

ANATOMY PROJECTS INTERPRETATIONS - Shapiro

1. **Lizards 4 (project 2) – essay.** Essay seems to be about narrator's childhood in Russia with her twin brother. She prided herself on being tough. This part of the essay is filled with seeming random images of revulsion and horror (the brother running through a glass door; a black hair in a cookie; a cut-off mole). Other images have to do with the student's fear and aversion triggered by insects, baby frogs. But she always masked her disgust and sadness so as to appear strong. The title refers to the student's habit of catching lizards, sometimes pulling off their tails in the process. Yet she did not enjoy catching the lizards, but only did so to impress her brother. These images are tied into the process of dissection, which evokes a similar revulsion – she dreads the process but takes pride in her ability to get through it. Seeing other students dissect and present their cadavers reminds her of her brother squashing frogs. Anatomy evokes visceral reactions rooted in childhood memories. The essay suggests that it is natural to be revolted by “torturing” little animals and intimates that dissection may be a similar process.
2. **They kept telling me it would be okay if I didn't feel so good on the first day 5 (essay – project 1).** The author didn't like being warned about the possibility of intense emotions in anatomy. S/he hadn't been too anxious previously, but this presentation increased anxiety. The author initially felt cutting into the cadaver was somehow “wrong,” but this feeling passed quickly, and for most of the course the student did not have strong emotions. The student rarely thought of the cadaver as a person. To the student, the cadaver was just a vessel that once had contained an “essence” but no more. The essay seems defensive and uses distancing as a coping mechanism.
3. **To me the body has always been simply a vessel... 5 (essay – project 2).** Author expresses initial concern about considering donating his/her body because of the crudeness s/he witnesses. Then the student realizes that in fact his/her classmates are not usually disrespectful, but rather full of caring and gratitude, and often awestruck by the complexity and beauty of the human body.
4. **Back muscles** – detailed charcoal sketch of the muscles of the back. The figure could be lying on its stomach, motionless, passive, waiting; or it could be standing and waving. It is beautiful, strong. Suggests a kind of caged power – you can feel the potential for movement and life in the picture, yet it is just as likely it is the portrait of a cadaver. There is also a sense of trusting, as if the cadaver trusts the student who is about to begin the dissection.
5. **Dancing body 9 (project 1)** – In a very similar work, the female body of a dancer is again portrayed, in a somewhat different posture. The human aspects of the figure are clearer – there is a face and hair. By contrast, the musculature, while still present, is less detailed, more suggestive than literal. Does this suggest a reincorporation of anatomy into the whole person, a recognition of all the components that go into making up the person?

6. **Dancing body 9 (project 2)** – The sketch shows a dancing female in an extreme posture. Much of the body’s musculature is displayed as well. It suggests depth of insight and understanding. Ahh, it seems to be saying, so this is what holds up this dancing body, this is what enables this body to assume such astonishing positions.
7. **Winter Dissection 11 (poem – project 1)**. Poem uses water images to portray the cadaver’s experience, and the students’ experience of dissection. The cadaver is imagined as a man full of love and grief. The students navigate into his body, as the cadaver gently rocks them in a lullaby. As they “drink and sail” through the body, they are also learning about death, in a way that is both groundless but caring.
8. **Cut and explore 17 (song)**. The song is in the voice of the cadaver. He encourages the students to “cut and explore,” learn as much as they can, memorize everything, but “don’t forget to stand in awe.” The cadaver says God made him, God took his soul, and now only the shell remains.
9. **Picture of backbone-zipper 21 (project 1)** – This suggests the parallels between the invention of the zipper and the “invention”/creation of man. The zipper is an efficient, ingenious, although rather prosaic invention, yet it gets the job done. Is this a fair description of man. In a sense, a zipper is kind of awesome because it works so well (although occasionally gets stuck – then you have back problems!). Maybe humankind is pretty awesome too.
10. **Unwrapped and Uncensored – 24 poem (project 2)**. A cadaver reflects on the end of anatomy. He is at last unwrapped (no longer draped) and uncensored – he can speak freely, as his soul is about to move into another space and time. He is content, fulfilled, ready to move on. His body, now just a pile, is no longer a concern to him. The cadaver has given lifelong knowledge, the ability to teach and heal, and has helped future doctors to return strength and happiness to living patients.
11. **The Warm Welcome 26 (poem – project 1)**. Written in the first person voice from the point of view of the cadaver, this poem expresses the cadaver’s anxiety and the parallel anxiety of the “seven gloved girls”. However, the situation turns out well. The girls are gentle, respectful, compassionate, grateful, and try to get closer to the cadaver. The poem reflects cadaver and students as a team. The cadaver feels better and so do the students. Dissection can be performed with caring and respect and it contributes to the making of “great doctors.” This is a story with a happy ending.
12. **Those lips that once...26 (poem - project 2)**. The medical student begins dissection of the cadaver’s face. With each feature, s/he imagines its relationship with aspects of the cadaver’s life. The concluding stanza promises the cadaver peace, rest, the gratitude of the student, and being held in high regard for the selfless contribution.

13. **I must admit that the thought of taking human anatomy – 29 (project 2) essay.** Essay chronicles the personal growth of the medical student from someone who didn't think of the person as a whole, but only focused on the body as a marvelous machine. Now the student tries to approach patients as an act of service. Yet because of student's increased sensitivity, s/he had trouble the first day of anatomy, and had to leave the lab. Student also talked to his/her cadavers, thanking them and wishing them happy holidays. However, by the conclusion of anatomy, student became desensitized, engrossed in the dissections and focused on the immense amount of information that needed to be learned. Medical training, and anatomy in particular, is challenging emotionally and personally, as well as academically, and forces intense personal growth in a short period of time.
14. **A very critical incident 32 (essay – project 1).** Student's grandfather, dying of lung cancer, agrees to donate his body to medical science. It is a gesture to acknowledge and support his grandchild's change of career from the navy (his grandfather's) to medicine. The grandfather, with flickering mentation, in a moment of clarity becomes excited about the possibility that his old body might still be of use to someone. The student feels the presence of his grandfather, who was his role-model in life, every time he is in the anatomy lab. The essay seems to express that his grandfather is looking out for him, guiding him. The student concludes that the grandfather's message to him would be to learn the most that he can, but still enjoy the experience.
15. **This October I lost my grandfather to a long fought battle. 34 (Critical incident essay).** This essay is a reflection triggered by the death of the narrator's grandfather. What she learned from his 4 years in a nursing home at the end of his life is how many others are affected by illness and death. She wonders whether her cadaver had a family; and how they feel about her donation, and worries that they might not have been able to achieve "closure," as she did after her grandfather's cremation. She also is concerned that family members may feel the students are "violating" the bodies of their loved ones. She concludes that she would not donate her body because of the pain it might cause family members.
16. **Collage of body parts 38 (project 2) –** Labels of "medicine," "education," "research hospital," "kidney," "lung," "surgeon" suggest all the elements that go into the making of a doctor. It is kind of a hodge-podge, but if you take a step back, it looks rather aesthetic
17. **Having never been the reactionary type myself... 41 (project 1) 4 poems.** Author disclaims having any strong emotional reaction to cadavers or dissection, but states he has a compelling interest in the emotional responses of others. He comes to terms with things in his own way, privately.
- My Captain (modeled on Whitman poem).** This poem speaks with the voice of the cadaver, addressing the medical student as "my captain," and using the metaphor of his body as an "old vessel." The cadaver reassures the student and tells him to

proceed. The only offense the student could commit would be to “drop the line and jump the deck” before he has learned all he can from the dissection. The cadaver is brave and encouraging, and guides the student into the role of “captain.”

Excuse me, but is this seat taken? Written in the voice of the student, the narrator asks the cadaver if s/he can sit beside him/her and chat. The poem treats the cadaver as a first patient, asking name, chief complaint, social history etc., but contains variations on the phrase, “You don’t have to answer,” “you don’t have to say.” The student goes on to explain the “routine procedure” of dissection. The poem closes with the recognition that the process can be “brutal” for both cadaver and student, and offers a promise to be as “honest and true” as the cadaver has been.

Stopping by Bob (modeled on Frost’s poem). This poem also finds the student addressing the cadaver. Though “others must think it queer,” the students “have miles to go”, while the cadaver “sleeps.” The poem captures something of the loneliness of the Frost poem, as well as the camaraderie between the horse (cadaver) and rider (student).

Streams of thoughts while watching. Poem of one or two words, much like chopping, ripping. Students are portrayed struggling somewhat ineptly with an early dissection experience. What is expressed is disgust, interest, uncertainty, errors. The final word “zip” closes the bag on the cadaver and on the experience.

18. **Old man, I know not your name 41 (project 2).** A poem which spells out “Please forgive me Father for I have sinned” going down the side of the poem. The student narrator warns the cadaver “Do not try to move me/To thoughts of your life.” The student asserts he “just can’t care.” The student acknowledges he is on a “queer sort of quest/For secrets and truths.” He is not sure exactly what he is seeking, or that he can find the answer in dissection: “And can I be sure/The answers are buried/At the center of you?”. The poem also contains religious imagery of fish, bread, and wine. The student feels he has committed a sin.

19. **I knew that anatomy would be a big part of my medical school learning experience 52 (essay - project 1).** A professional manner is first equated with distancing, “while maintaining some empathy.” By the end of the essay, the student is “learning a different type of professional distance,” which she defines as clinical detachment from the physical body while acknowledging the “soul and spirit of a person.” The student recognizes anatomy as a rite of passage to becoming a physician, and hopes that over time she will learn to strike the right balance between detachment and empathy.”

20. **I believe with the progression of the anatomy course... 52 (essay - project 2).** The student really feels s/he is becoming a doctor through this course. While it is acknowledged that the cadavers “were the vessels of distinct personalities and souls that made a unique impact on those around them,” this essay really celebrated the cadaver as an opportunity for dissection, for learning about the human body. There was a lot of appreciation and “that’s cool” attitude. “Who knew the skull was so complicated?” The essay positively glows with enthusiasm, and there is little more than a perfunctory nod toward moral or spiritual complexities.

21. **The Heart Goes On 59 (project 1) poem.** Student is in awe at “the wonder of God’s creation.” She holds her cadaver’s heart in her hands and ponders its significance. She wonders about the “dreams, fears, joys, and sorrows” of her cadaver, and what kind of person he was. The poet realizes that before anatomy, she thought the secrets of the heart had to do only with emotions and experience, but now she’s discovered it contains many other secrets as well. “...every powerful chamber holds a secret/Waiting to be discovered, some by the scalpel and probe/Others by the imagination.” She concludes by saying that although “we constantly share our hearts with others,” the cadaver “shared his in a more complex way,” because he offers her both learning and “the art of humanity.” Dissection allows the discovery of the marvel of the human body, its secrets and mysteries. It also deepens understanding of the human condition.
22. **I should tell you up front 60 (project 2)** – poem tries to establish a position of detachment toward the cadaver; puns on the idea of having only a purely “physical relationship.” Nevertheless he is drawn into emotions toward the cadaver – admiration for the well-kept body. The author contemplates ownership of this cadaver – to whom does it belong?
23. **Audio-visual 61(project 1)** – video of various textbooks set to hip-hop beat. Suggests the complexity, intricacy, and beauty of anatomy, as well as the near impossibility of memorizing the incredible details needed. The books end up thrown on the floor, perhaps hinting at a sense of reaching one’s limit, acceptance, resignation.
24. **Tools of anatomy plus self-portrait 61 (project 2)** – Drawing shows various tools, scalpel, scissors, forceps, a photograph of the student, and a sketch of a hand resting on a table wielding a scalpel. The instructions have to do with resting the hand “to eliminate unsteady movements.” This suggests both the student’s anxiety and uncertainty, as well as her sense that she is merely one instrument along with all the others that go into dissection. In an act of artistic metonymy, in the final panel, she has become her hand, and the hand and scalpel have become one. This work speaks to alienation and reduction.
25. **Abstract art (red, yellow, blue 69 (project 2)** – Suggests complexity, interconnection, vividness, brightness. It is not particularly coherent – does it all fit together?
26. **Life, death, and the in-between 70 (poem).** The dominant theme is the cadaver being caught between “what it was in this life” and “absolutely nothing”. The poem struggles to understand the relationship between the “mass” on the dissecting table and the person of the cadaver. It concludes that “what keeps us afloat” is love, which links souls. When we do not acknowledge “the depth of our own existence” we limit ourselves to the borders of our skin.
27. **This past month of anatomy has been challenging 75 (essay – project 1).** The essay starts out with a very narrow focus – will the student pass the class? S/he

- pays attention only to the part of the body which is being dissected. However, by the second day, after a rough dissection, s/he is consumed with fear that she has caused the cadaver pain. She calls her mother as well as an atheist friend and confers with classmates, all of whom reassure or ridicule her, but she cannot set her mind to rest. By the end of the essay, s/he must accept that she will not understand everything in the universe.
28. **Take My Hand 75 (1st person pov essay – project 2)**. A touching essay written from the cadaver’s point of view, in which the cadaver notes a particularly shy and fearful student. The cadaver longs for someone to talk to, but the students focus only on dissection. Then late one night, the fearful student comes in to study the cadaver’s hand. Holding the hand, the student begins to reflect on what the cadaver might have done with her hands in life; and on all the hands, now gone, that have guided the student, and what hands will guide her in the future. The cadaver mourns how her hands were taken from her through arthritis, but then realizes her hands are still useful for what they can teach the student.
29. **Stillness 87 (poem – project 2)** – “death is renewed by life and knowledge”; a kind of triumph of life over death; student reflects on anatomy experience after class, when the bustle and activity has been replaced by stillness. Author questions s/he has lost compassion because doesn’t feel pain or suffering, but realizes the beauty of the cadavers’ bodies is contained in his/her mind. Realizes it is through their “ultimate gift to life” that s/he can help sustain life.
30. **To know one so well, and not know one at all 88 (poem - project 1)** – reflection on how well the student knows the cadaver’s body, but knows nothing of his life. Realized that although the cadaver didn’t know the student, s/he know what the student could achieve (through learning), and what the student needed (a body to study). The poem focuses on the gift of the body, the gratitude of the student, and how the student will use this knowledge to help future patients. Although they started out as strangers, they have come to know each other intimately in certain ways.
31. **Hanging naked man 89 (project 1)** – The picture meticulously identifies the subject’s body parts. The body, however, is not in a state of repose. It is anguished, or perhaps only active. There is some element of striving portrayed. Whose effort is it? That of the former person of the cadaver, who donated the body? That of the medical student, who must learn all these body parts. The body also has a kind of beauty in its lean, muscular lines, so perhaps anatomy has a beautiful aspect as well.
32. **Self-portrait of girl adorned with anatomy jewelry 89 (project 2)** – This project raises questions of identity. The young woman is still recognizable as herself. But she has traded in “normal” bracelets, earrings, necklaces, and hair-clips for parts of the human body. Her expression is contemplative, perhaps determined. What is she asking herself? Is this a fair trade-off? Her body is very noticeable because of the bare arms and chest. There is an implicit contrast with her living, lovely body, and the presumably mangled cadaver from which these

- body parts came. Yet the overall effect is one of beauty, not horror. So anatomy enhances the medical student, complements her loveliness and adds to her beauty.
33. **Inside my dissection kit 90 (cartoon – project 1).** Dissection tools are shown. In their conversation, the scalpel complains that he does all the work, and feels the other tools do not do their fair share. They first ignore his pleas, but then say how much they value him. He says he'll need their support and help. The cartoon humanizes the physician's tools in a humorous portrayal.
 34. **What Netter doesn't tell you 90 (diagram – project 2).** This project takes a standard diagram of the human body found in an anatomy textbook and then labels all the personal things that have happened to that body. The effect is to personalize and humanize at the corporeal level.
 35. **They tell you that your first patient in medical school is your anatomy cadaver 99 (essay – project 1).** Student was unprepared for negative feelings of surprise, disbelief, and a longing to be finished with dissection. The brutal actions the student took during the thoracic dissection stay with her and make her feel uncomfortable. The only way s/he can cope with dissection is to focus exclusively on the technical aspects. No matter how hard the student studies or how well she knows the material, she “forgets” it all in the presence of the cadaver, and cannot stop thinking of it as someone's relative. The student feels an implicit contract with the cadaver – the cadaver has given so much, the student feels obligated to provide as much gratitude, peace, and rest at the end of the anatomy experience.

10a. Thumbs – is this a project?