

READING AND WRITING ABOUT CANCER

I. Introductions

- A. Something about myself - part of a family as wife, mother, sister, daughter; love literature**
- B. Name and something important about yourself**
- C. Overview -**
 - 1. Discuss why writing can help us**
 - 2. Read a couple examples of the writing of others, women who themselves have had cancer**
 - 3. Discuss some examples of different kinds of writing**
 - 4. Practice a couple of different kinds of writing**
 - 5. Share our writing**

II. Why Writing?

- A. There are different reasons to write:**
 - 1. Self-expression - expressing who we are as unique human beings**
 - 2. Self-reflection - thinking more deeply about who we are**
 - a. Personal growth**
 - b. Spiritual enrichment**
 - 3. Finding our own voice**
 - a. Particularly important when confronting a serious illness**
 - b. Can sometimes feel as though we have "lost" who we are - we have a new identity provided by doctors**
 - 4. Writing for others**
 - a. posterity**
 - b. our families**
 - c. our doctors**
- B. Therapeutic writing - writing that heals**
 - 1. Work of James Pennebaker**
 - a. Studies of college students, medical students, prisoners, unemployed: instructed to write about traumatic event**
 - b. Writing authentically, deeply, and over time about traumatic events is associated with improved psychological and even physical well-being**
 - 2. Why does this work?**
 - a. We don't know**
 - b. Writing restores coherence, order, and sense of control**
 - c. Helps to organize, make sense of, and discover meaning in events which initially seem impossible to incorporate in our life stories**
 - d. Once we have made difficult events meaningful, it is easier to release them and move forward**
 - 3. Variations**
 - a. Liberation through incineration**
 - b. Catharsis/ventilation**

- III. Reading about Others' Experiences**
 - A. Makes us feel not so alone - part of a community**
 - B. Gives us new ideas for coping**
 - C. Suggests different ways of thinking about, interpreting difficult events**
 - D. Themes of loss; identifying and expressing difficult emotions; facing one's own mortality**

- IV. Different Kinds of Writing**
 - A. Journaling**
 - 1. Daily record - keep things in order**
 - 2. Emotional record**
 - 3. Record for the family**
 - 4. Upbeat journaling**
 - a. Smilers**
 - b. Quotations, insights**
 - 5. Nature journaling – pay attention to world around you**
 - 6. Dream journaling - what your unconscious has to tell you**
 - B. Writing a letter to your problem**
 - C. Receiving a letter from a wise advisor about your problem**
 - D. Point of view writing**
 - 1. Choose another perspective to consider an event**
 - 2. Husband, child, friend, doctor**
 - E. Photograph writing**
 - 1. Who you were "before"**
 - 2. Who you are "now"**
 - F. Free writing**
 - 1. Choose an object, an event, a person**
 - 2. Write - don't censor, don't edit, don't worry about form**