



What, Exactly, is Narrative Medicine?



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Columbia University's Narrative Medicine program seeks to "develop the narrative capacities of **attention, representation, affiliation, and creativity** by engaging literature, philosophy, other humanities, creative arts, and social and natural sciences. " Narrative Medicine revolutionizes health care through **human connection and critical dialogue** to improve health outcomes for all. **Moved to action** by the stories of others, "we **expand justice, equity, and attention to self, others, and systems of care**" through "**education, training, research, scholarship, and advocacy.**"

Elements of NM

Attention

Offers heightened focus and commitment to the other

Representation

Confers form on the story to make it newly visible

Affiliation

Creates relationships that support, recognize, and act on behalf of the other

Creativity

Taps into creativity to make the NM response habitual

Close Reading is the signature method of NM

- Facilitator distributes a reading or shares a work of art.
- The creative piece is read aloud / viewed and discussed in small groups.
- The writing prompt is shared.
- Timer started. Participants write for 4 to 6 minutes.
- Small groups discuss their writing, then the facilitator guides a large group conversation on what was learned.

Example:

She Does Not Remember | Anna Swir

She was an evil stepmother.
In her old age she is slowly dying
in an empty hovel.

She shudders
like a clutch of burnt paper.
She does not remember that she was evil.
But she knows
that she feels cold.

Prompt:

*Write about a time
when you were
cold.*

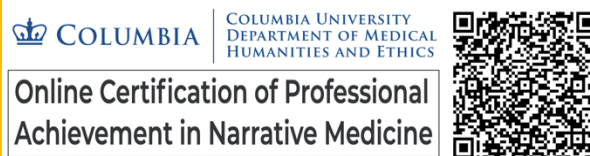
Download the
close reading
session outline



Download Narrative
Medicine resources,
references, and readings



Download information about earning a
Certificate of Professional Achievement
in NM:



Download information about an upcoming
weekend experiencing NM:



Bottom line:

Narrative medicine is much more than storytelling and reflective writing. It demands scholarship and rigor.

"I know beyond doubt that writing improves clinicians' stores of empathy, reflection, and courage. Writing benefits our patients. I have discovered how to fortify my medicine with the narrative gifts of perception, imagination, curiosity, and the indebtedness we listeners accrue toward those we hear."

- Rita Charon, MD, PhD



Rita Charon, MD PhD (left),
meeting with MCW faculty
members - June 2023



Kristina Kaljo, PhD
2024 MCW Campbell
Family Narrative
Medicine Fund Award
Recipient