

Readers' Guide

Looking for ideas on how to use *The Healing Muse* as a text in a classroom or as a selection for a book club? Here is an excerpt for this issue. You can access the entire guide at thehealingmuse.org

The Pandemic

An Epidemic That Travels

Every individual sees History through the lens of personal history. Stowed away in the recesses of the mind, memories of the past remain alive, impacting perceptions and experiences of the present, influencing expectations for the future.

How do personal memories contribute to the speakers' experiences of the present in the following poems? Identify the difficult memories at the heart of each poem. Compare and contrast them to the traumas of the global pandemic.

- *Making Rounds* ~ Peter Cronkright
- *In Sickness* ~ Fae Kayarian
- *Shelter in Place* ~ Alison Terje

Denial

There are different degrees of denial; some are obvious, while others are deeply buried. Do you feel any of these poems present a case for the *positive value* of the practice of denial? Do the poems suggest a *negative value*? Does the global tragedy magnify the individual tragedies?

- *When She Tells Me Pansies Will Die* ~ Katharyn Howd Machan
- *Covenant* ~ Gloria Heffernan
I Am Now an Understudy ~ Ellen Goldsmith

Silence

Why stay silent? What does it mean to have a voice of one's own? What purpose does silence serve in the following poems? What is the root of the silence in each poem? Do the speakers in each poem *choose* to not speak?

- *Seasonal Knitting Patterns of an American Housewife* ~ Kari Ann Ebert
- *Doves* ~ Katharyn Howd Machan
- *Many Returns of the Day* ~ Susan Eyre Coppock

Mental Illness

To live with mental illness is often to *endure* the suffering that comes with an absence of foundation. The following poems offer us some descriptions of that state of being as well as some hope of coming through it. Discuss the imagery used in each poem. Do the writers focus on the feeling of absence? If so, how?

- *When Even the Light Feels Like Darkness* ~ Lauren Fields
- *This life sentence is not a death sentence* ~ A.R. Bekenstein
- *Toast at a Wake* – Daniel Gleason

The Good Nurse

Examine the relationship between hospital and home portrayed in these poems. How do the nurses navigate both worlds? What do the poems say about what it means—and more importantly, what it *is*— to be a nurse?

- *Storytelling at 7 am* ~ Marilyn Baszczyński
- *In Sickness* ~ Fae Kayarian
- *On Call* ~ Tabor Flickinger

The Good Doctor

Discuss the characteristics of a “good doctor” in the following works. What character traits and behaviors are valued? Does age factor into these behaviors? Compare and contrast these portraits with those of the nurses from the previous poems.

- *The Good Doctor* ~ Mimi Herman
- *Doctors* ~ Marilyn McVicker
- *To Tom, My Medical Student* ~ Betsy Bouldin
- *Letter Concerning My Patient’s Feet* ~ Nat Mulkey

