

Welcome to **BODY BRILLIANT** by Nicola Morgan Useful Notes for Teachers

These notes are for schools wanting to teach the *Body Brilliant* messages. *Body Brilliant* gives young people age 10–15 (and their adults!) a really strong understanding of what body image is, how it is influenced in our minds, why it's often negative, and how to build a better body image: first by mentally prioritising health, strength, character and skills over appearance and shape; and second by putting into practice loads of positive, healthy lifestyle behaviours to build the best, fittest body we can.

Body Brilliant is perfect for students from Year 6 and the whole way through secondary school, when so much is changing inside and all around them, and when, with great support, knowledge and a positive outlook, they can have the best chance of building well-being and resilience for life. It is challenging enough for older students, with fascinating insights into psychology and science which will also be new to many adults.

To use *Body Brilliant* in lessons, you won't need a class set – though schools do use my books in that way and it would be a great idea. You just need a copy for yourself and maybe one or two in the school library. If I'm doing an event for you, I will give you a free copy.

Safe-guarding, empathy and respect

How we feel about how we look is intensely personal and yet often dragged into public view in the many situations where we have to be seen by others and particularly when appearance is being discussed. Many students may have powerful body dissatisfaction and feel uncomfortable in these discussions. I believe it's still really important to have the discussions but it's essential that we start with a promise of mutual respect and a complete ban on undermining other people by laughing or not taking them seriously.

Suggest that students choose to say "people might feel" or "I heard that" rather than something personal. Make sure no one feels they have to say anything if they don't want to. And make sure everyone is confident that their opinion or experience will be respected.

Some of the issues covered in *Body Brilliant* may trigger anxiety and distress in certain students affected by them. The topics where this applies most obviously are gender identity, eating disorders (and self-harm), body dysmorphia, visible difference and discussion about weight/size. Ensure that students know how to get help (through your agreed channels in school) and that they can "pass" on any topics.

For the above reason, these teaching notes don't directly approach those particularly triggering topics. I suggest you refer to the PHSE Association's resources. There is a useful set of guidelines here: <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/key-standards-teaching-about-body-image> The PHSE Association has several resources and Lesson Plans for different age groups.

What Body Brilliant covers:

SECTION ONE: ALL IN THE MIND

1. Let's Understand Body Image: what it is, why it's important, and how it develops.
2. Different Times, Different Cultures: how body ideals are relative, not fixed.
3. Internet, Social Media and Celebrity Culture: how these have affected body image, usually negatively.
4. Adolescence and Puberty: why this stage of life can particularly affect body image.
5. Gender Identity: how questioning gender and body image can be linked.
6. Sexuality: is body image affected by our sexuality?
7. Body Dysmorphic Disorder: extreme negative body image.
8. Living with Visible (or Invisible) Difference: what are the issues for people whose bodies are significantly different?
9. Eating Disorders and Self-harm: where does body image fit in – and where does it not?
10. How to Improve your Body Image: helping you think differently.

SECTION TWO: MAKING YOUR BODY BRILLIANT

1. Feed Your Brilliant Body: great food choices
2. Find Your Exercise: why and how to make activity a regular part of your life
3. Sleep Well: the why and the how of a great night's sleep
4. Your Best Brilliant Body: skin, hair, teeth, relaxing, avoiding illness
5. Self-expression and respect: your body, your style, your choice; consent

Ten classroom ideas

1. Introducing the topic

I recommend you start by reading the Body Brilliant introduction. Check that all understand the panel "What do I mean by body image?" Students may think body image is what we look like but actually it is *what we think we look like and also what we feel about what we think we look like*. Body image is mental, not physical. People of varying shapes, sizes and appearances can have positive or negative body image.

2. Challenging our focus on appearance

Activity and discussion: either prepare pieces of paper in advance or ask each student to write their own headings as follows:

Two things I would most want a friend to be:

Two things I most admire in people:

- Ask each student, working privately, to write down their answer. Ensure that all understand not to name anyone, just say in general what "things about people" they

most value in a friend and most admire in people. (With younger students, you might need to discuss examples first but try not to lead them.)

- Take the papers in and start reading some out. Notice that no one (or very few people) will have put things like “pretty”, “slim”, “fit”.
- Discuss and ask: If we’re not bothered about how people *look*, why do we care so much about what *we* look like and why do many of us want to look different? Do we judge ourselves too harshly and set standards we don’t set for our friends?

3. How our body image is formed

Discussion: Read pages 24-39, omitting quotes and body boosts. Stop to discuss at various points. Ask:

- Has this made you think differently about body image?
- How do you feel when you’re with people who look very different from you? (Including dress and style as well as body appearance, age and ethnicity.)
- Where there any ideas that you hadn’t thought about before?

4. Beauty ideals are all relative

Chapter 2 shows how different generations, centuries, cultures and societies have had different views of what is a “beauty ideal” for women or men.

Activity and discussion: after reading extracts from Ch 2, ask students to look at the Perfections of Perfection study and look at the images (one set for male and one for female “ideals”).

Female: <https://onlinedoctor.superdrug.com/perceptions-of-perfection/>

Male: <https://onlinedoctor.superdrug.com/perceptions-of-perfection-part-ii-men/>

- Discuss:
 - What does it mean if people in one country have a different view of “ideal attractiveness” from people in another country? (That there is no one true, *objective* ideal – it’s all *relative* and *subjective*. Discuss these words.)
 - If people living in one particular culture felt their body didn’t fit the ideal in their country, what kind of feelings and behaviours might that trigger? (EG Feelings of dissatisfaction; behaviours of dieting or exercising.)
 - Can they think of anything they’ve looked at recently that might make lots of people feel they didn’t measure up to some kind of physical ideal?

5. and 6. Media, online, celebrity culture

It has been estimated that by the age of 17, a girl growing up in a media-rich country (including the UK, US, Australia, and most Asian countries) will have seen around 250,000 commercial messages, most telling her how she should look. (The same research has not been done for boys; the figure is probably less, but still significant and may be increasing.)

Read extracts from Chapter Three.

Activity 5 (this could be done at home or in class if that is possible in your school): ask students to do the following. For a 20-minute period, go online in your usual way, whether on social media or YouTube or whatever. Keep a piece of paper beside you. From the

moment of getting online to the end of the 20 minutes, note how many times you come across any of these:

- An advert for anything to do with dieting, exercise, make-up, cosmetic surgery
 - An image/picture of someone designed to look “good”
 - An image/picture of a slim woman/girl or muscled/ripped man/boy
 - Any image, story, video or advert focused on physical attractiveness
- Discuss the things you saw in terms of the messages being sold to you.

Activity 6: (probably suitable for Year 8 upwards, but you decide)

- Ask students to tell you the names of as many internet celebrities they can think of. (Make a list.) You want a mix of genders and ethnic make-ups, ideally. If your school is single-sex, you *might* choose to focus on that gender but I believe there’s value in boys and girls gaining insight into the ideals being promoted to people of different genders or cultures from theirs.
- Put students in small groups (2-3) or let them work alone. Allocate one or two celebrities to each group or one to each student.
- NOTE: It is important to set a ground-rule: there will be no criticism of these celebrities for anything about their appearance. We are not here to ridicule or judge, simply to analyse. If we ridicule appearance we risk being hypocrites as we are trying to focus more on personality and actions than appearance.
- Ask them to use the Internet to try to discover the following things (ask them to beware of false information and to research closely any claims they find):
 - Has the celebrity had any cosmetic surgery or other cosmetic procedures to create the shape or appearance they have?* If so, what? (Clarify that we are not talking about a procedure to remove or disguise a blemish or other visible difference.)
 - Is the celebrity open about this or not?
 - Is the celebrity in any way trying to create the impression that they look the way they do through dieting and/or exercising?
 - Is the message of this celebrity healthy (eat and exercise this way so you can be strong and fit) or unhealthy (eat and exercise this way so you can look like this).
 - How many followers do they have on Instagram?
- Using the collected answers, create a chart or some way of showing the ways in which these individuals are contributing to positive or negative body image.
- Discuss: Is it OK to encourage people to have expensive and risky procedures when they’ll probably keep wanting more? (Research shows that people rarely only do something like this once.)
- What are the risks of having cosmetic procedures, do they think?

7 and 8. Online is not reality

Ask students to think of ways that people or companies alter or enhance what they put online. You’re looking for the following answers, and perhaps more:

- Software, such as photoshop, that alters images, often dramatically
- Filters – eg snapchat filters that instantly make someone look different

- Special make-up, such as contouring or products specially designed for photography
- Expert lighting and camera angles

Activity 7: Watch one of the Dove campaign videos

- There are various videos here: www.dove.com/us/en/stories/campaigns.html
- Why is it important to understand and remember this? What is the problem if we don't remember that online images are altered and not how real people look?

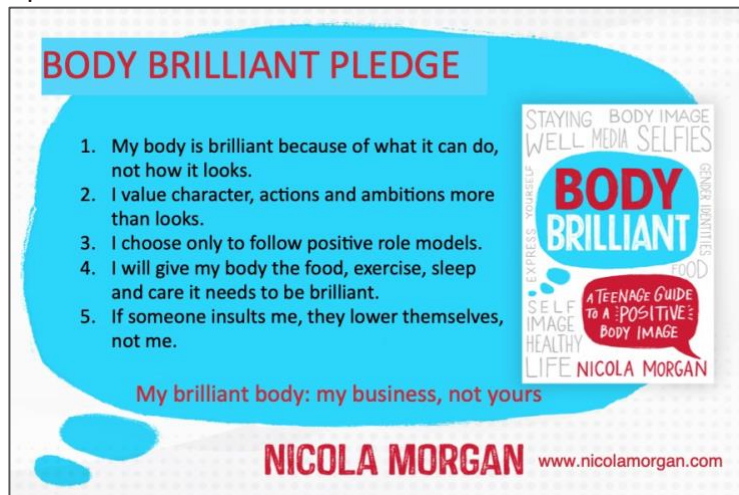
Activity 8: Tackling adverts and media campaigns

- Read the Charlie Howard story starting on page 52. (You can also ask students to find the full version of her Facebook post online.)
- In groups, find an advert or marketing campaign that you think 'body-shames' or 'fat-shames' people. (An example from recent years would be the 'beach body' advert which caused outcry in 2015: www.elephantjournal.com/2015/04/are-you-beach-body-ready-health-companys-london-ads-cause-an-outcry/) Or an example of an advert that portrays an unrealistically skinny woman or muscled man.
- Each group composes a letter or email to the company to persuade them to think again and do better next time. After discussion to ensure that they've put their points powerfully (but without insult), consider whether they might actually send the letters/emails to the companies in question.

9. The Body Brilliant pledge

Activity: download and print postcard-sized versions of this pledge from Nicola's website (see the Body Brilliant page) and also the [Hachette Schools website](http://www.hachette.co.uk/schools).

- In groups, students come up with at least one practical way that they could make each of the points be true for them.



10. The Body Brilliant tips

There is an A3 poster available to download (again from the Body Brilliant page on Nicola's website and the [Hachette Schools website](http://www.hachette.co.uk/schools)) and the tips are also available on the last page of these notes. Print, share, discuss. You could set a writing, art or drama assignment triggered by any of these tips.

Finally, discuss questions to ask me

- Get the class to discuss and then select one or two questions and email them to me? (Use the contact page on my website) If I can, I'll answer it on my website and name-check the school.
- If I'm visiting, pupils will get ownership if they ask questions. They won't all be able to so you can have a class discussion in advance, so they can choose interesting questions. You could put them in a box for me to select at random or you could send them in advance or whatever you like. But spontaneity is great, too!

Do take a look at **Positively Teenage**, too, as well as **The Teenage Guide to Life Online**, which both have free teaching notes available from my website.

Thank you for your interest. Do visit my website to see all the free resources as well as information about my other books and work with young people.

I have one final thing to say: look after your own body image, too. All the advice for young people also applies to us adults. Remember: your body is brilliant because of what it can do. Ignore what it can't do – we all have those things. Focus on your strengths of character and mind and the amazing job you do teaching young people to be the best humans they can be.

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(Overleaf is a list of tips which you can print out. It is also available as a wonderful poster for a classroom display from Nicola's website – on the Body Brilliant page – and the Hachette Schools website.)

BODY BRILLIANT: TIPS FOR A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

(Available as an A3 downloadable poster from Nicola's site and the [Hachette Schools website](#))

1. Focus on all the things your body can **do**: you made that happen!
2. Remind yourself that media images are artificial. Real people are all different: look around you in streets, schools and malls.
3. If someone criticises your looks, remember that this says everything about them and nothing about you.
4. Make your bedroom a safe space where nothing undermines you – no photos of 'perfect' bodies, no websites with artificial ideals
5. Judge people (and yourself) on actions, not looks. No shaming for appearance.
6. Avoid spending too much time looking at models of one particular shape as it will distort how you see yourself. What we see affects our mind!
7. Mood affects body image: do something fun or exciting and you'll feel better about everything.
8. Don't like what an advertiser is doing? Call them out!
9. Don't drive your body too hard: it needs food, sleep, exercise, social time and relaxation.
10. Learn the genuinely healthy things you can do to make your body brilliant: details, tips and truth in Body Brilliant!