

MCS 2 Selective

Becoming a Better MD Through Poetry

By the study of poetry as it relates to the medical experience, we hope to uncover a closer type of critical reading (attention), an ability for a caregiver to understand and convey the needs and context of a patient (representation), and an appreciation of the common concerns of the healing professions and to explore the use of poetry by some physicians to inform their medical practice (affiliation).

Instructor



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Syllabus

During this six-week elective course, poems will be read, heard, and written from the perspective of illness, caregiving, and doctoring. Our protected class blog will provide links to the most comprehensive and useful online resources for the investigation of poetry and other Medical Humanities. Also on the blog, we will have the opportunity to “publish” poetry that we create from prompts in class and post reflective and constructive comments on each other’s poems.

Educational Objectives

At the conclusion of this course you will have the ability to:

1. Explain the differences between reading poetry on the printed page and hearing the poet read his or her poem.
2. Navigate online resources for poetry and other medical humanities.
3. Compare and contrast the basic forms of figurative language: allusion, simile, and metaphor.
4. Describe how writing and careful listening to language can increase your ability to feel empathy or act compassionately.
5. Cite examples of physicians and physician-poets using poetry in their practice of medicine.
6. List poets who have written from the medical or illness experience.
7. Critically respond to your own and your classmates’ poems written during this selective.

Topics and Dates

WEEKS 1, 2: These first weeks we will study the different sounds of poetry. With poems by Sylvia Plath, Wanda Coleman, Jane Kenyon and other poets who have been touched by illness and tragedy, we will note the dramatic differences between poetry as it appears on the page and as it is recited or read by the poet. We will analyze the use of figurative language and practice writing it as well as understand the increased attention required in listening for simile and metaphor.

WEEKS 3, 4, 5: During these middle weeks of the selective, we will read work by physician-poets, and poets in a care-giving position dealing with Parkinson’s Disease in a parent, cancer in a spouse, AIDS in a brother or a patient. Poets read in these weeks include, but are not limited to Galway Kinnel, Rafael Campo, Jack Coulehan, William Carlos Williams, Marie Howe, Mark Doty, and Cortney Davis. The

importance of being able to represent another's feelings or perspective will be emphasized. More exercises will be performed in class and online as we develop some facility with the language of poetry, its objectives and limitations, and the possibilities of poetry informing our practice of medicine.

Evaluation

1. Both online and in-class participation will build toward your grade in this selective.
2. Attendance at all sessions is mandatory, as is standard for MCS 2.
3. Poems and comments made by you during this course will remain confidential and your copyright to all work produced is protected.
4. In class and online participation will be evaluated weekly.

Some feedback will be immediate, during seminar-style discussion and online responses to selected poems and your own posted poems. Students are welcome to meet privately with either or both instructors if more individualized feedback is desired.

Class Size

Minimum 6

Maximum 10