

# BRENDAN MCLEOD

## *BRAIN*

### TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE



#### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Hilarious and heartbreaking, *Brain* is a monologue about consciousness, mental illness, and friendship from award-winning novelist and former Canadian poetry SLAM champion Brendan McLeod. *Brain* maps Brendan's experiences with obsessive compulsive disorder – from a teenager struggling to understand his obsessions to an adult battling psychosis. A nuanced journey through the nature of thought, *Brain* is an upbeat, intense comedy about the miracle of the mind.

As awareness around mental illness rises, nuance inevitably declines. It's discussed in corporate sponsored twitter conversations, linked to mass shootings, and re-enacted, broadly, in Hollywood movies. While sometimes useful in lessening the stigma around it, these discussions often obscure understanding of how mental illnesses work and the effects they have. *Brain* is one person's personal mental illness procedural. An honest, detailed journey through obsessive compulsive disorder that explores the humour, horror, and beauty of being unable to understand one's own mind.

*Brain* premiered in BC in the summer of 2015 winning multiple awards at various theatre festivals and generating further bookings from soft seat theatres. *Brain* is a dynamic one person show that tackles important social and personal issues in a manner that is suitable for all ages 15 and up and will be of interest to innovative presenters interested in a vivid literary performance that can be combined with educational and community outreach.

"What theatre is all about... McLeod is so smart, his rapid fire delivery so clean and confident, his wit so casual, copious, and reassuring." – *The Georgia Straight*

**Brendan McLeod — Bio** Brendan McLeod is a Canadian writer, spoken word artist, and musician. He is the author of one novel, *The Convictions of Leonard McKinley*, a one woman play, *The Big Oops*, and two monologues, the most recent of which is his award-winning piece on consciousness *Brain*. He is the founder of The Fugitives, a folk group signed to Light Organ Records, that tours internationally and have been nominated for multiple Canadian Folk Music Awards and a Western Canadian Music Award. He is a former Canadian SLAM poetry champion and World SLAM runner-up. He's taught spoken word at Lan-gara College, and is an active youth educator with a variety of organizations, including: Wordplay, Prologue, and the Vancouver Biennale. He was the 2012 Poet of Honor at the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word and the 2015 Poet of Honour at the Victoria Spoken Word Festival.

#### SELECTED AWARDS

- ◆ Pick of the Fringe Award, Vancouver Fringe Festival, 2015.
- ◆ Georgia Straight Critic's Choice, Vancouver Fringe Festival, 2015 (nominee).
- ◆ Favourite Male Performer, Victoria Fringe Festival, 2015.
- ◆ Best Solo Show, Best Overall Show, Victoria Fringe Festival, 2015 (nominee).
- ◆ Poet of Honour, Victoria Festival of Spoken Word, 2015.
- ◆ Poet of Honour, Canadian Festival of Spoken Word, 2012
- ◆ Canada Writes (Shortlist), Creative Non-fiction, 2012.



## Student Activity (45-75 minutes)

First Thoughts - IRP link: write meaningful personal texts that explore ideas and information to experiment and to express self.

### What's the Burning Question?

Have students think about the one question they most want answered — their biggest fear; a relationship in their life to which they can't find an answer; a political ideal they're passionate about; a life event they can't quite sort out; etc.

Then have the students write for a timed 5 minutes. **The rules:**

1. Keep the hand moving — no pausing to re-read the line you just wrote.
2. Don't cross out stuff.
3. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, or grammar.
4. Lose control— don't think, don't get logical.
5. Go for the jugular — if something is scary or feels taboo— let it out — it probably has a lot of energy in it.

The aim is to burn through to first thoughts — the place where energy is unobstructed by social politeness or the internal censor — revealing what the mind actually sees and feels, not what the mind *thinks* it should see or feel. Afterwards, the students can decipher their work, see what's there and find the gems of a good story or poem (first thoughts) in that 5 minutes of stuff.

6. Have the students look over their work. Is something too overt? Clichéd? Not have enough detail? They're probably missing figurative language - metaphor, hyperbole, or alliteration. Have them go over your sentence and try different ways of expressing the idea: compare an emotion to an object, use alliteration to spice up the energy, exaggerate and use hyperbole. Have students note how much figurative language changes their work.