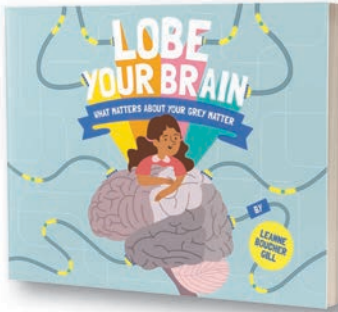




AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Lobe Your Brain: Interview with the Author



Let's focus on the brain! We talked to expert author Leanne Boucher Gill, who is a professor of psychology at Nova Southeastern University, where she received the Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award and was named the NSU STUEY Professor of the Year. She maintains an active research program studying how exercise affects the way we think. Her new book for younger readers is all about the human brain.

Magination Press: What inspired you to write *Lobe Your Brain: What Matters About Your Grey Matter*?

Leanne Boucher Gill: I love reading children's books! I use funny voices and really get into it because I love the giggles that erupt from my kids when I read them. And their questions are always so interesting. Oftentimes we'll end up talking about related topics from the books we read, like what happened to the dinosaurs, why hurricanes happen, or even why we have to share our toys with strangers. I wanted to write a kids' book about my favorite part of the body—the brain—because I want kids to realize just how amazing it is.

MP: Why is it important for kids to know about neurology and brain structure?

LBG: I think it's important to understand that the brain is responsible for everything we do, from walking to talking to feeling. It's also important to understand how to take care of our brains by exercising, eating right, and getting enough sleep.

MP: Why did you decide to focus on the lobes of the brain?

LBG: The brain can be divided in many different ways. As an introduction to the brain, the four lobes are easy to describe both in terms of where they are and some of the basic functions that they help us to do, like how visual information is processed in the occipital lobe. Understanding the different functions of different brain areas lets kids know that the brain isn't just a mush of tissue between their ears, but rather that it is a beautiful structure that is laid out purposefully.

MP: It can be really difficult to explain these complex neurological ideas to young children. Why did you decide to write a book for 6- to 8-year-olds? How did you make these concepts accessible and engaging for young children?

LBG: I wanted to write a children's book on the brain because I truly think it is fascinating. There weren't many books written for this age group on the brain. There are so many other science-related books out there for children to get them curious about how the world works. I have been organizing public events through libraries and museums since my children were babies. I think many of the complex neurological topics you refer to are not all that difficult to explain if you can think the way a child does. I don't believe in "dumbing it down", but rather I try to relate neurological concepts to concepts children are familiar with, like trees. I remember I was doing one program where I was talking about neurons (brain cells) and I described it as a tree with branches that reach out to "listen" to other neurons. Then I had all the kids stand up and pretend to send a message from the brain to the foot to make it move by playing "telephone". Of course the message got distorted along the way which made the kids laugh! Then I talked about how important it is that neurons stay healthy so that the messages don't get messed up. I think the kids learned a lot that day because it was fun and relatable.

MP: Do you have a favorite part of the book? Was one part harder to write than others?

LBG: My favorite part is where I talk about how information about the world gets into the brain using the examples of rainbows, songs, and annoying little brothers. And then I cycle back and talk about how your brain helps you to interact with the world by walking, dancing, or pushing your annoying brother's arm away when he touches you. That might have been inspired by my two kids' interactions!

The hardest part was deciding what to include and what not to include about how the brain works. This book is obviously a simplification of how the brain works, but I didn't want to make it so simple that it didn't contain any real information. I think readers will learn a lot about their nervous system and how the brain is amazing.

MP: What did you think when you first saw the illustrations?

LBG: I thought they were gorgeous! I love the bright colors and illustrations. I also appreciate the diversity of characters presented in the book. I think it's important for children to see themselves represented in the books they read.

MP: What do you like to do when you aren't writing?

LBG: I like to play board and card games with my family, hang out with my friends, read, hike, and try new things. I am always looking to try something new!

MP: Is there a fun fact about you that readers might not know that you'd like to share?

LBG: I am a SCUBA diver! I love to dive into the ocean and see all the pretty corals and fish. I am always excited when I see a shark! They are not as dangerous as people think they are and as movies show them to be.

MP: What was your favorite children's book when you were growing up?

LBG: So many! I used to love reading Greek tragedies, Judy Blume books, *Ramona the Pest*, and *Encyclopedia Brown*. But my favorite memory of reading is when I was just learning how to read, and my Grandfather sat with me as I read to him *Frog and Toad Are Friends*. I think that's why I love reading to children. The feeling of sharing something magical in between pages of a book is amazing.

This Article's Author

Leanne Boucher Gill, PhD, is a professor of psychology at Nova Southeastern University, where she received the Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award and was named the NSU STUEY Professor of the Year. She maintains an active research program studying how exercise affects the way we think. She lives in South Florida. Visit her on Twitter.