Northwest Noggin

Pandemic Connections: Reconnecting our brains one cell at a time

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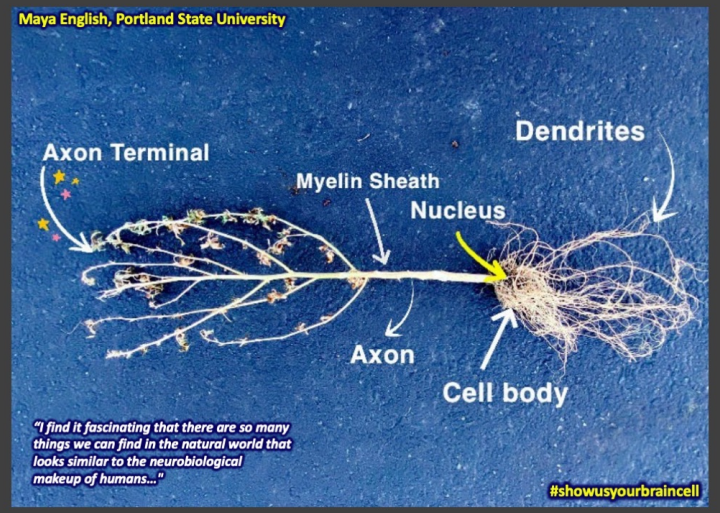


How do we connect with our community during a global pandemic?

Noggin @ SfN

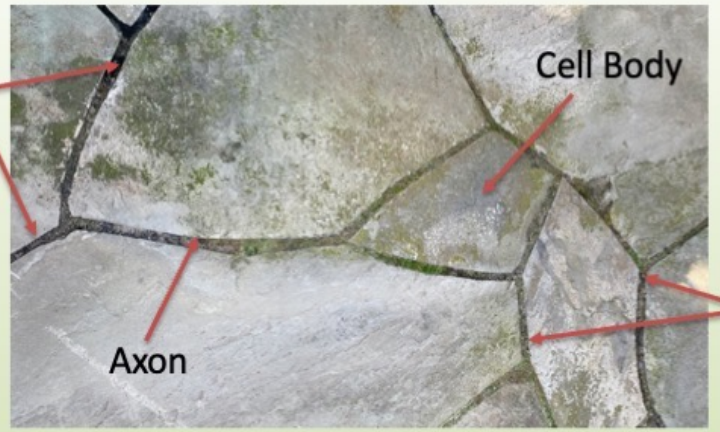
NWNOGGIN

TEN YEARS!
ALL VOLUNTEER (everyone)
50,000+ community members

Our brains are home to billions of cells that reach out and connect. These networks of linked neurons and glia make us who we are, and let us perceive, think and behave. When separated by trauma or injury they are remarkably plastic, capable of establishing new synapses, developing creative approaches to navigating a complex world.

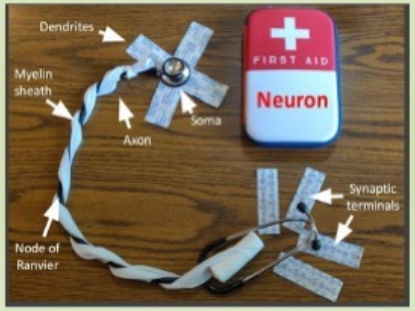
Nonprofit NW Noggin (nwnoggin.org) organizes undergraduates and graduates to collaborate, build community networks and inspire people about neuroscience and art. We bring diverse students excited by research and their own arts-integrated study of brains and behavior into K-12 public schools, youth correctional facilities, Congress, houseless youth centers, coffee shops and pubs to hear to what people already know and what they'd like to know, and to see where our stories and discoveries from labs and classrooms intersect. *We've talked with over 50,000 people since 2012!*

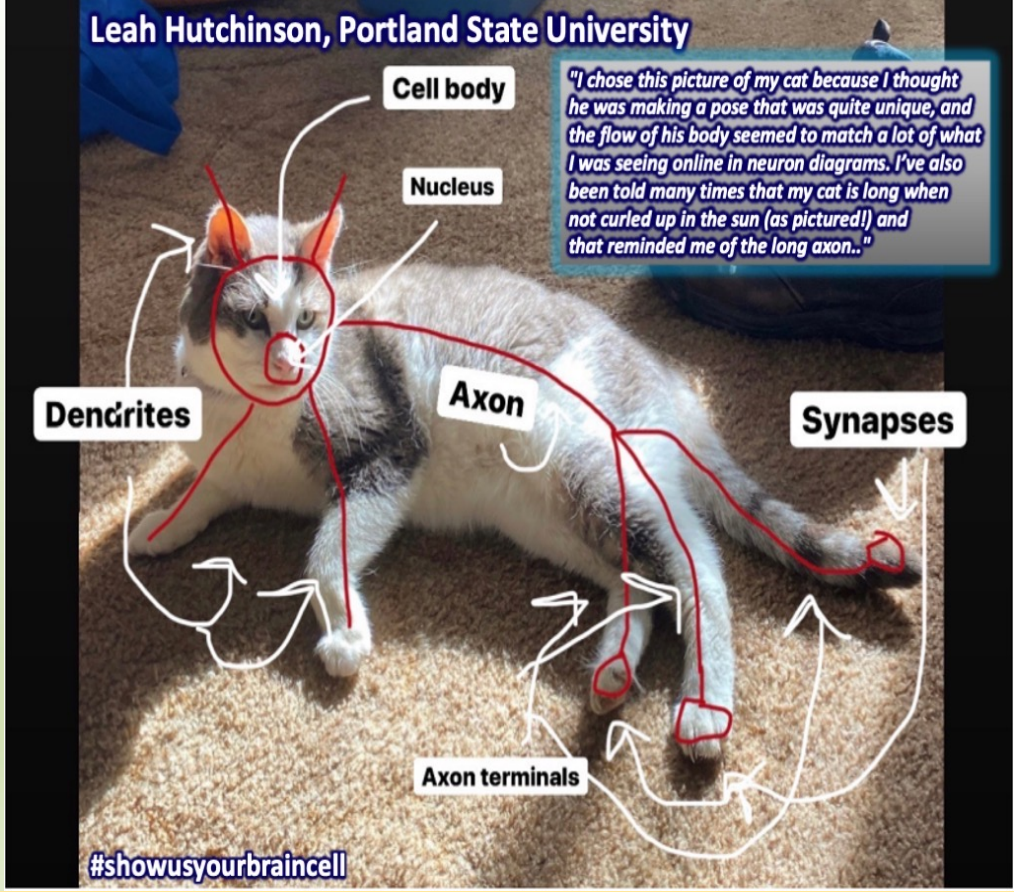
Take a look around you, what things do you see that share those structures?

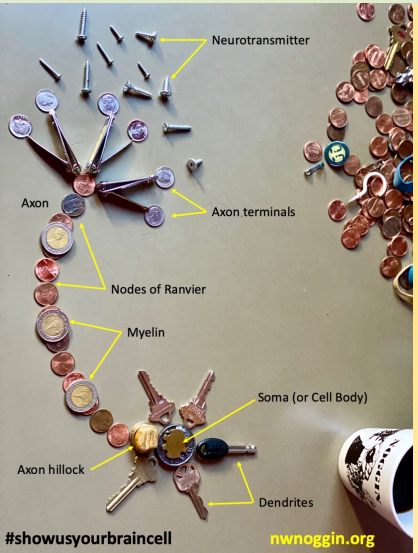


Can you construct a neuron out of things that you find?

What things for you represent the function of a neuron? Or the function of specific parts of a neuron? Do those things have personal meaning, or say something about you?

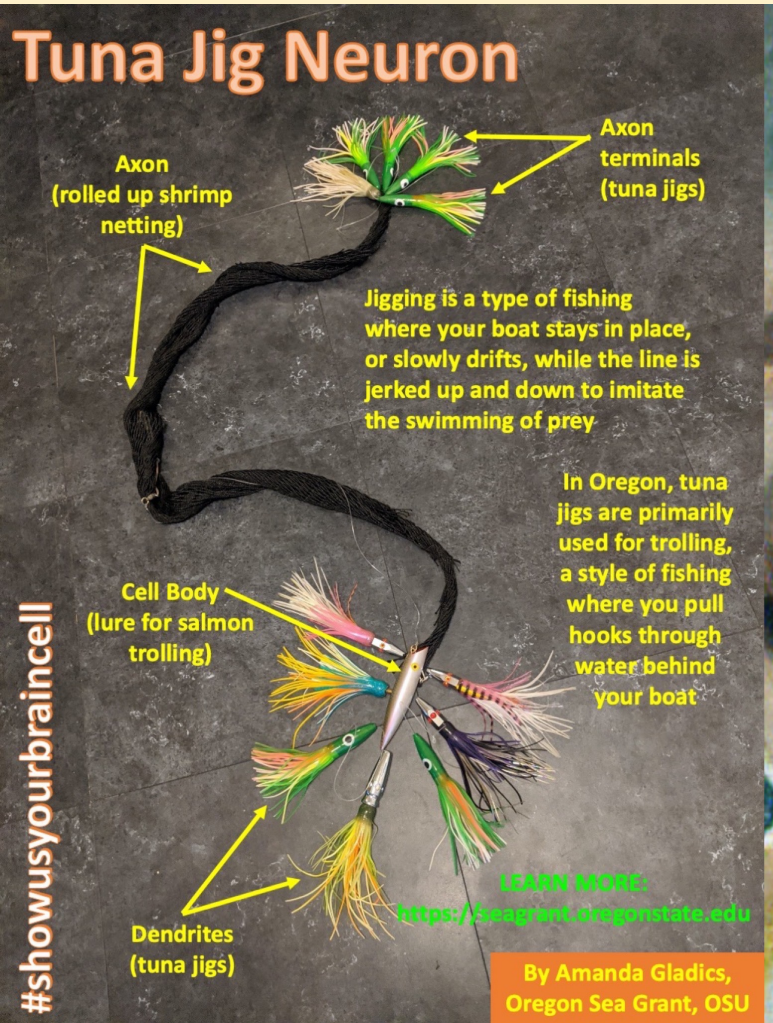


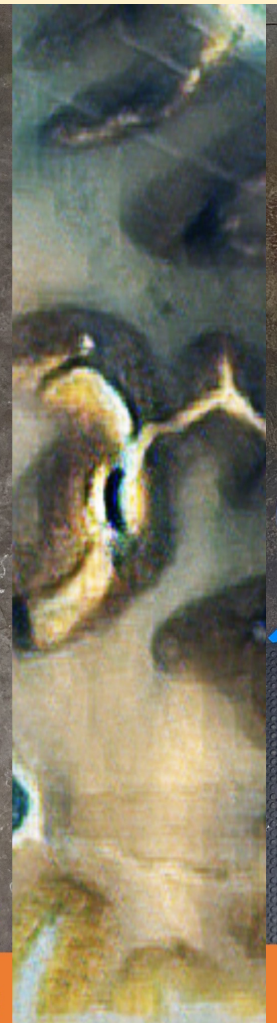


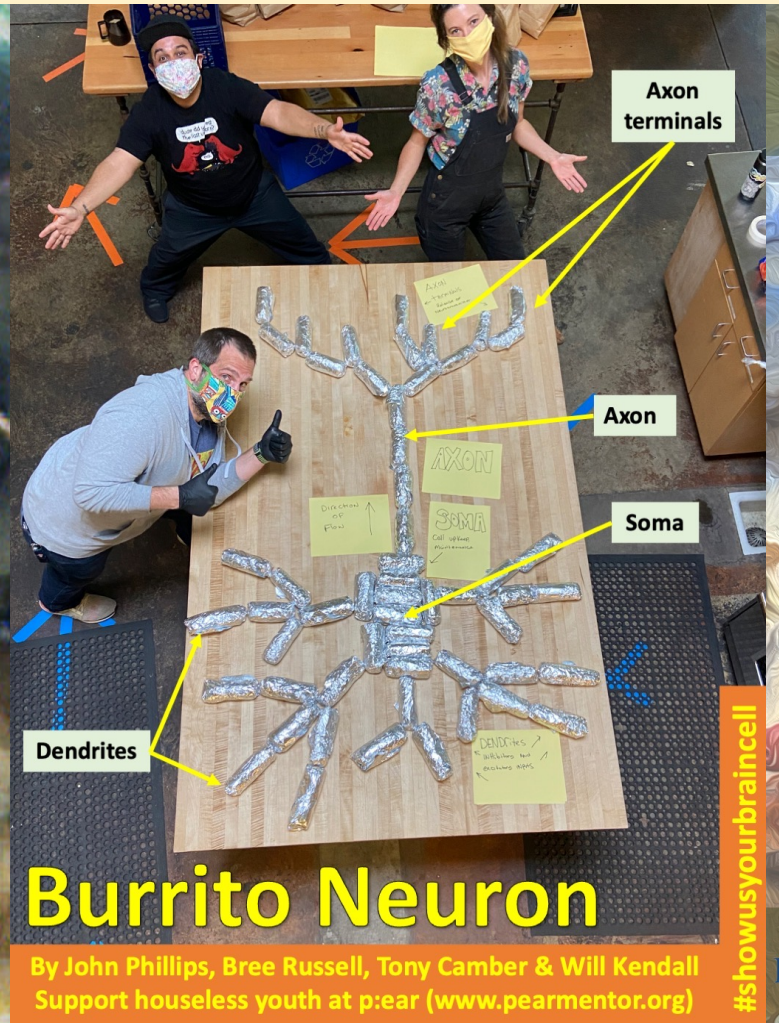


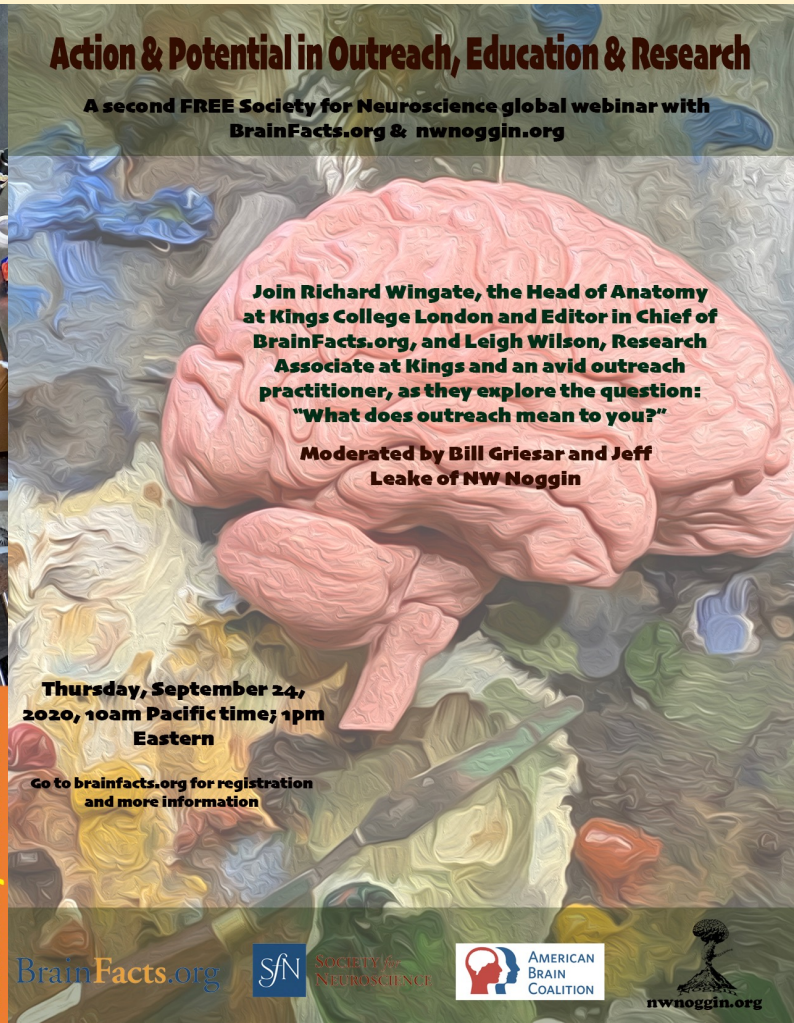
In 2020, with COVID-19 suspending in-person outreach, we developed a new, found object brain cell project we could engage in online. We asked people to look around their own environment and find objects that reminded them of neurons or glia. **See more examples: nwnoggin.org**

We brought this project to K-12 classrooms in the Pacific Northwest and Hawaii, and presented it through two global webinars in collaboration with BrainFacts.org, a public information initiative of The Kavli Foundation, the Gatsby Charitable Foundation and the Society for Neuroscience. The brain cells created and posted online with the hashtag #showusyourbraincell are extraordinary - beautiful, compelling, informative - and offer windows into people's individual lives and circumstances. Many took the opportunity to explain the materials used and their significance, connecting essential aspects of other fields and cultures to basic structural components of our brains.










A pandemic is traumatic, separates networks, and makes it hard to connect.
Yet like our brain cells, we can adapt and find new approaches to our ever-changing world.
Building excitement and awareness of discoveries, educational options and careers through arts-integrated neuroscience outreach also trains new scientists to collaborate, engages more people, and increases awareness and support for community investment in both brain research and the arts.