

Study Guide: *My Brain is Plastic*

Playwright: Arlin McFarlane
Whitehorse Independent Theatre: WIT



Artist: Angela Sterritt. Gitxsan Journalist/Artist

This play explores the brain's ability to heal
addictive and self-harming behaviours

Table of Contents

1. Story.....	3
2. Suggested Activities: Research and Discussion Before Seeing the Play.....	4-5
▪ The Brain	
▪ Addictions	
▪ Link Between Addiction and Stress	
▪ Addictions: Non-Suicidal Self-Harming Behaviours such as Cutting	
▪ Neuroplasticity	
▪ Link Between Addiction and Neuroplasticity	
3. Suggested Activities: After the Play.....	5
▪ Debrief the Play	
▪ Personal Responses	
4. Suggested Activities: Beyond the Play.....	6
▪ Understanding the Power of the Arts	
▪ Art Engagement: Suggestions	
▪ Splintered Craft: A Youth Driven Art Space	
5. WIT: What It Is.....	7
6. Resources & Questions.....	7
7. Schedule - Week at a Glance.....	8

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1. What is This Play About?

A troubled girl who engages in
addictive and self-harming behaviours



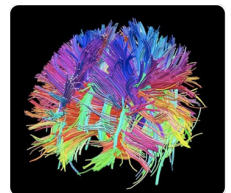
A neuroscientist who sheds light on
brain functions linked to addictive and
self-harming behaviours



New understanding that leads to change
in addictive behavior

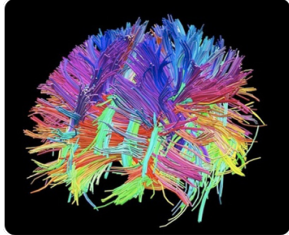


Healing and hope



2. Suggested Activities: Research and Discussion Before Seeing the Play

Explore What Students Already Know About the Brain



1. What does the picture suggest to you about the brain?
2. Add the quotation: *“Neurons that fire together wire together”*
3. What do the picture and quotation tell us about the brain? Why are there different colours? Etc. (Students can research)

What Is an Addiction: Discuss and Research

Addictions and Stress:

- What is stress and what part does this play in addictions?
- “When you don’t know you are stressed, it accumulates. Identify your key stressors and name them to reduce stress.”
- Dr Sonia Lupien. PHD Teen Resiliency and Education Specialist

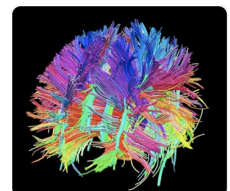
Addictions and non-suicidal self-harming behaviour such as cutting

- Why Cut?
- Why and how is cutting an addiction?
- Have students research four primary reasons for cutting.

NOTE TO TEACHERS:

Research suggests that there are four primary reasons for engaging in NSSI (non-suicidal self harming):

- to reduce negative emotions
- to feel "something" besides numbness or emptiness
- to avoid certain social situations
- to receive social support



Although instances of all of these reasons for NSSI occur, a common misconception is that NSSI is primarily a form of social manipulation. In reality a number of studies have found that the primary reason for NSSI is reason number one: to reduce negative emotion. -Nock and Prinstein (2004, 2005)

You may want to discuss this last finding with students.

Neuroplasticity and Brain Science: New Research

Look at the newest research on the brain and understand how it is essentially plastic, and that there is hope for change and empowerment.

Refer to the **free** interactive Brain App that will be used in the play:
Search “3-D Brain”, produced by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories, in your App store.

What do you know about the link between the brain’s neuroplasticity and addictions?

“The human brain develops in interaction with its environment. We know now about neuroplasticity - never give up on anyone! We can prevent and correct attachment disturbances with patience, willingness, and understanding. We all need to be cared for or taken care of.” - Dr. Gabor Mate, Addictions Specialist.

3. Suggested Activities: After the Play

Debrief the play

- What is the play about?
- What scene was powerful for you? Why?
- Were the characters realistic or not? Explain.
- Did the ending work?
- Was the play believable?
- What did you learn about addictions and self-harming behaviour?
- What did you learn about neuroplasticity of the brain?

Personal Responses

- Engage students in exploring their own experiences, their families’ experiences or their friends’ experiences. Use multiple intelligence such as music, art, drama, storytelling, freeze frames, and/or monologues to present their understandings.



4. Suggested Activities: Beyond the Play

Understanding the power of the arts:

- to engage all cultures
- to give all people a voice
- to act as a force for change



The arts provide a meeting place for all people from all cultures.

Youth share their vision, personal perspective, and sense of place in the world through the arts.

The Challenge: To Inspire positive change in themselves and others.

Challenge students to choose an art form (music, theatre, written word, visual arts, storytelling, dance, etc.) to create positive change in themselves and in their community.

Art Engagement: Suggestions

- Comic book project
- Create or share a story about addictions, healing and hope
- Record and upload your own lyrics or video link about addictions and hope to a website
- Create a mural for your school or community
- Other Possibilities

Splintered Craft: A Youth Driven Arts Space

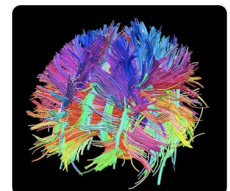
Splintered craft is traveling to Watson Lake to co-create a mobile studio during this project - sponsored by Skookum Jim's Friendship Centre.

www.fb/splinteredcraft.ca

Splintered Craft is coming to Watson Lake to co-facilitate workshops and help create an after school open studio environment for students and community members to come hang out, do some art, check out and share each other's work, illustrate comics, create a mural for the school or community, and reflect on the issues in the *My Brain is Plastic* play.

Make Your Mark!

Work on a mural or contribute to a comic book project with Splintered Craft, local artists and art teachers



5. What is WIT?

WIT is a new inter-arts performance society which seeks engagement with its audience. Arlin McFarlane is the generative force together with a supportive Board of Directors.

This is WIT's first project; however, Arlin brings extensive experience to its first production. As the previous Artistic Director of Yukon Educational Theatre, Arlin produced and toured the play *Wake and Bake* and *Diabetes: A Love Story*.

The My Brain is Plastic Team:

Arlin McFarlane, writer/director

Ken Cameron, mentor (Director of *The Damage is Done* -with Gabor Mate)

Mary Sloan, actor

Barb Hinton, art education/engagement designer

Jordy Walker, sound design/tech

Erin C. Corbett, video designer/live camera

Amber Church, production manager

Jona Barr, Splintered Craft

6. Resources:

Learn more about addictions, resources for students, families and communities:

www.hss.gov.yk.ca

www.canadarehab.ca

www.Yukonwelfare.ca

www.DrGaborMate.com

www.helpguide.org

www.HumanStress.ca

www.littledrum.com

www.drdansiegel.com

Indigenous Youth Best Practices:

www.beatnation.ca

www.darearts.com

www.redwiremag.com

www.taniawillard.ca

www.reelyouth.ca/kaya

www.cbc.ca/8thfire

Splintered Craft:

www.fb/splinteredcraft.ca



7. Schedule - Week at a Glance

Monday Nov 2

- 8:30-2 Crew drives/arrives in Watson Lake
- 2:03-3:10 Crew Meets with School & Community Partners
- 3:10-5 Set-up Theatre Tech & Art Stations
- 7-10 Cast and crew rehearse

Tuesday Nov 3

- 8:35-11:55 Crew preps for play run-through
- 12:53-1:53 Crew Runs play with all students, staff and interested community members present
- 2:03-3:10 Initial artistic reflection & feedback in theatre & small art stations
Support from Mental Health Teams & Community
- 3:10-5 After School art, theatre & music hang out & open studio

Wednesday Nov 4

- 8:35-11:55 **Phase 1**
Major Play edits & alterations. Tech training with students
Artistic Reflections & Projects
Community, Mental Health team & cultural workers collaborate
- 12:53-3:10 **Phase 2**
Major Play edits & alterations continue.
Tech training with students continues
Artistic reflections & projects continue
Community, Mental Health team & cultural workers collaborate

Thursday Nov 5

- 8:35-3:10 Crew & Select students revise the play & rehearse to present at Community Feast Performance
- 3:10-5 Set-up for big event (all hands on deck)
Prep introductions & partner/community roles
Art station/mural in full swing
- 5-6 Community Feast
- 7-8 Performance
- 8-9 Community Feedback & Mingle

Friday Nov 6

- 8:35-11:55 Follow up with community partners, school staff & students
Thank-yous, gifts, evaluations, follow-up
- 12-5 Crew returns to Whitehorse

