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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2021 Volume III: How to Do Things with Maps

Mapping the Life and Times of Phineas Gage

Guide for Curriculum Unit 21.03.02
by Sean Griffin

In this unit, I invite students to follow, map, and reflect on the travels of a nineteenth-century railway worker whose life was turned upside down after an accident with explosives left him with a serious brain injury. The main text in the unit is John Fleishman's book, *Phineas Gage: A Gruesome, but True Story about Brain Science* which has been used in the New Haven public school's language arts curriculum for a number of years. After a brief introduction to the realm of maps and travel writing, I invite students to create a persona that will become a travel writer and follow in the footsteps of Phineas Gage, reflecting on his physical and emotional journey. As we read the book, students will interact with a number of maps (including railway maps, brain maps, timelines, maps about literature, science and others) that will help them to interpret and breakdown a wide array of information that surrounds Phineas' story. My hopes are that students will not only utilize maps and writing to interpret and reflect on the life journey of Phineas Gage, but their work will also lead them to reflections on their own lives as travelers on a journey.

(Developed for Language Arts, grade 7; recommended for Language Arts, grade 8, Science, grades 7-8, and U. S. History, grade 9)

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