

The Medical Humanities Reader

**Textbook pitch by
David W. Boles, MFA**

When I was asked a year ago to create a course in the Humanities for graduate students in Public Health at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (<http://www.umdnj.edu>), I knew it would be important to teach the idea of finding meaning in subtext and movement in the silences.

The course I created was "Public Health Crises Reflected in the Humanities" and the course was approved by the curriculum committee in less than 24 hours and by the Dean's office in less than a week.

The official course website for "Public Health Crises Reflected in the Humanities" with information and student evaluations can be found online here [<http://www.umdnj.edu/~bolesdw/>] and a PDF version of that site has been included with this pitch as a separate file along with a PDF version of the course syllabus.

Since the course was set to run in the School of Public Health's Division of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, I knew my students would be those who loved numbers and didn't like having two answers to the same questions. My favorite way to end a course discussion is to ask, "What is the answer?" and for the students to realize, "There is no answer." Not having a ready, simple, answer at the end of a three hour graduate seminar is the beginning of the learning process, not the end. I knew many of the UMDNJ students would not like to accept the notion that "there is no answer" in this course. They also would not enjoy knowing their "grade would be determined on the logic of your text-based argument" and not on right and wrong answers to multiple choice questions.

Linking works that appear on the surface to have no connective tissue was also a paramount goal I had when creating the course. I have a lot of experience teaching the Humanities to students with mathematics and sciences backgrounds at Fordham, NYU and New Jersey Institute of Technology. The students demand and crave a method for determining a correct answer – the world is either black or white and it can be proven not through spirit or creative thought but through the mechanical methods of engineering and computer-generated lab reports. In my class I wanted to stretch my students' ability to think creatively and to proactively investigate a plethora of solutions within one problem. The joy of being human and not just a human being is the gift I wanted these smart students to give each other at the conclusion of the course.

THE TEXTBOOK

The only stumbling block I had in creating the course was the lack of a comprehensive textbook that included all the material I wanted to teach. I ended up going into the wild of the world wide web for additional inspiration and I employed pieces of a general literature textbook with additional outside reading from books, movies, plays, television shows, radio broadcasts, musicals and periodicals in order to create a comprehensive reading list.

The afterglow inspiration from that course is this book pitch for a 1,200 page megalith textbook that will fill a huge and gaping niche. *The Medical Humanities Reader*, with additional material bundled with the book on DVD, will become the core textbook for thousands of students across the world who are studying the Sciences, the Arts, Medicine and the Humanities. These students, by providence of this textbook, will finally be able to flock together in the spirit and purpose of learning to enlighten each other with their ability to stake the page to the abstract of healing.

The emphasis on this Reader will be on the Humanities with a Medical interpretation. We will cast a new eye on old chestnuts and re-evaluate familiar experiences through the lens of a medical aesthetic. For selections that deal with Medicine as the primary idea, we will find the Humanities angle on the work that leads us to a higher understanding of human emotion.

THE HOOK

Unlike any other Reader in the Humanities or in Medicine, *The Medical Humanities Reader* will enhance each side of the brain for learning. In this Reader the classic play *Antigone* becomes an investigation into the Public Health crisis of a dead body in the street and the conflict between the State and the Family to resolve a health crisis in the community. The *General Hospital* television Soap Opera becomes a popular key to learning about AIDS and HIV. Neil Young's song *The Needle and the Damage Done* becomes a leaping off point for the danger of drugs in the inner city. W.B. Yeats' poem *Leda and the Swan* provides context for the generational power of rape.

Hand-picked scholarly writers will help me create fresh essays and additional wraparound commentary for each selection. The Teacher's Guide will also help provide a clear line of reasoning and explanation so this textbook may be employed as the structure for an entire course.

THE COMPETITION

While there are several online entities that hint at the "Medical Humanities" [<http://www.MedicalHumanities.com>] there isn't yet a large textbook that provides comprehensive readings on the topic. Being first to market will help establish this book as the beachhead of a new movement in education.

THE MARKET

23% of the medical schools in the United States now have some kind of "Humanities" program to help train doctors, nurses and Public Health administrators that the symbiotic relationship between medical professional and patient must be more than just one of product and consumer. "Medical Humanities" is a hot idea that will burn hot and evergreen in universities and colleges because its time has finally come.

There is a big push to create more "Medical Humanities" programs and departments in medical schools. UMDNJ is in the process of setting up such a division and programs currently exist in some form at Johns Hopkins, Columbia, Stanford, USC, The City University of New York's Graduate Center, University of Connecticut, Michigan State University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Southern Illinois University, Drew University and New York University.

With alternate and complimentary care programs growing in popularity in medical schools, Public Health programs and general preventive healthcare, you can see how the effort to fold those ideas under the "Medical Humanities" banner makes economic institutional sense.

EDITOR/AUTHOR**David W. Boles, MFA (PhD in progress)**

I presently teach in the graduate school of Public Health at UMDNJ and I also teach World and Dramatic Literature at New Jersey Institute of Technology and Drama and Forensic Speech at Rutgers University-Newark. Other teaching credits include NYU, Columbia, Fordham, the College of New Rochelle and Saint Peter's College. My MFA is from Columbia University in the City of New York where I earned a terminal degree in Playwriting and my work as a Playwright has been seen on national tour in 16 states and 27 cities.

I wrote the international bestseller "Windows 95 Communication and Online Secrets" for IDG Books Worldwide and periodical work includes c|net's "Builder.com," "Windows Magazine" and "Boot." I served as the East Coast Editor for "Eyepiece" – the Official Publication of the Guild of British Cinematographers. For the past 14 years I have published and edited GO INISIDE Magazine [<http://goinside.com>] where 2.5 million readers are served a month and where new writers get their first works published and where established writers go to write their passion. For the past twenty years I have been president of The United Stage [<http://UnitedStage.com>] where Playwrights are welcomed to direct the first vision of their work on stage.

I am so inspired by the idea of the "Medical Humanities" that I created the brand new journal called "The ScientificAesthetic Quarterly" [<http://ScientificAesthetic.com/sa.html>] in order to publish fresh articles on the idea.

I then created the new program in "Dramatic Medicine" at [<http://DramaticMedicine.com/dm.html>] to further the cause of teaching the philosophy and aesthetic of working in the "Medical Humanities."

In addition to writing and teaching, I am a PhD student in the joint program in Urban Health Systems program at UMDNJ/Rutgers-Newark/UMDNJ. My full CV and Teaching Credits are available upon request and a narrative biography can be found online here: [<http://www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~dboles/>]

DEADLINE

This book will be submitted to the publisher 12 months – or sooner – after the book contract is signed.

THE OUTLINE

This 1,200 page book will be wide-ranging and innovative in design and content. I will write, edit and hire other experts in order to create new scholarly commentary. It would be delightful to include two original critical essays on each work: One from the Humanities point-of-view and the other from the Medical point-of-view and the student would then create their own convergence of ideas when they ingest the work.

I understand some of the following titles may not be available for inclusion in the textbook and I accept that other titles may need to be added to the book to help round out the Reader.

THE DVD

A DVD disk, which holds much more conventional and multimedia information than a regular CD-ROM, will include commentary, resource material, recorded performances, and on screen directed reading instructions from me for each piece included in the book. If the cost of including a DVD of this magnitude is prohibitive that will not adversely affect the salability of the Reader.

PART ONE: POPULAR EXPRESSION (400 Pages)

The popular expression of issues in Medical Humanities concerns the way the problems of living are interpreted in the mainstream world of film, television, radio, art and music. The idea here is discovery of the shared experience of communal thought and the values and ethical choices these forms of expression employ and entrust to the population.

How do Medical Humanities issues creep into our leisure time? Why do artists choose this method of mass communication? How is the audience expected to respond to this form of education through entertainment? What can the medical community learn from these successful methods of information distribution?

Religion & the Law

The textbook will open with an investigation into Religious texts and their purpose of indoctrinating followers into a belief system to control behavior. What are the lessons found in these religious texts that warn against bad behavior that can lead to illness, loss of life and the disintegration of the psyche?

Torah

Bible

Koran

The Book of Mormon

Dianetics

We will then move from the laws of religious texts into laws of the community and the government and how they all help control behavior and personality for the greater good. Or do they?

The Magna Carta

The Bill of Rights

The Constitution

Art

Next, photographs from the "Lila's Breast" exhibit at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey will be examined. Students will write a responsive poem based on the plaster casts of three nude women: Each one has a missing breast.

The point-of-view for each poem for student will be different. One student will write from the POV of the disease, another from the removed body part, another from the remaining body and then casting, and the viewer, the surgeon, the blood, the brain, the emotion, the lover, and finally, themselves as critic. In the process of their own creation students will rediscover their humanity and the power of emotional expression.

Film

Entire scripts, snippets of scripts and transcripts from the following movies and documentaries will be examined. Is the dramatization of the medical issue handled properly or poorly and why? What are the greater unasked questions these films ponder? Cut scenes from some of these features can be placed on the DVD?

Jaws – Feature Film concerning Public Health

Outbreak – Feature Film concerning a virus outbreak

And the Band Played On – Feature Film and the hunt for HIV

King Gimp – Documentary examining Cerebral Palsy

Sound and Fury – Documentary about Deaf Culture and Cochlear Implants

The Brandon Teena Story – Feature Film concerning Gender and Identity

Television

The flickering light of a television set brings in massive amounts of critical health information to millions of families a day. How is that medical message being prepared and received for action? Entire scripts or pieces of scripts or transcripts from the following dramatic and reality programs will prove the reading for this part of the book. Selected scenes from these shows may be added to the DVD.

Johnny Belinda – Television drama concerning mental retardation

General Hospital – Soap Opera, 1995, the HIV/AIDS storyline

Oprah – The 2004 Oprah Winfrey show on children and molestation

Dawson's Creek – The 1999 episode on Jen and the Ecstasy drug

Montel Williams – The girl who is allergic to water episode from 2002

*M*A*S*H* – The Dec. 10, 1972 show concerning Hepatitis

All in the Family - Episode #004 - Archie Gives Blood

Radio

Radio is a powerful communication tool for instant information. Sometimes, however, mistakes are made during a live radio broadcast and that kind of uncertainty can negatively affect the listener who seeks facts and a quick remedy. Transcripts will be read and audio clips can will be listened to on the DVD.

The War of the Worlds – Orson Welles' 1938 broadcast masterpiece

9/11 – Live coverage from 1010 WINS in New York as the towers fell

BBC – Breaking news coverage of the 2003 SARS outbreak in China

Imus in the Morning – Raising money for a sick children's ranch retreat

Music

Songs convey information through emotion and the perils of a shared experience. Lyrics will be printed and examined in this section and the songs may even appear on the DVD.

The Needle and the Damage Done – Neil Young sings about drug abuse

Luka – Suzanne Vega sings about child abuse

The Streets of Philadelphia – Bruce Springsteen sings about dying of AIDS

Ohio – Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young sing about the killings at Kent State

Sympathy for the Devil – The Rolling Stones and the murder at Altamont

Where is the Love – Black Eyed Peas sing about social devastation

Waterfalls – TLC sing about teenage suicide

Love is Blind – Eve sings about urban strife and hopelessness

PART TWO: LITERATURE (400 Pages)

The second section of *The Medical Humanities Reader* will delve into the world of literature.

Many of these titles may be familiar to students, but we will cast each story in a new light. This section is interactive with students creating interpretation and storytelling in real time.

Drama

The live stage has always been a moderator of civility, cultural education and the dangerous idea. This part of the book will examine personal experience and a public expectation.

Oedipus Rex by Sophocles (Plague)
Antigone by Sophocles (Policy vs. Duty)
An Enemy of the People by Henrik Ibsen (Tainted Water)
The Doctor's Dilemma by George Bernard Shaw (Ethics)
The Good Doctor by Anton Chekhov (Healing in Action)
Hazel Flagg by Ben Hecht (Radium Dial Poisoning)
Endgame by Samuel Beckett (Cleaving of Personality)
On Tidy Endings by Harvey Fierstein (Gay Man/Married Woman)
Angels in America by Tony Kushner (AIDS and Repression)

Poetry

Poems construct new neural pathways of learning by challenging the student to think beyond the obvious.

These poems have been selected precisely because they do not appear, on the surface, to relate in any way to the idea of a "Medical Humanities," yet, they all contain warnings for those who serve the forgotten and misbegotten.

Leda and the Swan by W.B. Yeats (Rape and Power)
Woodchucks by Maxine Kumin (Extermination at a Distance)
My Papa's Waltz by Theodore Roethke (Alcoholism and Child Abuse)
On the Late Massacre at Piemont by John Milton (Death in the Field)
The Chimney Sweeper by William Blake (Black Lung Disease)
AIDS by Mary Sarton (Stages of Dying)
Five Ways to Kill a Man by Edwin Brock (Incremental Industrial Killing)
Daddy by Sylvia Plath (Elektra Complex)
The Victims by Sharon Olds (Coming to Terms with Abandonment)

Novels

These titles were selected as marks of excellence that celebrate the pluralism of the human condition. Chapters from each book will demonstrate the power of the life-force in rebellion against disease.

Bad Blood by James Jones (Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment)
Journey Out of Silence by William L. Rush (Disabled Body, Able Voice)
The Doctor Stories by William Carlos Williams (Medical Chestnuts)
Lisa, Bright and Dark by John Neufeld (Teenage Paranoia)
Flu by Gina Kolata (The Great Influenza Pandemic)

Essays & Stories

The following short stories and narratives are rich because they create uneasy smiles of recognition.

Each piece questions the difficulty of doing the right thing by examining ethical dilemmas while wondering about community morality.

- On Morality* by Joan Didion (Promises and Choices)
- The Butchering at Wounded Knee* by Black Elk (War and Healing)
- Talking Black* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Cultural Sensitivity)
- The Human Cost of an Illiterate Society* by Jonathan Kozol (Learning)
- On Dumpster Diving* by Lars Eigher (Homelessness)
- Cultural Etiquette* by Amoja Three Rivers (The Psychology of Getting Along)
- My Oedipus Complex* by Frank O'Connor (Longing and Lust)
- Does God Have a Future* by Karen Armstrong (Meaning of Living)
- My Brother, Gary Gilmore* by Mikhal Gilmore (Justice and Punishment)
- Eugenics and the Disabled* by David Boles (Social Control of Human Mating)
- The Turbid Ebb and Flow of Misery* by Margaret Sanger (Abortion)
- Humanities and Science* by Lewis Thomas (Dynamic Relationship)
- The American Way of Death* by Jessica Mitford (Bodies and Funerals)
- Lessons from McDonald's* by Robein Leidner (Health and the Economy)
- Two Scenes from a Hospital* by Melvin Urofsky (Do Not Resuscitate)
- My Patient's Suicide* by Timothy E. Quill (Choosing Quality of Life)
- Looking for a Rain God* by Bessie Smith (Child Sacrifice)
- An Evening with JonBenét Ramsey* by Walter Davis (Sexuality and Children)
- Women on the Breadlines* by Meridel Le Sueur (Hardship and Healing)

PART THREE: PUBLIC PERCEPTION CHANGERS (400 Pages)

The final part of *The Medical Humanities Reader* will take students into a different angle of yaw where they will meet outstanding individuals who changed the landscape of public perception of medicine by revealing private pain in humanistic writing.

Chapters from the following books, or even the entire book, will be read and left open for dissection.

Helen Keller

She was the Mother Theresa and Britney Spears and Maya Angelou of her time. Deaf and Blind, Helen Keller soared above her disabilities to become a Superstar of the Human Race. She is someone you long to look up to for a path into appreciation for the smaller gems of life.

The Story of My Life

Stephen Crane

He was the voice of a generation. He gave words to those who could not speak. He provided profiles in honor and courage when others preferred to ignore the blood soaking the land and shame staining a nation.

An Episode of War

The Monster

Christy Brown

This Irish writer was thought to be mentally retarded until it was later discovered he suffered from Cerebral Palsy. His writing is beautiful and touching. He challenges us to peer beyond the horizon of the spirit to prove we are not our bodies.

Down All the Days
My Left Foot

Ryan White

He was a hemophiliac who became infected by the AIDS virus during a blood transfusion. Ryan White was not sexually active; he was a child born into a middle class family who then became the international poster boy for HIV and AIDS and, in the end, was the "straight" face of AIDS for a nation where many had fearfully viewed AIDS merely as a punishment for homosexual promiscuity.

Ryan White: My Own Story

Oliver Sacks

Like Annie Sullivan was to Helen Keller, Oliver Sacks is to those who suffer from strange medical maladies. Through Sacks' kindness and genius we learn to understand the unknown and to accept mysteries of the mind we may never quite learn.

The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat – Selections of stories from medicine
Seeing Voices – An analysis of Sign Language as a universal language
Awakenings – The power of L-dopa to enliven the mind
Uncle Tungsten – The story of a the creation and education of a brilliant mind

Berton Roueché

His books make him the modern father of "CSI" and "ER" and "M*A*S*H" and "Saint Elsewhere." Roueché knows how to tell a story that teaches while it entertains and many doctors and nurses today credit Roueché's writing for inspiring them onward to careers in medicine.

Eleven Blue Men
The Medical Detectives

Michael Crichton

If Berton Roueché is the father of modern day dramatic medical writing, then Michael Crichton is his star pupil. Crichton's writing is spectacular and moving and creates a thrill ride of science and entertainment like no other artist of his generation.

A Case of Need – A Medical Murder thriller from the first time writer
The Andromeda Strain – There's a virus loose and it is killing quickly
Jurassic Park – Dinosaurs and DNA create monsters of science

The Afterlife

The Medical Humanities Reader with DVD will be a significant signpost of ingenuity and serve as a marker for the promise of great things to come from the wedding of Science and the Arts; the melding of Medicine and the Humanities; and the blending of Left Brain and Right Brain learning.

The result of publishing *The Medical Humanities Reader* will be a new community of doctors, nurses, artists and humanitarians who have a new appreciation for each other and for a renewed energy of cooperation to help keep the body healthy and the spirit thriving.

Together we can understand and heal with passion and magnitude.