12 and 13 with pupils. Explain that they are going to share their new knowledge visually. Pupils could use the outline for the brain on these pages and fill the space with words/facts or any information that they have learned. Pupils could also recreate the brain with multi-media: for example, Modroc, clay, etc...
- Challenge pupils to rewrite the content of the “ten ways” for a younger audience. How would you change the language used? Which themes would you include and which would you omit?
- After reading, challenge pupils to create a podcast based on the whole book or to choose a strand to explore. Pupils could record their podcasts and upload them to the school website for others in the school community to share.
- Pupils could create a leaflet based on the book for a specific audience in school – this could be their peers; older pupils; staff or the whole community. Allow pupils to take ownership for how to organize the leaflet.
- Pupils may have more questions for the author. These could be submitted online or pupils could write letters and include some of their questions.

### Other titles to support exploration of themes from the book:

- *The Teenage Guide to Friends*, by Nicola Morgan
- *The Teenage Guide to Stress*, by Nicola Morgan
- *Be Resilient: How to Build a Strong Teenage Mind for Tough Times*, by Nicola Morgan
- *Positively Teenage*, by Nicola Morgan
- *Blame My Brain: The Amazing Teenage Brain Revealed*, by Nicola Morgan



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