

## Creating a Narrative Medicine Close Reading Session

<b>Facilitator pre-work</b>	<b>Select a reading or other creative work</b>	In general, close reading exercises last from 30 to 90 minutes, depending on the narrative piece chosen and the time allotted for writing and conversation. Look for pieces that evoke a reaction and highlight inequity. High-quality selections can be non-fiction, fiction, poetry, dance, theater, visual, music, etc. The pieces can be medically informed or entirely non-medical. The length depends on available time.	
	<b>Create a prompt for the session</b>	Experience the piece yourself and identify the main themes. Participants will be writing “in the shadow” of the piece. Experiment with prompts that begin, “Write about a time when...” or “Describe a day when...” Use words or phrases from the piece, if possible. For example, if you choose “Eleanor Rigby,” your prompt might be, “Write about a time when you worked hard on something that seemed meaningless,” or “Write about a day when nobody came.” Keep the prompt short, non-leading, and open to interpretation.	
	<b>Gather supplies</b>	Print copies of the piece(s) to be used in the session. Gather blank paper, pens, etc.	
<b>The session</b>	<b>Explain objectives and ground rules</b>	WELCOME THE PARTICIPANTS AND REVIEW THE OBJECTIVES. THIS SESSION WILL...	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equip participants to recognize, absorb, interpret, and be moved to action by stories</li> <li>Encourage learners to experience heightened levels of attention while being creative</li> <li>Develop narrative skills that enhance learners’ ability to “hear” patients’ stories</li> <li>Model creative and reflective writing for wellness</li> <li>Be fun!</li> </ul>	
		<b>NARRATIVE MEDICINE APPROACH – Reading aloud encouraged</b>	<b>ALTERNATIVE APPROACH – Reading aloud optional</b>
		REVIEW GROUND RULES:	REVIEW GROUND RULES:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be open to the process</li> <li>Everyone will be asked to read what they have written aloud, although everyone has the right to not read</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be open to the process</li> <li>No one is required to read what they have written although participants might talk about the process of writing</li> </ul>
	<b>The reading</b>	For written pieces, have one of the participants read the piece aloud. For poetry, read each poem aloud twice. Ask participants to circle words and phrases that are evocative, confusing, or attention-grabbing. For video or music pieces, have everyone experience it together. Participants follow along, take notes, circle intriguing words or phrases. “Read with a pen.” Ask participants to note the story’s elements.	
	<b>Group discussion</b>	Depending on the size of the group, engage the entire group or break into discussion groups for five- to ten-minutes. Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When does it take place?</li> <li>Where does it take you?</li> <li>What can you say about the narrator?</li> <li>What’s happening just outside the frame?</li> <li>What do you see? Whom do you hear? What senses are evoked?</li> </ul> Bring the group back together and see what they learned. Summarize the discussion.	
<b>Free-Writing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Prepare a prompt that is succinct and touches a bit on a theme in the selection.</b> For example, if the close reading piece is “Eleanor Rigby,” the prompt might be, “Write about a day when nobody noticed,” or “Write about a time when you waited by a window.”</li> <li>Tell participants that the next step is “free-writing.” They will write without stopping. No edits. Don’t worry about spelling. Just keep going! “I saw” &amp; “I did” &gt;&gt; “I feel” &amp; “I think” Concentrate on description, facts, events, story, dialogue. This is not the time for reflection.</li> <li>Read the prompt and start a timer. The writing duration (often 5 to 10 minutes) is based on available time and type of learners. Engaged or seasoned learners might write for fifteen to twenty minutes. The facilitator writes, as well. Warn the learners when there is one minute remaining.</li> </ul>		
<b>Group discussion</b>	<b>COLUMBIA APPROACH – Reading aloud encouraged</b>	<b>ALTERNATIVE APPROACH – Reading aloud optional</b>	
	If they were in small groups before, return them to their groups. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The group has a brief discussion about the writing process before sharing their writing.</li> <li>Participants take turns, reading only what is on the page, avoiding introductory or explanatory comments.</li> <li>The rest of the group responds <u>to the writing</u>. Discourage comments on anything outside of what is read aloud. Encourage, “I like how your writing...” or “Your writing made me wonder...” or “Wow! I hadn’t noticed...” Steer comments away from “Did the patient eventually die?” or “Weren’t you mad?” or “Here’s what happened to me...”</li> <li>Wrap up: Was this meaningful? Did it end up where you thought it would? What surprised you? What was this like?</li> </ul> Return to the large group to report discoveries.	If they were in small groups before, return them to their groups.           Conversation prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What was the writing process like for you?</li> <li>Did your writing end up where you thought it would?</li> <li>Did you discover anything unexpected? What surprised you? What would you like to talk about?</li> <li>Does anyone <u>want</u> to read what they wrote?</li> </ul> Return to the large group and have the small groups report out, again, focusing on process and discovery more than content.	
<b>Wrap up</b>	See if anyone has any final comments. Reinforce discoveries and provide resources for further creative activity. Get written and verbal whenever possible.		
<b>Post</b>	What worked? What didn’t? Would you use that same text again? The same prompt? Review feedback.		
<b>For more reading</b>	<b>COLUMBIA APPROACH – Reading aloud encouraged</b>	<b>ALTERNATIVE APPROACH – Reading aloud optional</b>	
	Based on the “close reading” approach developed and championed by the Program in Narrative Medicine in the Department of Medical Humanities and Ethics of Columbia University. See Chapters 7 and 8 in Charon R, et al., <i>Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine</i> , Oxford University Press, 2017, pp 157-208.	A version of this was initially developed to encourage Medical College of Wisconsin students to explore and reflect on their early, seminal clinical encounters. See: Campbell BH, et al. Creating Reflective Space for Reflective and “Unreflective” Medical Students: Exploring Seminal Moments in a Large-Group Writing Session. <i>Academic Medicine</i> (June) 2020; 95(6):p 882-887.	