



Creating Minds: An Anatomy of Creativity as Seen Through the Lives of Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham, and Gandhi

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Howard Gardner changed the way we think about intelligence. In his classic work *Frames of Mind*, he undermined the common notion that intelligence is a single capacity that every human being possesses to a greater or lesser extent. Now building on the framework he developed for understanding intelligence, Gardner gives us a path breaking view of creativity, along with riveting portraits of seven figures who each reinvented an area of human endeavor. Using as a point of departure his concept of seven “intelligences,” ranging from musical intelligence to the intelligence involved in understanding oneself, Gardner examines seven extraordinary individuals—Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, Igor Stravinsky, T.S. Eliot, Martha Graham, and Mahatma Gandhi—each an outstanding exemplar of one kind of intelligence.

Understanding the nature of their disparate creative breakthroughs not only sheds light on their achievements but also helps to elucidate the “modern era”—the times that formed these creators and which they in turn helped to define. While focusing on the moment of each creator’s most significant breakthrough, Gardner discovers patterns crucial to our understanding of the creative process. Not surprisingly, Gardner believes that a single variety of creativity is a myth. But he supplies evidence that certain personality configurations and needs characterize creative individuals in our time, and that numerous commonalities color the ways in which ideas are conceived, articulated, and disseminated to the public. He notes, for example, that it almost invariably takes ten years to make the initial creative breakthrough and another ten years for subsequent breakthroughs. Creative people feature unusual combinations of intelligence and personality, and Gardner delineates the indispensable role of the circumstances in which an individual works and the crucial reactions of the surrounding group of informed peers. He finds that an essential element of the creative process is the support of caring individuals who believe in the revolutionary ideas of the creators. And he documents the fact that extraordinary creativity almost always carries with it extraordinary costs in human terms.

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Mark says

Howard Gardner explores such interesting subjects. If only he could write better. I've tried to get back into this two or three times, but the prose is like wet cement.

Rose says

This was a really fascinating book to read. I loved learning more about historical figures that I only knew a little bit about, and some that I didn't know at all prior to reading this book.

The author might be a little ambitious in trying to find an overarching pattern for creativity, but he seems to at least be aware of the limitations of such an endeavor, and still attempts to do it scientifically.

On difficulty level, I'd place this book about middle of the road. Sometimes it gets really complicated and seems to be speaking to trained social scientists, and at other times it seems to be talking to a layperson. It's probably not too dense to turn the average reader away, but there are certainly parts that one might gloss over if one wasn't interested in research.

Overall a pretty fascinating book. I'd love to look more into the author's work on multiple intelligences.

Paul says

Gardner presents seven individuals to match his seven intelligences (of MI theory). His prose is beautiful and his research thorough, but he comes across as heavy handed and somewhat ageist (as all of his examples succeeded largely early in their lives). Early on in my reading I came across a question that Gardner fails to adequately explain, namely, how do each of the intelligences find their place in the world? How can each of them maximize their potential impact upon the world?

Ci says

Firstly, a comment about the writing style: much space is devoted to the methods of writing this "historical biographic sketches" of several creative people. Depending on a reader's motivation, such preface may be too ponderous to get things started. Also the writing is a mixture of academic analysis and more casual narratives. I consider this book to be "informative" but not "inspiring". Here are some of my book notes:

1. Theme of "marginality". Creative people such as T.S. Eliot had been caught between cultures, "inhabiting" diverse time period, experiencing personal complexity and disturbances. Creativity is associated, at least in

some degree, with a certain level of "not-belonging" and dissonance to their time and social sphere.

2. Sigmund Freud: "If repression qualifies as the central idea in the Freudian conspectus, the dream presents itself as the privileged route to an understanding of the processes of the repression and to the psychic life". Hence the masterpiece about "dreams".

3. Einstein -- I skipped this segment for now since I am to read a proper biography.

4. Pablo Picasso -- the constant creating-deconstructing artist of the first rank. Full of wrath and energy.

5. Igor Stravinsky -- the musician for the modern age.

6. T.S. Eliot -- the poet capturing the modern dissonance

7. Martha Graham -- the modern kinetics and aesthetics departure from classic ballet

9. Gandhi -- the political master behind "brahmacharya" (self control) and the political process of non-violence "Satyagraha".

The book's short-coming is that it is dry and largely humor-less.

Michael Exley says

Outstanding thoughtful and a useful tool.

Katie says

A very readable application of the science of creativity. This book does well to dispel the myth of the lone genius, and reveals some of the lesser-known brilliant communities behind the brilliant minds we all know.

S Kasm says

One of the most stimulating books I have ever read on the subject of creativity ~ Howard Gardner is in a league of his own when it comes to exploring the dynamics of the human mind and its capabilities. Here, you get an inside glimpse into the lives of 7 creative giants, their thought processes and their influences. An very insightful read!

U. Teresa says

I taught this book in a critical reading, thinking , and writing class. Some students like it, but most hated it. I personally love how it gave great insight into how these individuals were able to influence the 20th century with his or her creativity, a creativity that grew from similar paths. If you didn't know much about the lives

of Gandhi, Picasso, Stravinsky, Freud, Eliot, Einstein, and Graham, Gardner's study will enlighten you about these geniuses.

Mark Terry says

I really enjoy reading Gardner, but it can be a bit tough to get through. He explores creative thinkers of the early twentieth century here, choosing one for each of the MI types. Using these personalities as a base, he develops a profile for highly creative people. Much of the creativity profile is pretty standard. The exploration of each case is very interesting for the historical and societal context. If you are interested in Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Gandhi, Stravinsky, TS Eliot or Martha Graham you will probably enjoy it.

Alaura Robinson says

This book was well-researched, well-written, and somewhat interesting. It does not tell you how to be creative, but rather lets you see parallels in the people Gardner deems as the most creative people of a generation. Honestly, it was pretty dull for me.

J. Whitley says

I first heard about Gardner's book while reading another book. Gardner was often quoted in the book *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives* (0046442072434) by Louise Desalvo. Because of her references I found myself excited about ordering *Creating Minds* as the next read.

Gardner's book is an important book as he looks at the lives of seven great creators within the Modern Period and their similarities and differences. It is however a very different approach from Desalvo's book. At first I was disappointed because I expected writing more in the vein of Desalvo's. Gardner's approach was analytical rather than writing to encourage personal exploration. Once getting past that (and understanding Gardner's focus on the theory of Multiple Intelligences) I could appreciate it from an educator's point of view.

His summaries of the creators Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham, and Gandhi was phenomenal. While I understand his premise, I'm not sure I agree with his conclusions. Perhaps this was because my original hope was to use the book to inspire my own creative mind. As a reader who is 50 years of age, his conclusions came across rather discouraging since he focuses on successful creators making contributions in their twenties.

M. Jane Colette says

I love Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory, and so I really enjoyed this exploration of it as it applied to "genius" in different fields.

One can complain about some of his choice of subject (T.S. Eliot? Really?) but he sneakily addresses all

those complains in the first pages by admitting yup, a lot of what he's doing is a judgement call.

Overall, a lot of food for thought for me. I'm fascinated by creativity (less so genius) and having this kind of peek into the stories of Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky etc was great.

Really loved that Martha Graham was chosen as one of the subjects, an embodiment of physical creativity + intelligence.

Maica says

Howard Gardner provides intimate sketches of these creative individuals who stood out on various domains, while studying their lives in alignment with his theory of Multiple Intelligences. Filled with lots of useful info and insights.

Peter Mancini says

Great book and a must read for educators! I think that is eye opening to see what made these great, great!

Anthony says

While it purports to be a grand study of creativity and genius, it fails at that. It is however a nice little collection of biographers on 6 great minds who each revolutionized their field. Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham and Gandhi. It is worth reading just as a collection of biography.

The insight into creativity that the book supposedly offers is pretty nil - that great thinkers have to make sacrifices for their art, and often rely heavily on the help of others is not a very profound revelation. Still I enjoyed greatly reading the lives of Freud and Picasso.
