



Readers' Discussion Guide

An Introduction to *The Healing Muse* Volume 15

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The Healing Muse is a journal unique in its approach to illness, medicine, and the body. Composed of narratives of prose, short stories, and poetry, it can help those experiencing illness in any context as well as those interested in studying literature and medicine. To guide both readers and educators, we've provided a starting point for discussion for use in classrooms, book groups, or one's own exploration.

Patient-Physician Relationship

To the Patient in Room 16 by Travis Quinn

This essay is about a young health care professional coming to terms with mortality. Why do you think Quinn chose to include so many stark physical descriptions (“Should I put the sock back on?” and “You are placed into your drawer, then the drawer is closed,” for example)? How might the experience he describes affect how he practices medicine?

Finding our Routine by Alisa Anderson

What is the routine the medical student is learning? How might her experience change the way the narrator interacts with future patients? Does Anderson's use of the second person point of view affect your reading of this piece? What does she gain by using it?

Personal Bias/Prejudices/Disabilities

In *Uncanny Gift*, Robert Roger Lebel repeats the phrase “all people are different, but some are more different than others.” What might this mean for Kevin in terms of his experiences as a person with disabilities? Discuss how the narrator quietly but deftly illustrates for us the abilities that Kevin does have. How has Kevin impacted the narrator?

The following three poems also portray situations where someone's differences cause him/her to stand apart:

For My Brother, Who Asked Ann Brown to Dance by K.B. Kincer

She Wrote About the Peaceful Minoans by Pamela Sonn

Hummingbird by Carol Barrett

What common themes emerge in all three pieces? How does each speaker cast the image of difference in such a way as to upend our expectations? What can each of us do to grow our understanding of and respect for those who are different?

Dementia

Medical Daycare by Sandy McPherson Carrubba

The narrator's husband, who suffers from dementia, takes great joy in the friendships he builds at "medical daycare." How do his experiences there affect his relationship with his wife (who is also his caretaker)? How does his wife's view of the daycare change over time?

Improvisation on Senile Dementia by Rob Jacques

The speaker permits the reader an "insider's view" of how dementia feels and manifests. How does memory impact the effect of his disease? What is it he wishes to convey to his loved ones?

Land Line by Pam Freeman

A misdialed number brings two strangers together. Patience and caring bring relief to one and increased understanding to another. How does the poem deepen our awareness of dementia? How does the poem expand our notion of empathy?