

2003

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: creative project

Hi, [REDACTED] I thought your collage was a very thoughtful and creative piece. I especially appreciated your discussion of why you selected the various images which showed a skillful integration of many of the themes that we discussed in class.

I'm really glad you decided to take my class. Your comments and very honest writings were always illuminating. I wish you much luck in all your future studies and life in general! Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: creative project

[REDACTED] I liked your collage, especially the labels that helped tie the images to many of the issues we discussed in class. Thank you for your presence, and for your thoughtful and well-written essays. Good luck in your future studies. Regards,
Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: creative project

Dear [REDACTED] - I really appreciate how you have wrestled with you mother's illnesses at various points in this class. Your disclosures and comments were always relevant and appropriate, and I hope that some of our class discussions shed light on the difficult choices you have had to make and the difficult emotions you have experienced. Your essay helped me understand you a little better by providing a context for all you've been through. Especially the way you chronicled the shift from mother-as-chronically-ill-but-no-big-deal, to mother as vulnerable, suffering human being was moving and revealing. Besides being well-written, with a certain sense of irony, it also showed considerable insight and personal growth. You are much more than a conglomeration of statistics, and I'm glad you see that now. You are clearly a highly intelligent and gifted individual. No matter whether you are at Cornell or UCI, those qualities will shine forth, as they did in this class. And beware of dichotomous, either-or thinking. You are still plenty young to have your dreams and reality too! I predict you will not regret having spent time supporting your mother.

Joseph, I very much enjoyed getting to know you a bit through this class. I hope you do not give up on your dream of medical school (or psychology, not a bad field either!). Get in touch if I can ever be of help. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: creative project

[REDACTED], what an outstanding project you contributed! The idea of a play was innovative and engaging. Your characters were well-realized and the dialogue was authentic and natural (you can always tell when you've written "wooden" dialogue when you hear it read out loud!). I loved the fact that you named your oncologist Dr. *Grey!* (He certainly seemed to have a very grey personality!). The device of letting us, the audience, know what was going on inside the father's head was very creative, and also helped humanize him. I personally got a feeling of joy that, even at this late point, father and son could be reconciled, and that the father, just by listening, still had something important to offer his son. Finally, the message of your play (person, not patient) pretty much sums up the whole point of the course, which you conveyed in a very touching and real manner. Great job!

Thank you for your involvement in this course. I hope you continue to use all your many talents. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: creative project

Dear [REDACTED] Thank you so much for your very moving poem. It is so honest and heartfelt. It is also skilfully crafted, which gives it additional power. I know you will make a terrific engineer, but don't forget every once in awhile to sit down and read a poem - or even write one. You really have talent! I

I enjoyed having you in my class. Good luck with your future studies. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: creative project

Dear [REDACTED] I was very touched by your poem. It captures so beautifully the confusion, misunderstanding, and loss when a little child is confronted with death. Your repetition of the phrase "a little girl" to introduce each stanza kept the reality of this child right before my eyes. We did not really discuss this issue in class, but your poem says it all: children experience death very differently than do adults, and often we don't understand their grief. Thank you for expressing this so well.

You really blossomed in this class. I appreciated the effort you put forth, and the improvement in your essays. Good luck next year! Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To:
Subject:

[REDACTED]
creative project

Hi, [REDACTED]. What a clever, insightful, funny, and wise poem! I laughed when I heard it, but when I read it I also sighed. You've probably heard of "medical student syndrome," where they think they are exhibiting signs of each disease they study? Your play on words in the title is terrific, and really captures the melodrama of hypochondriasis. Also, your use of spacing and indentation enhances the slightly self-mocking tone, as well as the underlying desperation of the speaker. I only know of one other poem written about hypochondriasis and frankly, I like yours better. Would you mind if I considered using it in other classes? Very well done!

I really enjoyed your intelligent essays this quarter. I anticipate a successful and rewarding academic path for you. Much good luck in all you undertake. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: creative project

Hi, [REDACTED]. You were right - you contributed a deep, ambiguous, and evocative poem. As you mentioned, it can be interpreted in many ways. It made me think of "locked-in" syndrome, where people have no way of communicating or moving, but are fully conscious and can live for years. And it made me think of life itself, which can sometimes feel like a prison. And then, of course, it could be more literal, someone on death row. I'm sure you have your own interpretation, which is likely none of the above. In any case, I found the imagery compelling and oppressive - the off-key peeling of the bars, the stifling trap of the cell, the bird beating against the window. The tone too is very effective - ironic, despairing. I think this is really excellent.

You are clearly an intelligent and gifted student. I hope that, in the midst of your engineering preparations, you take the time to write an occasional poem - you shouldn't let that talent go to waste! I wish you all the best as you progress through college and life. Regards, Dr. Shapiro P.S. I hope you didn't mind my running dictionary joke, but you usually *did* have the answer!

Shapiro, Johanna

To:
Subject:

[REDACTED]
creative project

Dear [REDACTED] Wow! This is just a remarkable poem. It has an incredible energy and power to it. It is actually difficult to read, it so brutally honest. By writing in the present tense, you force the reader to participate in every agony of the narrator. Also, your use of the first person enhances this sense of immediacy. The image of the candle is amazing - other poets have used candles before as metaphors for dying, but your initial image of the "candle that never melts" is completely original, and gives additional significance to the metaphor as it proceeds through the remaining stanzas. Your use of chapters is also very evocative - since we all know that when the chapters end, the book is over. I am so impressed and moved by your work. I'd like permission to use this poem in some of my literature and medicine classes, if you do not object.

It was a pleasure to have you in class. Your comments and essays were always well thought-out and on target. Much good luck with your future studies. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To:
Subject:

[REDACTED]
creative project

[REDACTED], what a lovely and thoughtful poem! As you have demonstrated throughout this course, you are good at asking the big questions. I like the image of the rollercoaster - exciting, scary, an adventure, and beyond our control. I was also struck by your equation of life and death - you challenge Western dichotomous thinking here by emphasizing their similarities, rather than their differences. The last stanza seems to express your life (and death) philosophy. Quite profound.


I have really enjoyed getting to know you a bit through your comments and essays this quarter. You are a thoughtful, sensitive, and talented person. I'm glad I won't have to say "goodbye" to you just yet! Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: creative project

Dear [REDACTED] I could have saved myself a lot of work by just passing your poem out at the first class and giving everybody "free time" for the rest of the quarter! Seriously, your poem was a very creative rendering of all that we studied in class, and truly captured the essence of each module. I'm very impressed. I especially liked your concluding line - it takes Dylan Thomas' fighting spirit and puts it toward what I think is a better cause - life!

It was a pleasure to have you in class. I wish you much luck in your future endeavors. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

 great reflections around the theme of "the heart." Your project was really ingenious. Honestly, when I speak about the heart from now on, I will envision your little blocks, and how easily a "full" heart can become "empty." Your essay is extremely articulate and well-written. You did a marvelous job of identifying all the main themes of the course and integrating them into a well-crafted whole. Your grasp of the conceptual material (for example, distinguishing between patient's experience and patient's meaning; and your precise formulation of the components of each) was really impressive. Thanks for being such an attentive, thoughtful, and hardworking student. I hope you continue to pursue your dream of medical school. Please let me know how you're progressing, and don't hesitate to ask if there's anything I can do to help you. Regards,
Dr. Shapiro

Wow, [REDACTED], TWO poems for the price of one! Seriously, thank you very much for taking the risk to experiment with writing poetry. I really liked both your poems, although in different ways. "The Miracle" is a loving tribute to your grandfather, and beautifully expresses a child's sense of loss. The final two lines are especially poignant: his tears reflecting your love. I am so glad that he survived his ICU experience and was returned to you, hopefully to once again string arrows, capture your nose, tickle, and bowl.

The second poem is more humorous, telling the story of a little girl determined to meet her obligations, as a "monkey" and as a student, until the pressure becomes too much, and poor Mrs. Grimes is the recipient of stress-induced vomiting. I think this poem says a lot about you, and suggests you have the right level of perseverance to succeed in medical school. In fact, I think you should post the poem on your refrigerator when you get there, to remind yourself not to push too hard!

[REDACTED] it's been a real pleasure getting to know you. You were an outstanding student. Your comments in class showed that you had always read – and even more importantly, reflected on! – the assigned material. Your essays were insightful, thoughtful, and well-written. "Garden Ballet" aside, I sincerely think you would be a great candidate for medical school. Please keep in touch, and I will help you however I can. Warm regards, Dr. Shapiro


Thank you, [REDACTED] for writing about [REDACTED] experience with dyslexia. As I mentioned in class, learning disabilities are close to my heart because of my [REDACTED]. (I'm attaching a poem I wrote about her). Like [REDACTED] is my hero. She struggled so hard at such a young age, and experienced so much adversity and failure, yet has turned into a wonderful human being. [REDACTED] was very lucky to have a loving, supportive family who was determined to find help for him. Like your family, we also had many conflicts with the school system, and faced many dead ends. Again like [REDACTED] in the end [REDACTED] was the person most responsible for overcoming her difficulties. I'm glad for [REDACTED] success in math, and admire his ability to excel in spite of obstacles. From personal experience, I know that it is possible to triumph over learning disabilities and reach your potential. It was a pleasure to have you in class, and I wish you every success in all your future studies. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Wednesday, June 04, 2003 3:19 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: final creative project

Hi [REDACTED] You wrote a wonderful poem. Thanks for the courage you showed in sharing it in class. I have great respect for the way you consistently used this class to work on [REDACTED] death. You are clearly a strong, determined, and devoted young woman. I am proud of you for sticking with school, sticking with your brothers, and sticking with your feelings. And I really do hope you share this with your brothers, so that they can have the opportunity to support you as you have supported them. Most importantly, however, the poem gives you permission occasionally to be vulnerable, to break down and cry. I guarantee you that, afterwards, you'll put yourself back together, knowing you can't count on yourself in moments of strength – and in moments of weakness. I'm so glad you took the risk of enrolling in this class. I wish for you continued healing and much success in the future. Warm regards, Dr. Shapiro

6/4/2003

 I really liked that you tackled poetry writing for this final project. Poetry can convey emotions and create images that often are so much more powerful and compelling than prose. In this, I think you succeeded admirably. The opening lines are terrific, because they call to mind the lighthearted phrase, "Here today, gone tomorrow," yet place it within a grim and sorrowful context. The short, choppy lines you use seem like little blows ("strokes") themselves, and underline the unexpectedness and irreversibility of this personal catastrophe. The repetition of the phrase "never again" also emphasizes the feeling of loss (it reminded me of the chorus of the classic poem "Lenore" by Edgar Allen Poe, which you might have read in high school: "Quoth the raven 'Nevermore!'). I am very sorry that this poem was based on a personal experience. I hope writing it helped you to find some peace about your relative's sudden death. Thank you for taking my class. I wish you all success in your future studies. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED] I really apologize for continuing to confuse you and [REDACTED]. Somehow I entered your names backwards in my brain, and was not able to reverse my mistake. Nevertheless, I do know who you are (!), and really appreciated your effort to use the project to explore your own bout of depression. What you describe is a very typical episode of mild depression, triggered by some truly difficult events (I am truly sorry to learn about your cousin; but happy that you joined this class). The sense of hopelessness and helplessness that you experienced, as well as anger, sadness, isolation are all characteristic of depression – and VERY understandable under the circumstances! Fortunately, you learned an important lesson from your roommate, who seems like a good friend indeed: asking for help is something we all need to do sometimes, and usually at the times when we feel it is most impossible to do so. I'm very glad you reached out and worked on resolving your feelings. I'm also truly happy I could help you graduate on time. Linda, thank you for entrusting me with this piece of your story. I hope you have a great time as a game-tester – it sounds like a fantastic job – and I pray that your cousin finds peace. Warm regards, Dr. Shapiro

[REDACTED], thank you very much for using the class project to probe [REDACTED] struggles with panic disorder and anxiety disorder. I thought you were very brave to do so. Also, by taking such a step, you help reduce the stigma that can accompany psychological disorders. The title of your essay is very apt: panic does feel like a profound physical and emotional upheaval. It was also enlightening to hear how you experienced these problems as a child. What a difficult and scary way to grow up. I'm happy that your family was there [REDACTED] even when they didn't know what was wrong. I also admire that you are able to own these problems as a part of yourself rather than try to hide or reject them. That is so much the path to recovery. I applaud your commitment to pursuing child psychiatry as a way of helping other children. The insight you've developed from [REDACTED] suffering will surely enhance the understanding and sensitivity you bring to this field. I enjoyed having you in class. Good luck with your future studies at UCI. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Wow! I was so impressed. You are really talented, which I'm sure you already realize, but I appreciated your taking this talent and using it to explore themes of the class. Music can bring to the surface emotions that are hard to articulate, particularly emotions dealing with loss, fear, and death. Music also has an amazing power to help heal and reconcile these emotions. Your explication of the meaning behind the music made a lot of sense, and enhanced the music for me. Of course you're right, the reason people compose music is to capture experiences that just can't be adequately verbalized, but knowing something about their intentions can make the music richer and more interesting. I was very moved by your composition. It was beautiful and, yes... elegiac. Thank you. Dr. Shapiro



Hi [REDACTED]. You tackled a difficult topic in your creative project. The pictures you chose fit the themes you wanted to emphasize very well. I also liked the way you attempted to identify a conceptual model within which to frame the experience of cancer. In my experience, your stages have a lot of truth in them. In philosophy, there is a concept of the “just universe,” a belief many people hold that the universe is a fair place, and since they’re good people, nothing bad will happen to them. This is a belief that falls hard to the onslaught of cancer. Identifying phases or stages is a useful way of understanding experience – as long as we don’t try to pigeon-hole people into our models! By using the first person (“I”) to express these stages, you gave them a personal voice, which I really liked. Finally, your poster has a nice sense of coherence in the way you come full cycle back to the blue skies and colorful flowers, on the other side of cancer seen with new appreciation and gratitude. Good work! Dr. Shapiro