

BECOMING A PHYSICIAN Medical Humanities Conference Jan 2017

- I. 12:35 (Intro slide) Overview of session. First I'm going to very briefly talk about medicine as a rite of passage and some of its limitations. Then we'll consider how writing – and poetry in particular – can act as a critique of the process of becoming a doctor. We'll read a poem by a medical student; and then we'll practice writing a poem, or starting to write a poem and share with partner.
 - A. Medical education is a rite of passage – but what does this mean?
 - B. Medical education is a process that takes an ordinary person [think Frodo] out of her or his ordinary world by choosing that person for a special privilege/challenge
 - C. Transition – As part of this rite of passage, the person enters an alien world, filled with trials and tribulations (think orcs, Saruman), as well as wise guides (think Gandalf) and precious friendships (think Sam)
 - D. Incorporation – Finally, after passing all the tests, this ordinary person becomes a full-fledged member of this new world with special privileges and responsibilities; you are a doctor
- II. But many medical educators and students have observed that there are shortcomings to medicine's current rite of passage that can wound as well as elevate the people who are subjected to it; and that the way people are changed is not always for the better
 - A. To mention just a few of these shortcomings...
 1. Overemphasis on logico-scientific, reductive thinking devalues skills that are linguistic, interpretive, empathic
 2. Devaluing of personal identity and discounting personal experience
 3. Neglect of medicine as a moral, rather than a technologic, enterprise
 4. Encouraging distance between doctors and patients – “professional”; pt seen as “other”
- III. 12:40 Medical student writing can act as a critique of the normative rite of passage
 - A. Through writing, students can consider what is happening to them and how the educational process operates from a human rather than a scientific perspective
 - B. By telling their stories, they can better understand and find meaning in their experiences
 - C. Writing helps students consider which aspects of their socialization they wish to retain and which they wish to question
- IV. Why poetry?
 - A. Offers alternative to language of science based in imagery, rhyme, rhythm, metaphor
 - B. Helps us understand narratives of ourselves and others that are not neatly formed, but incoherent, even chaotic; poetry often reveals more than the author intends
 - C. Because of its reliance on metaphor and image, it often provides new ways of looking at things, new insights
 - D. Can reduce stress, promote feelings of coherence and wellbeing
- V. Poetry is telling not necessarily THE truth, but certainly A truth
- VI. 12:45 Read Thoughts on George Harrison's Death

- A. How does this poem critique the medical rite of passage?
 - 1. Critique of authoritative role model and pseudo-scientific thinking
 - 2. Critique of lack of attention to student's personal, subjective experience
 - 3. Critique of emotional distancing (joking, swaggering)
 - 4. Critique of judgmental attitudes toward pts – lack of moral compass in surgeon
 - B. Transcendent value of art – as important as healing power of medicine
- VII. 12:50 Writing poetry
- A. Find a central image (something from your life NOW)
 - B. Write down words that come to mind to describe that image
 - C. Put the words together
- VIII. Tips for writing poetry
- A. Avoid clichés, sentimentality
 - B. Imagery, metaphor, sound, language
 - C. Concrete, not abstract language
 - D. Show, don't tell
 - E. Think outside the box, subvert the ordinary
- IX. 1:00 Topics
- A. Write what you know
 - B. 15 MIN for writing; 5 min for sharing with partner; 5 min for summary 1:25 stop