

Exercising the Therapeutic Imagination

Bertman's Premise:

“Engaging in the arts and expressive therapies as initiator or observer is in itself a creative act, often catalyst enough to enable grief, assist in the search for meaning, and initiate change. The engagement (be it reading or writing, viewing or drawing, listening or enacting) to varying degrees involves attention, analysis, identification, catharsis and insight. The beauty of the process is its openness to interpretations, to the way any of us—therapist, nurse, patient, colleague—takes it in and uses it for oneself, in personal and professional contexts.” (adapted from Bertman, *Grief and the Healing Arts* 1999, p.3)

I. Goals:

- to elicit concerns
- to introduce concepts
- to enhance/build skills
- to explore attitudes
- to heal

II. Visual Poetry: (liberties with acronyms and epigrams)

Let the letters be the first of a word, phrase or sentence. Write freely the words that come without stopping, censoring or judging. This exercise is for spontaneity, creativity and discovery, capable of concisely triggering a pointed or ingenious turn of thought. Poetic rather than explanatory, it validates the ability of the image—even a word image—to expand communication and offer insight outside the scope of the reasoning mind. (e.g., HOPE, GRIEF, A NAME, PAIN, TOMMY, MOMMY, SOUL, IF ONLY, DEATH, HEALING, etc.)

H _____

O _____

P _____

E _____

III. Visual Case Studies (distributed):



Visual Case Studies: Some Ways to Begin...

Choose any one of the distributed images. Write a paragraph or two about what is happening in this scene.

Before writing allow yourself to be drawn into the image.

- What are your thoughts?
- Feelings?
- Create a context or setting. If so moved, create a title, dialogue...a poem....

Some Prompts

If the image could speak...

- What is going on here?
- Whose voice is this?
- Who is the speaker?

How does the image relate to your experience?

- Can you identify with anyone in it?
- What memories does it trigger?
- How might you change image to relate it to your experience?

I would say to the image...

- To the figure(s) in it
- To the "artist" who created it?
- To _____

-Please share any final comments on the process:

i.e., how the exercise was for you.

-How might you use such an image in your teaching or clinical practice?

References:

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