
Discussion Guide: An introduction to *The Healing Muse* 18 for readers and educators

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 from the Readers' Guide for this issue of *The Muse*. You can access the entire guide for this and other issues at www.thehealingmuse.org

Childhood Memories

Events from the past—especially those from childhood—often linger, surviving and transcending time. These events can shape present day experiences and relationships. In the following pieces, examine the impact of childhood on the adult speakers. How does memory affect each narrator? What is its effect on the reader?

- *Nightmare* by Taylor DeBlase
- *Returning Home* Natela Dushukyan
- *Six Years* by Vanessa Zimmerman
- *The Earth* by Adria Klinger
- *Twilight Meditation* by Eric v.d. Luft
- *Evening Feast* by Alf Abuhajleh
- *Nightfall* by Laura Glenn

Illness & Identity

Illness can shatter a person's sense of self, unintentionally causing them to define themselves, and at times become defined by others, as their diagnosis. In other words, they are no longer viewed as anything *apart from* their illness.

Discuss the relationship between illness and identity in the following pieces. Compare and contrast the ways the individual authors reflect on the problem of selfhood. Are there differences in how mental illness is viewed compared to physical illness? Is one more acceptable than the other?

- *A Club for Us Who Almost Died* by Dianne Silvestri

- *OCD* by Ben Casola
- *Panic Attack* by Cailey Blair
- *Incognito* by Jane Blanchard

The “Good” Nurse

Ken Kesey’s malevolent Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* did serious damage to the image of the nurse. In the following poems, analyze the images that illuminate the nurse. What characteristics seem most prominent? Do the poems illustrate what the public (or other characters in the poems) need from their nurses?

- *The Winter Chair* by Lisa Alexander Baron
- *The Watercolor Artist* by Jennifer Campbell
- *Hats Off* by Mary Gilliland
- *For the Nurse Who Brushed Your Hair* by Gloria Heffernan

Growing Old

With age comes wisdom or so we like to think. What do the following poems tell us about our mortality? What in the poems encourages us? What scares us? Is empathy a form of healing in these poems?

- *Isabel Understands* by Robert W. Daly
- *Saint Seal* by Joe Cottonwood
- *The Other Woman* by Elizabeth Brulé Farrell
- *The Case of the Agrarian* by Alyssa Ross
- *Invisible Becomes Visible* by Rob Jacques

Psychology of Death & Dying

How do our personal conceptions of death impact the experience of terminal illness? Does the belief in an afterlife (of any kind) make it easier to accept such a diagnosis? Does belief lessen fear?

Examine the following poems as their narrators realize and accept their prognoses. Do the poems value one attitude over another?

- *Immortality* by Carol Alexander
- *Diagnosis* by Barbara Brauer

- *Who Will Sing for Me?* by Diane Hallett
- *Cancer Aesthetics* by Roxana Cazan
- *Tell Me No More* by Kaz Sussman
- *In the Tall Grass* by Cynthia Knorr
- *What the Mapmakers Knew* by Gloria Heffernan