

## Anatomy Projects #2 4/10

Hi [REDACTED], I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I was fortunate enough to be assigned your humorous "interview." You hit on all the important themes – that the cadaver is more than just a lab specimen, it is a formerly alive person like yourself; the importance of respecting the cadaver; and expressing gratitude for having been given such a gift. I'm glad that your cadaver was unambivalent about the decision to donate; and I'm glad you got so much out of the experience. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED], I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I was fortunate enough to be assigned your reflective essay. I really liked the way you enumerated all the anatomical details, all the potentially gross aspects, and then said simply that you were "grateful" for all of it. That is an attitude to cherish. It's not always possible, but to the extent that you can "embrace" everything in medicine as opportunities for learning and becoming a better healer, I think you've figured it out.

You played cleverly with the concept of "exposure," both literally and figuratively, in terms of vulnerability. Vulnerability makes us feel, well, vulnerable; and of course a common defense mechanism is humor, often at another's expense. Since patients are by definition vulnerable, it is easy to distance from them emotionally by laughing at their ignorance, stupidity, demandingness, fear, you name it. Hopefully, you will remember the epidermis joke and not fall into that trap. Perhaps you will also think about the possibility that it is not just the cadaver – and later the patient – who is exposed, but also the student – and later the doctor. Practicing medicine requires at least as much self-dissection (we're talking figurative here!) as anatomy ever does. It is a mirror that invites you to see what kind of person you are, and what kind of person you are becoming. Not for the faint of heart, but as you said in your essay, you can be grateful for it all.

It's been such a pleasure knowing you this year, [REDACTED]. Much good luck with second year, and I hope to see you soon. Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED], I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I was lucky enough to be assigned your poem. I enjoyed reading it, thank you for writing it! It is such a lovely reminder that although science can answer a lot of questions, certain questions can never be answered, and we should relish – and find consolation in – the mystery. I also appreciated your emphasis on unity. There is a lot of differentiation in medicine – doctors and patients, doctors and medical students (!), sick and healthy, "good" patients and "bad" patients. Sometimes distinction is purposeful and useful. But sometimes it is employed primarily to protect oneself from the vulnerability of life. If you can remember that underlying

the differences of doctors and patients there is the fundamental unity of suffering beings trying to help and support each other, you will have gone a long way toward becoming a fine doctor. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED], I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I was lucky enough to be assigned your essay. Your writing expressed an important journey from arrogance (or at least pretty simplistic confidence :-)) to humility, from lost to found. I hope very much that you will always remember this lesson that dissection, your professor, and your cadavers gave you. You will discover its value over and over again as you proceed through your training. Medical training consists of so many unique experiences that can never be fully explained or prepared for until you go through them. Approached with the humility and gratitude you evince in this writing, you will succeed with them as you have obviously succeeded in anatomy. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED]. I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I was lucky enough to be assigned your cadaver interview. Well done, you asked interesting questions, and your cadaver was very forthcoming :-). A couple of things impressed me. One was your recognition that the students have to be willing to put in some work to get the cadaver to "reveal" his secrets. This is a good insight that in my experience is applicable to many patients as well. And just as you learn not to resent the hard work in this context, it's important to keep that same generous spirit with living patients as well. The second was when you recognized that the cadaver was a unique individual who had made very particular choices; so that in his opinion, he's been treated "marvelously." I'm glad that, at the end of the day, your cadaver would have made the same decision all over again (plus a little body toning). I would tend to agree with you. You and your classmates have made good use of these cadavers, and I think that is what they wanted. It's nice to think of making your cadavers happy :-). Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED], I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I was lucky enough to be assigned your essay. I LOVED it, partly because it says that mother knows best :-). It is a beautifully constructed narrative, and the repeated refrain of the narrator's early choice counterpoised to his "other plans" becomes a fascinating puzzle that the reader wants resolved. The reader is caught up and involved with how the narrator's life unfolds, cheers his successes and empathizes with his challenges. We *want* him to fulfill what we know to be his destiny. When, first as a doctor, and then as a cadaver, he satisfies this dream, we are fulfilled too. It was a creative and original way to tell the cadaver's story. It showed, rather than told, beyond all doubt, the humanity of the cadaver. Thank you! Dr. Shapiro

[REDACTED]

Hi [REDACTED], I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I was lucky enough to be assigned your poem. It's very well-crafted, I liked the extensive alliteration and the way you made poetry out of the scientific language of anatomy. The idea is simply wonderful – a “dissection” or analysis of a simple smile and hug. Yet the effect is not to reduce these actions to mechanism, but to show the “skeleton” if you will of love. To me, it conveys the best use of knowledge – to deepen appreciation, to add beauty. Very well done! Dr. Shapiro

Dear [REDACTED], I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I had the good fortune to be assigned your poem. I really liked what you did with the concept of “togetherness.” First, you talk about it on the content, knowledge level – all the little “pieces” of learning coming together. This is good, this makes sense. But then you took this idea to a higher, symbolic level: the idea of starting off separate and disconnected from the cadaver, but by the end of the course “coming together,” becoming one, with the cadaver. This was an outstanding conceptualization. I hope you can remember it as you proceed through your training. There are many forces that will separate and disconnect you from your patients – many systemic, some personal. But ultimately, a good doctor is always “together with,” “united with,” on the same side as the patient. If you can keep that context, and remember to feel the gratitude you express toward your cadaver toward your patients as well – all of them! - you cannot go wrong. Thanks for this lovely reflection. Dr. Shapiro

[REDACTED], I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I received your thoughtful interview questions. They demonstrate to me your sincere interest in the humanity of the cadavers. What was their life like? What is it like to move from life to death? What is it like – if anything – to be a cadaver? I remember once reading a poem by a student in which she imagined that cadavers getting up at night, dancing and making merry. I guess a lot of us wonder if it's as quiet as we think. Thanks for writing down all that you wonder about. I think many of us think about similar questions. It's too bad that, no matter how often we ask, we will never receive answers. Best, Dr. Shapiro

[REDACTED], I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I had the good fortune to be assigned your poem. It was a beautiful poem, in the most literal sense. It made dissection *beautiful*. It made the reader fall in love with dissection, just as you fell in love with the word, the sound, the texture of fascia. I also liked the way, just at the very end, you entered the poem, with aching back and recognition of privilege. You say it so well – you *have* seen the body whole in a way that few others have. How ironic that that wholeness is perceived in the process of taking that body apart! Impressive work. Best, Dr. Shapiro

[REDACTED]

Hi [REDACTED], I'm one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I had the good fortune to be assigned your drawing and poem. I very much liked the way you explored the concept of seeing: "gift of sight," "lent eyes," a "lens" through which to see and interpret. My favorite line was "I now possess the tools to see beyond the superficial" because it is open to multiple interpretations. Of course there is the literal – you can now actually visualize the heart hidden behind the chest wall. But to me it also evokes a core concept in medicine – that good doctoring is all about being able "to see beyond the superficial" – to peer (compassionately) into the deepest core of the patient, to understand not only the surface person, but also the essential humanity. I could feel your gratitude and appreciation for all you have learned from your cadavers. I know you will use this "gift of sight" well. Best, Dr. Shapiro

[REDACTED]  
Hi [REDACTED]. I am one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I had the good fortune to be assigned your poem. You have a real aesthetic sensibility – this is a beautiful and moving poem. You have some fantastic lines – the one about the probing fingers, and the way it "links" to the beckoning purple nails. Great! Its intimacy really honors the body of the cadaver, which of course is what the cadaver offers at this point; and which is the locus of medicine. What your poem does so wonderfully is show that we are embodied creatures – that there is nothing without the body, yet we are so much more than the body. Really well done. Dr. Shapiro

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED], I am one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I had the good fortune to be assigned your essay. What a well-written and thoughtful reflection! Your allusion to the Tin Man was so apropos, because of course we all know that he was Dorothy's most caring companion! The distinction you make between lab and bedside is the crucial one. Human emotions are complex, but it's unlikely that anyone cries or faints in anatomy lab because they're worried about the cadaver! As in your roommate's case, the dead become a link to living human suffering, and it evoked tears. In my view, in no way embarrassing, actually pretty appropriate. I'd guess, based on your essay, that the dead are a link back to the living for you as well – but in your case, your cadavers are linking you to your future patients, and it is something to celebrate and be grateful for. So what the cadaver means to his or her dissector is variable and fluctuating. What's important, I think, is that it means *something*. Thanks for the opportunity to read this work. Dr. Shapiro

[REDACTED]  
Hi [REDACTED], I am one of the faculty that reviews the anatomy creative projects, and I had the good fortune to be assigned your anatomy essay. The way in which you contrasted your experience with those of your peers was quite interesting. I really appreciated your overall point that it was in *this* experience of dissection, as a medical student, that the meaning of what you were doing became illuminated. If you can remember the *meaning* of what you are doing as your training progresses,

**whether it is checking a lab result or holding a patient's hand, you will be a satisfied learner and give your patients the best you are capable of. I was also struck by the way you describe the impact of the anatomy course on your learning which stands as a eloquent justification for the value of in vivo dissection. Finally it sounds to me as though you have made the most of the incredible gift you have received. Of course, we will never know for sure, but I think you are right to imagine that the cadavers would be proud of you and your classmates. Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Best, Dr. Shapiro**

Hi [REDACTED], I am one of the faculty members reviewing students' creative projects for anatomy. I received your essay, for which I am thankful. It is quite beautiful! Thank you for sharing how your faith intersected with the anatomy experience. It is not uncommon for anatomy to raise questions, or deepen understandings, on the level of faith, and your reflections were both thoughtful and uplifting. For me, it was intriguing that you saw the body as "merely a vessel," yet its very materiality brought into clear focus the spiritual dimensions of being. It sounds as though perhaps it was the juxtaposition of the living, animated, vibrant students and the shell, "clothing" that the cadaver represented, that crystallized this religious teaching. All the best, Dr. Shapir