

WORD PHARMACY VIA VERSE, PROSE

Course Description: *Poetry Pharmacy Returns – Verse and Prose for Today*

Instructor: Patricia (Pat) C. Thompson

Good words make good remedies. So suggests William Sieghart in his latest best-selling mini-anthology titled *The Poetry Pharmacy Returns*.

Sieghart takes a wide range of conditions (low mood, aging, grief, human relations, family matters, isolation, care-giving, even agonizing about one's weight) and offers verbal remedies in two parts – a brief poem plus his one-page warm, witty meditation on that “malady.”

We'll discuss select entries each week – a few enhanced by outside prose plus some practices that can provide added help for today's challenges. Emphasis will be on discussion of the stated “life challenge” or condition, Sieghart's one-page reflection, the poetic remedy, and our personal responses. No prior knowledge of poetry is needed. Focusing on how the poem provides solace will be emphasized more than the elements of poetry or poetry as a genre. (See **FOCAL QUESTIONS** and **TOPICS** below for more on course content.)

Text to obtain: ISBN: 978-0-241-41905-2 *THE POETRY PHARMACY RETURNS* by William Sieghart

NOTE: Please refer to the ISBN in obtaining the book (turquoise cover). Sieghart has several similar titles in print.

Course intention: To explore how these readings, our discussions, and certain related practices have the potential to offer support and/or enhance holistic well-being. In general, we'll ponder ways in which literature and reading material can offer “cures” or at least consolation of varied types.

Who is William Sieghart? A British philanthropist, entrepreneur, and publisher, Sieghart has been aware of the joy and power of poetry since his childhood. “The Poetry Pharmacy” is his project founded largely on the belief that poetry is a healing force much needed in these modern times.

Born in 1960, he is founder of National Poetry Day and the Forward Prizes for Poetry designed to help raise the profile of poetry today. His poem prescriptions have occasioned rave reviews from his grateful “patients,” and he has published several volumes of poem as remedies.

Poets in this text: Among the many poets represented in the text are Robert Frost, Mary Oliver, Hafiz, Denise Levertov, Naomi Nye, Gerard M. Hopkins, Anne Bronte, Mark Strand, Kate Tempest, Raymond Carver, Matthew Arnold, William Wordsworth, Anna Akhmatova, Seamus Heaney, Khalil Gibran, Rumi, Nikita Gill, Pablo Neruda, Alice Walker, and Emily Dickinson.

Book format: Roughly two pages per selection with Sieghart's commentary (aka reflection on the theme) on one side and the “remedy poem” on the other

Reading rate: A few per week -- range of 8 – 12 pages on average

Length of text: 57 poems plus commentary; 136 pgs. of core content (Book has 150 total pages.)

Discussion pace: Typically three to five poems per class depending on how the topic and poem resonate with class members. We will proceed largely in chronological order of **TOPICS that are noted at the end of this document.**

Focal questions of course:

1. What was Sieghart's original and highly popular in-person approach to poems as "remedies" for ills of all sort?
2. What is Sieghart's own story regarding poetry and his evidence that a poem can be a valuable "prescription" for certain conditions?
3. What are the six content or topic areas* of the book's poem-remedies, and how do they serve as potential helping tools for challenging states of mind (per Sieghart)?
4. How do we as class members evaluate these "poem prescriptions"? In short, are certain poems functioning as a balm in the form of humor, empathy, insight, or guidance about select life conditions or challenges?
5. What other tools and/or practices might be valuable for navigating life today – especially for those of us age 50 and upward? (For this, we may reference a limited number of select print materials and/or videos, etc. beyond this text.)
6. What tools or insights about poetry do we need in order to read these poems effectively?
7. What (if anything) do we want or need to know about the poets who wrote them?
8. What else would be of value to you that is relevant to this study?

*** Topics in Sieghart's *The Poetry Pharmacy Returns*:** Under each of these six headings, Sieghart typically provides 8 to 10 short poems as "prescriptions."

1. Hesitation and Choice
2. Strength and Healing
3. Silver Linings
4. Heart and Home
5. Conflict and Reconciliation
6. Being Numerous (Identity, care-giving, handling multiple roles at once)

Location: This course is currently set for OLLI at Wyoming United Methodist Church, Dover, DE.

Contact with instructor: You are encouraged to let me know if you must be absent/delayed or for some reason must withdraw from our course. We aim to build community and be sensitive to the circumstances of each course member. Please email, text, or phone if you have updates, questions, or concerns. I am pat.thompson48@gmail.com ; also, 302 670-0048 mobile-texts (Please sign your name to texts.)

Emails: I do tend to send occasional emails, especially at the outset of the course. My **subject line will begin with "OLLI "and a form of our course title.** Please note that **my name will appear in the TO line.** **Your names and emails will be not be seen since OLLI emails are sent as a "BCC" (blind carbon copy)** to protect your privacy.

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