

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Thursday, March 11, 2004 4:16 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

Hi [REDACTED] I just wanted to put into writing to you that I found your poem about the anatomy cadaver to be amazingly good. Not only did you cleverly interweave an additional supplicatory prayer into the poem itself, but you then enhanced this hidden message through the "body and blood" imagery in the second to last stanza. Using both the short and the long syllable line was also very effective. This allowed the poem to move between a raw, blunt harshness and an elegiac lament, which seemed unified by the rhyming couplet that ended each verse. With perfect pitch, you expressed the sometimes desperate, sometimes angry, sometimes vulnerable ambivalence that students, residents, and even physicians feel about what might happen if they "let the patient in." This question lies at the core of medicine, and you approached it as you might enter a church – aware you are on sacred ground, but ready, if necessary, to rage and defy and break a window. The last couplet is incredible - not only is it "the revenge of the cadaver," but it also admits that physicians are never far from sin. I really am in awe of this work. I hope you keep writing! Regards, and thanks for taking this class. Dr. Shapiro

3/11/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Thursday, March 11, 2004 3:53 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

Hi [REDACTED] I wanted to let you know how touched I was by the poem about your uncle, the pharmacist. The imagery of "pills" (both salutary and destructive) created a powerful impression that involved and carried all of us through this story. I also liked the way you talked about your uncle's profession as a "calling" and him as a "medicine man," with its connotations of healing. Too often we tend to reduce the pharmacist to "pill-dispenser," and you reminded us that this person can be so much more. Finally, I'm happy you shared this poem with him. It is a wonderful tribute to a dedicated, brave, and lucky (or blessed) man. [REDACTED] it was a real pleasure to have you in class. I valued your engagement with the material and your always perceptive comments. Regards, Dr. Shapiro
P.S. Have you read, *The God of Small Things*? Very good.

3/11/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Thursday, March 11, 2004 3:31 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

[REDACTED], I hope I've conveyed to you what a truly fine writer I think you are. I loved reading this poem again, and of course now I think the final "couplet" is the best part! Loss upon loss. I'm amazed at the way you (seemingly) simply pile fact upon fact, so chart-like, yet so much more than the chart, with the result of having revealed a man in all his wholeness, only to have him disappear before our eyes. The tone is impeccable. What a great poem. Thank you for another opportunity to hear and read it. Regards, and my best wishes for sorting out all that needs sorting. Dr. Shapiro

3/11/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna**Sent:** Thursday, March 11, 2004 3:24 PM**To:** [REDACTED]**Subject:** litmed creative project

Hi Pejin. We've already discussed your project in a sense, but I wanted you to know how much I liked it, and how effective I thought your reading of it was in class. On rereading it, I realized how much I liked the title. "Conversation" implies a mutuality, a certain flow, the feeling that the patient and doctor are somehow in this together. Too often, the medical encounter seems like a one-way flow of (too often, endlessly bad) information. In the interplay of voices, you also managed to fully humanize both patient and physician. Both are suffering, but the doctor also has the compassion and groundedness to contain his patient's fear and uncertainty. A very moving, carefully observed poem. Thank you, Dr. Shapiro

3/11/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Thursday, March 11, 2004 3:16 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

[REDACTED] your delivery of this was screechingly funny. You definitely have your finger on the pulse of both your own experience and that of your fellow students. The imagery in this comic stream-of-consciousness was so vivid (the stress balls, the topsy-turvy roller coaster, the mental sphincter) that it was impossible not to feel totally engaged. And underneath you ask a very serious question indeed – what could possibly be worth all this misery? Pondering what lies on the other side/what “balances out” the equation is something I suspect you’ll be thinking about for some time to come. And don’t worry, you’ll get past the Volvo. I very much enjoyed having you in class, best of luck in finishing up the year. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

3/11/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Thursday, March 11, 2004 2:41 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

Hi [REDACTED] Thank you for your thoughtful "critical incident" essay. I recognize Mrs. Morgan from PD! You demonstrated yourself to be a close and careful observer of the mind and the heart – of your patient and of yourself. This level of intense self- and other-awareness is particularly commendable given the limitations of the SP situation. What I appreciated most about your essay was its sensitivity to issues of control – how much all of us, and particularly doctors, like to feel in control; how we make all sorts of efforts to stay in control or regain control; and how sometimes we find ourselves in (as you put it so well) situations that aren't completely controllable. In this latter case, what most reduces the patient's suffering is a demonstration of solidarity, which is precisely what you provided for the SP who suddenly became more than an SP. Your final insight sums up a truly important aspect of medicine, i.e., sometimes you and the patient are just "...two people trying to deal with an uncontrollable situation." This is a highly reflective, honest, and original piece of writing. Thank you for attempting it. I also valued our earlier dialogue. I wish you much success in completing the year. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

3/11/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Thursday, March 11, 2004 12:52 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

Hi [REDACTED] Thank you so much for writing, then reading this heartbreaking poem. Sometimes this kind of rhyme scheme (aa,bb,cc etc.) sounds a little mickey-mouse, but somehow you made it work perfectly. The very simplicity and starkness cleared away all unnecessary verbiage, and showed us a completely clear and tragic chain of events. Each line is so simple and straightforward, it engaged me completely, and I was really rooting for her. You also captured poignantly that cycle of hope, optimism, determination, despair, and acceptance. The repetition of the title line "They told her" for me also reinforced the often uncontrollable flood of information/advice/bad news that flows from the physicians to the patient. I'm glad she kept talking back, right to the end. Thank you for taking this selective, I enjoyed having you in class. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

3/11/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna

Sent: Wednesday, March 10, 2004 5:28 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: litmed creative project

[REDACTED] really nice work! Great topic to tackle. You took a common cliché in medicine ("I need more time," whether uttered by patient or doctor) and helped us examine its multiple, complex, and contradictory meanings. What came across to me most vividly is the incredible fluidity and plasticity of time, how its implications change so much depending on our circumstances. The ending to me is somewhat ambiguous, but ominous. "...watching and waiting" makes me feel vulnerable, as though in the end time will catch me. Your poem makes me reflect on the importance of learning how to work with time, so that it becomes our friend rather than our enemy. Thank you.
Dr. Shapiro

3/10/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Wednesday, March 10, 2004 5:13 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

Hi [REDACTED] Thank you for sharing this poem. You write very well. I liked your use of the first and second person, this gave the poem a really intimate feel. Also, your take of the experience of surgery is spot-on. I think it highlights the very different perspectives of physician and patient. For the surgeon and operating team, all is routine, uninteresting, forgettable, a good chance to "catch up." For the patient, this is a unique, extremely important, memorable and anxiety-producing event. Neither viewpoint is wrong, but because the patient's viewpoint results in suffering, it is the responsibility of the physician to recognize and hopefully alleviate this distress. By the way, I couldn't agree with you more about pain scales. They have their place, but you can't easily reduce suffering to a number (there's a good essay about this which you might enjoy in *A Piece of My Mind* Roxanne Young (ed), 2000 "By the Numbers" by Nancy Greengold). It was a pleasure to have you in this class Sarah. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

3/10/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna**Sent:** Wednesday, March 10, 2004 4:54 PM**To:** [REDACTED]**Subject:** litmed creative project

Your poster explored some really key aspects of being a medical student, Jaspreet. Every person who has a toolbox knows it helps if the tools are kept clean and well-organized, as opposed to the "tangled information" that you fear is being deposited in your brain. It was interesting, wasn't it, how many of your peers touched on this same difficulty of "putting it all together"? Fortunately, I can assure you with a high level of confidence that the questions you're asking will resolve over time. I guarantee that eventually you'll hear heart sounds, what you learn will start to make sense, and by the end of third year you'll be pretty good at differential diagnosis and have found your specialty. Keep this paper and see if it doesn't work out this way. Of course, you're still going to be stressed, concerned, and jumbled up, but at least it will be about different stuff! ☺ Just kidding (partly). Thanks for taking this selective, I enjoyed your presence in the class. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

3/10/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Wednesday, March 10, 2004 5:04 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

[REDACTED] that was a fantastic project! It was really different, really creative, and really beautiful. As a consequence, I spent some time reflecting on your tree. I was very interested in what you wrote about the juxtaposition of inorganic material to construct a living thing. It occurred to me that, with patients, we take a living, breathing thing and deconstruct it into an insensate, "man-made, cold, and lifeless"... chart! The sculpture stimulated thoughts about the complex relationship between people and the "objects" (lab values, chart notes, MRI scans) we use to represent them in medicine. I also liked that you introduced the concept of negative space. I've found this very rich in terms of thinking about doctor-patient relationships – where is the negative space, and what does it convey? What is absent, unstated in the relationship? As you pointed out, viewed from different perspectives, nothing looks the same. What a great lesson for clinical care! Thank you for such a provocative piece of work. Dr. Shapiro

3/10/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Wednesday, March 10, 2004 2:20 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

Hi [REDACTED] Thanks very much for this stream-of-consciousness essay. I loved the way the opening frustration and the closing gratitude and fascination are mediated by the incomprehensible mystery and tragedy of particular experience. The tone throughout is absolutely true, veering from the classic first-year complaint to grief, confusion, and desperate desire, to recommitment and, most importantly, self-rediscovery. This is complex, passionate, beautiful writing. I thank you for it. Dr. Shapiro P.S. My favorite line in the whole piece? ..."she is now far more bored than I..." What a triumph of ironic understatement!

3/10/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Wednesday, March 10, 2004 2:30 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

Hi [REDACTED]. Thank you for writing TWO poems – what a surfeit of riches! (I could only find the one about The Patient, if you can easily email a copy of the one you read, I'd really like it too). In both cases, you really sound like a primary care doc and, selfishly, I hope you keep that orientation. In "The Patient" poem, you appreciate the vast gap that separates the physician from really being able to help the patient – it's not knowledge, it's more ephemeral, intangible things like desire, understanding, trust, and hope. It's not that it can't be done, only that it's a bit more complicated than the linear connection we like to make between diagnosis-treatment-cure. You also have the great insight that if physicians actually tried to make their own lifestyle modifications, they'd suddenly discover how terribly "noncompliant" they are. Ouch! I love the term "health hypocrites (spelled so as to evoke shades of Hippocrates!)." Really nice work, [REDACTED]. Thanks for taking this selective, I enjoyed having you in class.
Dr. Shapiro

3/10/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Wednesday, March 10, 2004 2:38 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

[REDACTED] as I noted in class, I'm so glad you addressed this topic of medical error. It is core to the profession of medicine and, of course, can be approached on many levels – epidemiological, procedural, legal, ethical. But one of the levels has got to be personal, just how difficult it is for every physician to somehow integrate the possibility, indeed the inevitability, of doing damage to another, albeit accidentally. The idea of an “advance apology” is very wonderful. It starts you – and everyone who heard your poem – thinking about making mistakes, and thinking about how to deal with them. You know, in my own spiritual practice, I say a nightly prayer in which I ask forgiveness for the harm I've done to others intentionally or unintentionally during that day – and forgive those who have intentionally or unintentionally harmed me. And I'm not even a doctor! So, at least to my way of thinking, forgiveness has to be part of the equation, which doesn't mean complacency, but more the honest acknowledgment that we are fallible human beings. Thanks for such a lovely poem that really made me think!
Regards, Dr. Shapiro

3/10/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna

Sent: Wednesday, March 10, 2004 2:46 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: litmed creative project

[REDACTED] I hope it doesn't sound patronizing to say I was really proud of you on Monday! You did precisely what all of us need to do when confronted with difficult issues – reflect on them, wrestle with them, solicit others' opinions, and then take the best available course of action. I think that process of finding the balance of being true to who you are without making unwise choices that might damage yourself or others is something you'll continue to engage in as you proceed through medical training. Your poem itself I find heartstoppingly beautiful (all that sensuous imagery at the start) – and tragic (“mothers examine, criticize,” “trapped, body numb,” “no words, only prayers”), and triumphant (“I WON'T...”). You wrote from a deep place within yourself. The result is redolent with texture and smell and passionate with feeling. To me it is a celebration. Thanks for writing and thanks for sharing. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

3/10/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Wednesday, March 10, 2004 2:55 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

Hi [REDACTED] I really liked your mask, both for its aesthetic qualities and for its symbolism, so well explored in the accompanying poem. You know, the physician's "gaze" (the manner in which the physician regards the patient) has been the subject of much analysis from post-modernist philosophers like Foucault to practicing physicians. Your art and your poetry both remind us that one's gaze will evolve and change, so the interesting question becomes a moral one – how do you wish to gaze on another? I'm also intrigued by the metaphor of human layers, since in many ways patient care involves an ongoing emotional "peeling back" of patient's concerns, fears, and desires. I'm glad I had the chance to see your mask at the Winter Formal, and even more glad to have heard your meditations on it. I enjoyed having you in class! Take care, and have a good rest of the year. Dr. Shapiro

3/10/2004

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Wednesday, March 10, 2004 3:00 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: litmed creative project

Hi [REDACTED]. Your project really struck a chord of recognition with all your classmates (and me too – I'm still trying to figure out how to put it all together!). You took a well-traveled cliché, and infused it with new meaning, using the existence of veins in both trees and people to link your images literally and metaphorically. And you're very insightful – how you "look at" things is going to be a key aspect of who you are as a physician – and as a person. The forest-trees is good, and I also see it as one of those trompe-d'oeuil exercises, where you see one image if you look one way, and another if you look another. Moving back and forth effortlessly is possible with experience, patience – and desire. Thank you for a very creative piece of work. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

3/10/2004

Hi [REDACTED] Thank you for struggling with this question. I appreciate your openness, and I also appreciate whatever risk you took in signing up for a class that forced you to "stretch" a bit. Look, I leave this decision up to you (with no penalty, and no sense that I will regard you more or less favorably depending on what you decide). I will say that most people think that their writing is a lot worse than it really is. There is a lot to be said for the expression of authentic emotion and thought, which is really what this exercise is supposed to be all about. And sometimes we can learn something from placing ourselves in a situation where we aren't "the best" (whatever that means in terms of something as subjective as creative writing). On the other hand, I don't want you to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable, and sharing your work out loud just might not be the right thing for you. Honestly, as long as you've thought about it sincerely, this should be your choice. See how you feel about your efforts Sunday night (and don't kill yourself over this - it's not an anatomy final!). If you feel okay about reading, great. If not, perhaps you'd like to say something in class about the situation you wrote about, and just mention you aren't going to read the actual work (and truly, that's fine with me). Or maybe you'd just like to come and be a "witness" to others' reading, which I sometimes think is the greatest gift we can give someone else. Regardless of what you decide, I hope you do come Monday. I've enjoyed having you in class.
Regards, Dr. Shapiro

-----Original Message-----

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 04, 2004 5:46 PM
To: Shapiro, Johanna
Subject: Re: creative projects

[REDACTED]

Thanks
[REDACTED]