WRITE ON:
An Introduction to Narrative Medicine

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Narrative Medicine

• The term “narrative medicine” is attributed to Rita Charon (2000).
  • Physician – Internal Medicine
  • Literary Scholar

• Used to describe an “approach” to practicing medicine that:
  • Develops one’s narrative competence/skills
  • To augment scientific understandings of illness

• Emerged from decades of interdisciplinary work combining:
  • Medicine
  • Arts/Humanities
  • Social Sciences
Narrative Medicine

• Medicine practiced with narrative competence
• Emphasizes that the process of healing begins with:
  • A story told by one person
  • That another person receives with the obligation to make sense of it
• Not just for physicians, but for ALL health care clinicians
  • When you possess narrative competency
  • You enter the clinical setting with a nuanced capacity for attentive listening
• What we do with the stories we hear depends on our:
  • Absorptive powers
  • Band of stories in their possession
Families may want to create a mission statement similar to the ones many companies use to identify their core values.

By BRUCE FEILER
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Narrative Competence

The ability to acknowledge, absorb, interpret, and respond to the stories of others
3 Tenets

• Attention (Listen attentively)
  • Close reading skills
    • Literary texts/Poetry

• Representation (“Re-present” in writing)
  • Delivering the essence of something into view
  • Meaning of what gets expressed come simultaneously from:
    • The one writing (e.g. fingerprints/DNA)
    • The subject of that writing

• Affiliation
  • Connection
    • Interpenetration of self/others
    • Inhabitation (without colonization)
“Medicine”
practiced by someone
who not only thinks with stories...
...but knows what to do
with stories.
The fate of the story depends on the preparation of the receiver.
READ
What you read when you don’t have to determines what you will be when you can’t help it.

Oscar Wilde
Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind

David Comer Kidd* and Emanuele Castano

Understanding others’ mental states is a crucial skill that enables the complex social relationships that characterize human societies. Yet little research has investigated what fosters this skill, which is known as Theory of Mind (ToM), in adults. We present five experiments showing that reading literary fiction led to better performance on tests of affective ToM (experiments 1 to 5) and cognitive ToM (experiments 4 and 5) compared with reading nonfiction (experiments 3), popular fiction (experiments 2 to 5), or nothing at all (experiments 2 and 3). Specifically, these results show that reading literary fiction temporarily enhances ToM. More broadly, they suggest that ToM may be influenced by engagement with works of art.

The capacity to identify and understand others’ subjective states is one of the most stunning products of human evolution. It allows successful navigation of complex social relationships and helps to support the empathic responses that maintain them (1–5). Deficits in this set of abilities, commonly referred to as Theory of Mind (ToM), are associated with psychopathologies marked by interpersonal dysfunction (6–9). The ability to inhibit disengagement of ToM has been linked to the breakdown of positive interpersonal and intergroup relationships (10).

Researchers have distinguished between affective ToM (the ability to detect and understand others’ emotions) and cognitive ToM (the inference and representation of others’ beliefs and intentions) (7, 8). The affective component of ToM, in particular, is linked to empathy (positively) and antisocial behavior (negatively) (7, 8). It is thus not surprising that we foster ToM in our children by having them attend to the emotional states of others: “Do you think he is happy or sad as a consequence of your action?” Such explicit encouragements to understand others usually diminish when children appear to skillfully and empathically engage in interpersonal relationships. Cultural practices, though, may function to promote and refine interpersonal sensitivity throughout our lives. One such practice is reading fiction.

Familiarity with fiction, self-reported empathy, and performance on an advanced affective ToM test have been correlated (10, 11), and limited experimental evidence suggests that reading fiction increases self-reported empathy (12, 13). Fiction seems also to expand our knowledge of others’ lives, helping us recognize our similarity to them (10, 11, 14). Although fiction may explicitly convey social values and reduce the strangeness of others, the observed relation between familiarity with fiction and ToM may be due to more subtle characteristics of the text. That is, fiction may change how, not just what, people think about others (10, 11, 14). We submit that fiction affects ToM processes because it forces us to engage in mind-reading and character construction. Not any kind of fiction achieves this, though. Our proposal is that it is literary fiction that forces the reader to engage in ToM processes.

The category of literary fiction has been contested on the grounds that it is merely a marker of social class, but features of the modern literary novel set it apart from most best-selling thrillers or romances. Mann and Katzen (15–17) emphasize that through the systematic use of phonological, grammatical, and semantic stylistic devices, literary fiction familiarizes its readers. The capacity of literary fiction to unsettle readers’ expectations and challenge their thinking is also reflected in Roland Barthes’s (18) distinction between written and readable texts. Although readable texts—such as most popular genre fiction—are intended to entertain their mostly passive readers, written—or literary—texts engage their readers creatively as writers. Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin (19) defined literary fiction as polyphonic and proposed that readers of literary fiction must contribute their own to a cacophony of voices. The absence of a single authorial perspective prompts readers to enter a vibrant discourse with the author and her characters.

Bruner (20), like Barthes and Bakhtin, has proposed that literature engages readers in a discourse that forces them to fill in gaps and search “for meanings among a spectrum of possible meanings” (p. 25). Bruner argues that to elicit
Tolstoy
Death of Ivan Ilyich

James Sanders
A HISTORY OF THE PRESENT ILLNESS

stories

LOUISE ARONSON
WRITE
Writing activities

- Story of your name
- Index Card activity
- Cinquain
- Discovering your inner novelist
  - 6-word stories
- Discovering how to dig deeper
  - 25 things I know about...
What is the story of your name?
Index card activity
Cinquain

• A poetic form
  • “Bundle of five objects”
• Five lines that do not rhyme (2-4-6-8-2)
  • 1st line – 2 syllables
  • 2nd line – 4 syllables
  • 3rd line – 6 syllables
  • 4th line – 8 syllables
  • 5th line – 2 syllables
**Forgetfulness**

By Billy Collins

The name of the author is the first to go
followed obediently by the title, the plot,
the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel
which suddenly becomes one you have never read,
ever even heard of,
as if, one by one, the memories you used to harbor
decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain,
to a little fishing village where there are no phones.

Long ago you kissed the names of the nine Muses goodbye
and watched the quadratic equation pack its bag,
and even now as you memorize the order of the planets,
something else is slipping away, a state flower perhaps,
the address of an uncle, the capital of Paraguay.

Whatever it is you are struggling to remember
it is not poised on the tip of your tongue,
not even lurking in some obscure corner of your spleen.

It has floated away down a dark mythological river
whose name begins with an L as far as you can recall,
well on your own way to oblivion where you will join those
who have even forgotten how to swim and how to ride a bicycle.

No wonder you rise in the middle of the night
to look up the date of a famous battle in a book on war.
No wonder the moon in the window seems to have drifted
out of a love poem that you used to know by heart.
Struggling to remember. Your name is the first, then a love poem I once knew by heart.
Six (6) word stories

• Stories told in just six words.
• Inspired by Ernest Hemingway, who challenged students

For sale: Baby shoes, never worn.
Met at antiwar rally. Still fighting.

Wanted world. Got world plus lupus.

Cancer. Only three months left. Pregnant.

She loved cigarettes… more than life.
25 things I know about...
Before you see your next patient, take a moment and a deep breath and ask yourself...

Where did we leave the thread of our story the last time
Visual prompts
LISTEN
Holding space for...
Thank you.