

Anatomy Creative Projects II 2011

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Hi ██████████, I am one of the faculty that works with Dr. Leonard to comment on the creative projects for the anatomy class. Haha – when I first saw yours, I wondered what subtle contrast you might be drawing between a well-tailored up-and-coming professional and anatomy. Then I flipped it over! Lots of life lessons for the emerging physician are to be found in your lovely collage. The ticking clock and hourglass contrast with the living growing greenery of the plants. The skeletally-handled book reminds both of knowledge and the fleetingness of learning. The fields, the lowering skies, the sea perhaps suggest that life ebbs and flows within the constancy of the natural world. I hope I understood some of your meaning. In any case, much food for thought. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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Hi ██████████, I am one of the faculty that works with Dr. Leonard to comment on the creative projects for the anatomy class. Your collage was quite thought-provoking. Partly, for me, it spoke to the contradictions in our culture – we are obsessed with physical fitness, working out; and apparently equally obsessed with junk food, alcohol, and unhealthy couch potato lives. Further, although we can make choices about lifestyle, ultimately we must all consume our “last supper.” The collage also made me think of other contradictions in life – happiness (the old couple) and suffering (the kid with the brain tumor); the beauty of the body and the inevitable decay that awaits us all. Very interesting and thought-provoking. Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on your work. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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Hi ██████████, as you know I am one of the faculty that works with Dr. Leonard to comment on the creative projects for the anatomy class, and I got the chance to look through your intriguing and often amusing sketches. I had the feeling I was probably gazing at anatomical structures (I DID recognize a hand :-)), but they reminded me of Dr. Seuss-like squiggles. To my untrained eye, they were whimsical, lighthearted, joyful figures that could as easily have hung on a Calder mobile as resided in the human body. I am probably way off-based, but I did enjoy them! Hope you are doing very well, and bringing your year to a successful conclusion. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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██████████ I am one of the faculty that works with Dr. Leonard to comment on the creative projects for the anatomy class. I was impressed by the artistry you demonstrated in your drawing of the heart. The heart, of course, is a highly symbolic organ. Your pencil sketch is so meticulous and careful that its execution seems a way of honoring “the great pump.” Gazing at it filled me with awe for the complexity and elegance of the structures contained within the human body. Technically thorough, and surprisingly moving. Dr. Shapiro

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Dear ██████████, I am one of the faculty that works with Dr. Leonard to comment on the creative projects for the anatomy class. I had the pleasure of viewing your adorable sketch of “medical student at prayer” :-). It is pretty funny what you start to pray for as a medical student – and this may not be the strangest thing you put in your prayers over the next 3 years. The drawing was well-executed and the accompanying balloon hysterical. You captured perfectly how the world of the medical student can shrink rather alarmingly, but also amusingly. Keep that sense of humor intact, you’ll continue to need it :-). Best, Dr. Shapiro

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Dear ██████████, I am one of the faculty that works with Dr. Leonard to comment on the creative projects for the anatomy class. I really enjoyed your poem “Pleased to meet you.” The rhyme scheme and meter added an element of lightness to an obviously serious subject. I particularly liked the lines “How easily I hold your heart/Without having even been your friend.” This addresses so well the strange intimacy that develops between student and cadaver in the anatomy lab. I also appreciated the analogy of life “like a nerve,” holding “a purpose that is fleeting.” The awareness of the ephemeral nature of life is a well-established one, but this comparison is quite original and brings the insight to life. Your pledge to your cadaver is moving, and honors the deepest “purpose” of anatomy. I’m very glad I had the opportunity to be privy to the relationship you shared with the cadaver and your commitment to your future patients. Dr. Shapiro

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Hello ██████████ I am one of the faculty that works with Dr. Leonard to comment on the creative projects for the anatomy class. I read your poem “But Still I Wonder,” and was touched by the way you brought this cadaver to “life” by your appreciation for her uniqueness and specialness. I also liked that, even as the anatomy class draws to a close, your mind still contained uncertainties. What was she like, who was with her when she died? Did she really understand what would happen to her as a result of donating her body? Could she have imagined the esteem in which you held her, and the respect with which you treated her? Medicine is full of unanswered questions, and we must all find ways of accepting them. Ultimately, you adopted an attitude of gratitude toward this cadaver. I hope you make this same choice toward all your future patients. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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Hello ██████████, I am one of the faculty that works with Dr. Leonard to comment on the creative projects for the anatomy class. I had the opportunity to read your thoughtful reflection triggered by the cadaver’s painted toenails. I agree that dissection has an element of privacy violation in it, as do many procedures in medicine. Yet, like anatomy, these violations are conducted for a greater good. These contradictions take some getting used to, as you intimate.

It is also common for physicians to connect (sometimes unconsciously) certain patients with people in their personal lives with whom they have strong relationships. In your case, the cadaver's toenails made you think of your grandmother, and her need for everything to be "perfect," even at the end. This "transference" (to use the technical term) can either work in favor of or against the patient, but having awareness of these feelings is the first step toward ensuring that they do not complicate patient care.

I love what you wrote about a "carefully done dissection" doing "justice to the cadaver." This is a beautiful thought. The donor gave such a precious thing – her own body – as a teaching tool. It seems to me that the best way to honor this last bequest is to conduct dissection with care, humility, appreciation, and to learn as much as possible. In this way, the "violation" aspect is at least in part overridden by gratitude and respect.

Thank you for sharing your varied responses to dissection. It is a complex process (in more ways than one!) and I admire the sensitivity and perceptiveness that you've brought into the lab. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED], it was my good fortune to receive your follow-up reflection as part of the anatomy creative projects option. I can see how you've wrestled (Israel?) with this question of dissection, and I appreciate that you've stuck with the process. It is quite possible that in a decade or so, cadaver dissection will be a thing of the past to be replaced by prosections and virtual modeling (I know at least one medical school in the UK only offers virtual anatomy); and future medical historians may well judge current practices barbaric. You were pretty funny about the "very clean lab" and the "very stressed-out medical student" :-) I agree that thinking it will be possible to preserve ALL of the body is probably unrealistic; and in a strict construction, this would certainly eliminate Jewish donors. I also appreciated your historical perspective. Whatever the future of anatomical dissection, there is no question that without it, the advancement of medicine would have been significantly hobbled. I am glad that despite your personal reservations about the "ultimate" value of dissection (saving a life), you have preserved an attitude of appreciation and respect for those who made this decision. Thank you for these carefully parsed and well-reasoned thoughts. Best, Dr. Shapiro