



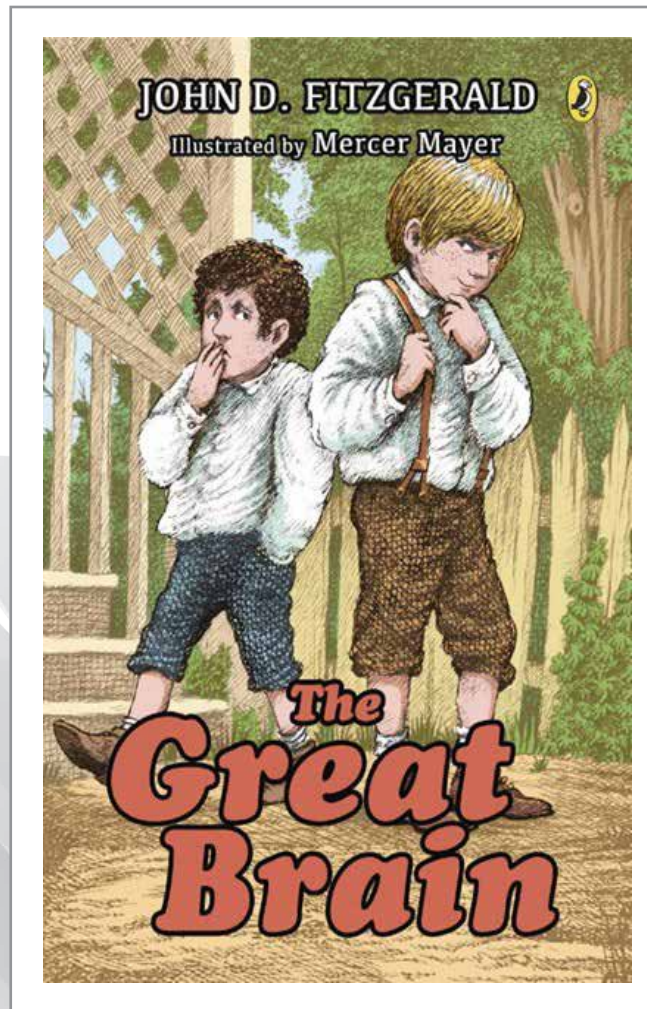
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# The Great Brain

John D. Fitzgerald



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# The Great Brain

John D. Fitzgerald

## TEACHER GUIDE

### NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,  
comparison/contrast, cause  
and effect

### Thinking

Research

### Vocabulary

Synonyms, word mapping

### Listening/Speaking

Facial expressions,  
discussion

### Writing

Descriptions, expository

### Literary Elements

Characterization, story  
elements, symbolism

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## Summary

Tom, age ten and the middle boy of the family, is known as the "Great Brain." Preferring to read *The World Almanac* and encyclopedias, he is somehow able to turn everyday situations into profitable ones for himself. He has many adventures in this book, including one with mumps, another with a rescue attempt, and yet another involving a teacher. Serious topics such as suicide, tolerance, and prejudice are also included as Tom attempts to solve problems great and small.

## About the Author

John Dennis Fitzgerald was born in 1907 in Utah. He died after a long illness, May 21, 1988, in Titusville, Florida. He was a journalist and author. During his literary career, he wrote adult novels, short stories and essays, and worked as a publicity agent for MGM, and as a foreign feature editor for United Press in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. His career also included a stint as a jazz drummer.

His first book, *Papa Married a Mormon*, was published in 1955, and is a reminiscence of his life in Utah when it was still a territory. In 1967, the first of his "Great Brain" series, stories based on his own Utah boyhood with his brother Tom, was published. Of this series, Fitzgerald has said, "The memories of childhood are either elusive or vivid. My memories of Tom are very graphic because he swindled me so many times when I was a boy. I wrote *The Great Brain* based upon actual experiences I had with Tom and his great brain as a boy."

## Introductory Information and Activities

*Note:* When using this study guide, please be selective and use the suggestions and activities that would be most appropriate for your use and group of children. It is not intended that you do everything that is included in this guide, but that discretionary choices be made.

### Initiating Activities

(Since Sears Roebuck is no longer printing a catalog, use any company's catalog.)

1. Sears Roebuck Catalog: Have some copies of a Sears Roebuck Catalog available for use in the room. If you are able to, locate from your local library or historical society copies of pages from the catalogs of long ago, have those mounted and placed about the room. It would be terrific if you could locate pages that had the erector set and the water closet priced, as they are mentioned as specific purchases in the book.

Make a survey as to the students' buying practices. Is any ordering done from catalogs? What kind(s) of merchandise? What specific catalogs are generally used? (Save this information from the survey for later use in math activities.)

2. Utah: Play a record or a tape with lyrics written by Otto Harbach, one of the famous people from Utah.

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Make a few paper beehives and have them hanging in the room. A few scattered paper bees here and there would add to the atmosphere, too. On one of the hives you may wish to put something like "Each of us is busy as a bee, for our motto is 'Industry.'" ("Industry" is the state motto. See "Teacher Information, Utah," for more details.)

Ask the students to look at the map of the state on the bulletin board. Can anyone identify the state? Has anyone ever lived or visited there? What can you tell us about Utah? Make a record of the information given.

What is the opinion of the children in the group regarding the state motto? What is implied in the motto? Would you like to have that motto for yourself? Why or why not?

Can you think of a motto that you would like to have for your group? Yourself? Make a banner with the class motto on it. Think of some way to share your individual motto with others. Display the mottoes on the bulletin board. (See "Bulletin Board Ideas, Utah.")

3. The Mormons: The Mormon religion is mentioned in the novel. The Mormons, or the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, believe that their prophet, Joseph Smith, found the laws of the church in New York State in the 1800s. Because the beliefs of the Mormons were so different from other religions, these people were driven west to Utah. They were hard working people who turned the dry desert land into a prosperous one. They are famous for their beautiful music from the Mormon Tabernacle. The Mormon's beliefs that are important in the story include the avoidance of liquor, tobacco, tea, and coffee.

Have a record or a tape of some music by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir playing when the children arrive. Collect books from the library about the state of Utah, in which there will be information about the Mormon people. Have those in a special area in the room.

Invite a guest in to tell the children in the group what it is that the Mormons believe, subjects brought out in the story (avoidance of liquor, tobacco, tea, and coffee). Discuss. Refer the children to the library books available, for further study and information.

### **Bulletin Board Ideas**

1. Sears Roebuck Catalog: Cover the bulletin board with plain background paper. On it, staple some pages from a Sears Roebuck catalog. Be sure to include some pages from the home improvement sections, as well as the toy section.
2. Utah: Cover the bulletin board with plain background paper. Place a large map of the state of Utah on the bulletin board. Make a large paper beehive, and also place that on the bulletin board. After the initiating activity, place the state motto on the bulletin board, and surround it with the group and individual mottoes.
3. The Mormons: Cover the bulletin board with plain background paper. On it place a large map of the United States. Use some thick string or heavy yarn to mark the Mormons' path from New York State to Salt Lake City, Utah.

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## Chapter Three: "The Great Brain Saves the Day"—Pages 43-67

### Vocabulary

mongrel 43	proposition 44	cautiously 44	indignantly 44
protruded 45	restrain 49	connive 49	chandelier 50
posse 50	apparently 50	fantastic 51	penetrate 55
infernal 58			

### Vocabulary Activity

Match five of the words in the vocabulary list with the word or phrase which means the same thing in the synonym box below:

conspire	a plan	a suspended, branched light fixture
wondrous, extravagant		a body of men armed with legal authority

(Answers: conspire/connive; a plan/proposition; light fixture/chandelier; wondrous, extravagant/fantastic; a body of men/posse)

### Discussion Questions and Activities

1. What are the three big events that are coming up in John D.'s life? (Page 43, School will be over for the year, he is to be taught how to swim by his brothers, and he is going to mate his dog, Brownie, with a dog named Lady.)
2. What proposition does Tom have for John regarding the dogs? (Page 44, Tom wants to arrange for the mating, and to choose the pup that John will get as "pick of the litter.") Does John agree? (yes) Have you ever been the one to choose the "pick of the litter"? What does that mean? What did you look for in the pup as you were choosing?
3. Who do the boys meet on the way to the river? (Page 45, They meet Frank and Allan Jensen with their dog, Lady.) Where are the Jensens going? (They are going "exploring.")
4. What is the first step of learning how to swim that Sweyn puts John through? (Page 46, Sweyn takes John out into the water, where it is up to his armpits. He then holds John's chin, and tells him to paddle and kick.) Does this work? (No; John's head goes under water.) Do you know how to swim? How did you learn? Tell us what you had to do.
5. Tell us how John D. learned to swim. Why did he do it? (Page 48, "Better by far to drown than to disgrace our family name.")
6. Explain what "chaw-raw-beef" clothes means. (Pages 47-48, The clothes are soaked in the river and then tied into tight knots.) Do you know of anything that is similar? What other things, especially done at camp or out-of-doors, are of a similar nature? (short-sheet a bed, etc.)

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7. What reward does John D. receive for learning how to swim in one day? (*Page 49, He receives 25 cents from his father.*) Do you think that giving/getting a reward for learning how to swim is a good idea? Why or why not? Did you ever receive a reward for doing something? Would you like to tell us about it?
  8. The Jensen boys, and their dog Lady, are missing. Where is it feared that they have gone? (*page 50, Skeleton Cave*)
  9. Five-hundred-foot bales of rope are brought to the cave. What is done with the rope? (*Page 52, It is tied together, so that the searchers can unroll it as they go into the cave, thus enabling them to find the way out of the cave.*) Six bales of rope were brought at first. How many feet long is the rope when tied together? (*3,000 feet*) What would be the length if 10 bales had been brought? (*5,000 feet*) What if each bale had six-hundred feet of rope? (*6 bales/3,600 feet; 10 bales/ 6,000 feet*) Make up other instances of different numbers of bales, and lengths in the bales.
  10. Eight more 500-foot bales of rope are brought from Cedar City. How far into the cave can the searchers go with all of the rope tied together? (*7,000 feet*) Tom says, on page 55, " 'that is more than a mile.' " How many feet in a mile? (*5,280 feet*) How many more feet is 7,000 than 5,280? (*1,720 feet*) What percentage of a mile is 1,720 feet? ( $1,720 \div 5,280 = 0.32575 \times 100 = 32.575\%$ )
  11. On page 56, Tom makes the following comment when it is thought that the Jensen boys and Lady would not be found, " 'If they don't find them alive it is going to cost me a fortune.' " What do you think that Tom means by that? Make some predictions, and record them. Save them for future reference.
  12. Tom thinks of a plan for the rescue of the Jensen boys and Lady. Explain his plan. (*Pages 58-59, Since Lady is in heat, Tom feels that Brownie would be able to follow her scent in the cave. He also feels that the dog would be able to lead them out of the cave by following the scent of raw liver that has been rubbed on the bottoms of shoes.*) Do you think that this is a good plan? Can you offer any alternative plans? Does Tom's plan work? (*Yes!*)
  13. On page 66, Tom gives a speech, "with about as much modesty as a plucked chicken hanging in the window of the Deseret Meat Market." Make up your own "with as much modesty as..." For example:
    - ...with as much modesty as a stripped table standing in the entrance hall
    - ...with as much modesty as the naked truth parading before a crowd
    - ...with as much modesty as the bare facts out on the beach

### Supplementary Activities

1. Write out a detailed explanation of what to do to learn how to swim. If you have not had any lessons, write out what it is you think one would have to do to learn how to swim, or write out what John D. went through in his lessons.
2. Some things are revealed about the Mormon people in this chapter. What have you learned? (*Page 63, The Mormons never drink coffee, tea, or any kind of alcoholic beverages, and they never*