

Open Your Class With This Tomorrow
A Tour of the Senses: How Your Brain Interprets the World

Background: Prosopagnosia is a type of visual agnosia or an inability to recognize objects that involves difficulty recognizing faces. More commonly called face blindness; individuals with this condition have trouble recognizing faces including famous individuals, family members, and even their own face. Individuals who have prosopagnosia do not typically have any other visual, memory, or cognitive problems. The condition itself can be either inherited or acquired (resulting from either head injury or stroke) and involves problems in the areas of the brain responsible for recognizing faces as opposed to objects. This brain region that is primarily responsible for recognizing faces is the fusiform gyrus of the temporal lobe which has also been linked to other conditions including synesthesia and dyslexia. Interestingly, some degree of prosopagnosia is frequently present in cases of autism and may be linked to difficulties autistic individuals have with social interaction.

The artist Chuck Close who has prosopagnosia ironically chooses to paint portraits. His large-scale portrait paintings are created based on photographs. His process involves creating a grid on a photograph and the canvas. He then builds the image by painting each square in the grid individually to create a unique image.

Directions: Use the provided PowerPoint to illustrate for students what it is like to suffer from prosopagnosia. The demonstration presented in the PowerPoint will hopefully give students an understanding of what it feels like to be face blind. Images of famous individuals are presented upside down and with identifying characteristics such as hair cropped out. Students should find it difficult to identify individuals when their faces are presented in this manner. A fun option might be for you to add a photo of yourself or other teachers in the school where you work to the PowerPoint to see if students can recognize them in this same manner.