

Dear Elizabeth and Lisa,

Thank you so much for sharing your manuscript with me. It was a joy to read, and it made me feel connected to poetry and art in the way I always associate with narrative medicine and the two of you. It was wonderful to learn about parts of your journeys that I didn't previously know—like your work with the Lighthouse for the Blind, Lisa—and about the many, many programs and collaborations you've been involved with over the years.

Harnessing the Power of Objects is going to be a great resource for so many museum educators. There's so much heart and wisdom and reflection and honest humanity in these pages. Every chapter reinforced for me the importance of the work you're doing.

In approaching this edit, I projected myself back to when I was new to narrative medicine and health humanities and didn't know much about the history of the practice or how to think of poems as objects.

The bones of the book are here, and they're strong. What's needed is more connective tissue so to speak, to create more supportive scaffolding so there are more entry points for people new to these practices. In the following pages, I'll address a small handful of stylistic and readability suggestions, but will focus mostly on thoughts about how to build out the beginning chapters to create a more comprehensive path into the themed chapters for the novice reader. For the most part, I'm focusing on your introductory chapters and your structure and not on the contributors' essays. I'm approaching it more as working to make the scaffolding fit the essays and prompts and reflections of the themed chapters. Hopefully this framework helps contextualize my thoughts and suggestions.

You'll also notice that I've made some comments in the manuscript. These mostly focused on things like responding to comments and questions that one of you had added, uplifting particularly great lines and sentiments, catching typos that might get past Word's spelling/grammar check, and in one case pointing out an instance of (unintentional, I'm sure!) ableist language used by one of the contributors. Generally, I tried to hold off from focusing on copyediting too much because this is an early stage for that and the manuscript will likely go through more drafts before it's ready for that, but you'll notice a very light touch of it throughout.

I've always been a big fan of both of your work, and now that's only stronger after getting to know so much more about all the projects and initiatives you're both part of. The themes, and the contributors selected for each one are wonderfully curated for your purposes. I believe in this book project even more now that I've read this draft.

Chrys Buckley

Stylistic and Readability Suggestions

Let's start with a bit of the lighter fare before diving into scaffolding.

Paragraph Length

One thing that struck me throughout is that you have a lot of long paragraphs. There are some contributor essays and several bios that are one long paragraph, as well as some very long paragraphs throughout. These will likely look even longer once laid out in book format than they do here in word processing, and could appear as walls of text and affect readability and approachability for your readers. Breaking up these long paragraphs according to tone or subject shifts, even if they're subtle, should help the book feel more accessible.

Anything over 8-10 lines in the Word doc is worth considering breaking up and looking for those places where the natural shifts occur. Look for transitional words and phrases as natural breakage points (ex. "After that" or "For the next year" or "Until that moment") as well as shifts in topic or tone.

In some paragraphs, that natural breakage spot may simply not exist, and having some longer paragraphs, as long as they're used sparingly, can work really well.

The bios are a spot I especially saw this happening. We're all used to having to write bios that are essentially one block, and then they can grow in size with new experiences and roles we want to highlight. The information in all the bios was interesting and provided context, so I wouldn't suggest cutting anything out of them, just breaking them into multiple paragraphs. This can go a long way to having readers actually read the bios instead of skipping them! The last one, Beth's, is a great example of breaking up the bio into smaller chunks.

Consistency

While going through the themed chapters, I found they weren't quite consistent in their structure. Some had one set of prompts or one aspect of the reflection portion missing. Some had the Close Looking prompts broken out by piece of art while others didn't. This might be because you're still in process of building these out, but I wanted to point it out because it can look a bit incomplete. The two ways to handle this would be to either vary the structure more so the reader isn't expecting the chapters to all follow a rigid pattern, or to more strongly adhere to a rigid pattern, so that readers expect it and get what they expect. Either way could work, and given the purpose and audience of the book, the latter is likely the more effective way to go.

Another place that would be helped by more consistency is citations. Formatting them can come at the very end of the process, but just to tip the scales, I'd opt for footnotes as a way to make the main text less cluttered, while still mentioning attribution where needed.

Scaffolding

Let's dig in to ways to build out the book to be more accessible to an audience that's unfamiliar with your work and the principles behind it

Subtitle

After the title itself, your subtitle will be the strongest indicator to readers about what's inside. It'll help people decide if this is for them or not, so it plays a marketing role, and it also primes the reader for what to expect. So, it's worth spending some time and consideration here.

Of the three options suggested on your title page, #3, "A Workshop Guide for Museum Educators to Foster Attention, Reflection, Creativity, and Connection" is the clearest communication of what's inside the book. It specifies who it's for (museum educators), what it is (a workshop guide), and what the goals are (fostering all the good things). It might be listed last because it's a bit wordier than the others, but the clarity it provides outweighs its wordiness. The second option is shorter but doesn't convey as much information with as much clarity.

The first one could be read as being about how to help museum educators find their own wellbeing as opposed to fostering that wellbeing through workshops. Unfortunately, I'd also advise against using the word "wellness" in your subtitle, as the word has been co-opted for not-so-great purposes like many corporate wellness programs that are aimed more at lowering the company's health insurance burdens and the GOOP universe of wellness trends, and now might even be associated with MAHA and the current administration. It's a word with a lot of charge, used by different people for different purposes, that might evoke skepticism and distrust for your audience, and could even be alienating. It's disappointing this is the case because I know how you intend it, but newcomers to the book and your work might not.

Sample Workshop Portion of Chapter 1

While the workshop template isn't in the chapter yet, I had an alternate idea for how to incorporate templates after reading through the themed chapters, seeing how they're structured and what they contain, and putting myself in the shoes of someone new to the work who might feel intimidated by figuring out how to build a workshop around the objects and prompts.

What if you used the Attention chapter as the place to incorporate your template? You could keep the chapter exactly as it, but add some templates after the chapter material proper. That way, the reader has been exposed to the artwork, the poem, the different types of prompts, and then can see concrete examples of how to turn that into workshops. You'd only need to do this for the one chapter, as once there's this fleshed-out example, readers will have a better idea of how to adapt the others.

Another suggestion, if you choose to accept this change, would be to offer a couple of different templates based on the Attention chapter, so that readers get a full scope of how adaptable this material is. Maybe you include suggestions for workshops of different lengths. What length of

workshops are common for museum educators? Might they want a more in-depth one (90 minutes comes to mind), as well as a short one (30 minutes)? One that focuses more on visual art, one that focuses more on poems and writing prompts, one that's mixed? It also could be clearer that people are encouraged to bring in their own objects and create their own prompts based on your models, and this might be a way and a place to encourage that.

If I were attempting to implement a new workshop at my museum, I'd want to see different examples of how to apply what's in the chapter so I felt encouraged to pick and choose and also had a sense for what is realistic for typical workshop timeframes. Without that, it could feel overwhelming or like there is one right way, and I might be less inclined to try. Thoroughly going through and showing different pathways to use the material in the Attention chapter would build a framework for thinking through the rest, and in a way that's integrated with the chapter material.

I wouldn't make this part of Attention a separate chapter because that would interrupt the flow of the chapters that follow, so you could highlight that this is where the templates will be in "How to Use this Book" and other introductory materials, as well as at the start of the Attention chapter.

Introductory Materials

I know you got some feedback from the writer of your Foreword suggestion adding more chapters to the beginning of the book, and I fully agree with this suggestion. The current introduction and Chapter 1 are really strong, and moving, and wonderful. And I kept feeling that if I was new to this work, I'd need quite a bit more context.

Throughout the beginning sections there are concepts, acronyms, institutions, etc. that aren't explained. Some examples include OHSU, VST (and in this case I didn't know what this was and was genuinely a bit confused and trying to see if it fit the names of programs that'd been introduced earlier), how "object" is used in this context and its more expansive definition that's so familiar to us but might be obscure to someone encountering it for the first time, narrative medicine, and others.

I don't know if your publisher has given you a target word count, and since my experience is more with trade fiction and nonfiction, I'm not as familiar with word count ranges for an instructional book or a museum book, or what your publisher envisions for the size of your book. All that said, it's currently approx. 26,000 words. That strikes me as low—in fiction publishing, this would be the word count for a short novella—meaning you probably have a fair amount of latitude to add more to this part of the book before you get into themed chapters. This is where it will probably pay off to spend most of your time and attention.

There are several different ways to build out and restructure this beginning portion so it has more scaffolding for the rest of the book, so please feel free to mix and match from whatever resonates with you from the following suggestions. I'm aiming to provide options and jumping off points, rather than a "one right way" to restructure.

-You could add a section before the Introduction chapter (or at the top of the chapter) that spells out exactly who this book is for and what you want readers to get out of it so the goals are clear. Until the very end of the intro, I'm not clear what I as a reader/museum educator am supposed to do with the information in the book, so I think bringing that forward earlier would be helpful. Something along the lines of "we hope you'll use these guides to create or facilitate workshops at your museums" but said in more beautiful words the way you both do.

-Along the same lines, when I get to How to Use this Book, and the first sentence is about how the book isn't just a collection of objects, I was thinking, I didn't know the book would have a collection of objects. This also goes to having an establishing "what this book is, who it's for, what we want you to get out of it" section.

-You could have a short section at the beginning where you introduce some of the basic concepts referred to throughout the first couple chapters.

-The above is especially true for the definition of "object" in this context. Before the The Power of Objects section, consider a short section called "What is an Object?" For people who are used to thinking of objects as physical things and might need a little prompting or even hand-holding to think of less tangible things or things in other forms (especially things used or mentioned in the book like comics, poems, stories, music) as objects. This will be especially helpful for people from the museum world, who might be automatically thinking of objects as in the objects on display in museums.

-Some of "How to Use this Book" might belong earlier in the manuscript, before your stories. Your stories are *so* wonderful and moving, and they'd be even stronger with some context preceding them.

-Your stories could also be developed a bit more. Lisa, yours ends a bit abruptly, so a concluding sentence, a summary, or a transitional sentence could help it more smoothly flow into Elizabeth's.

-The cut text at the end of p. 7 is important context and could be worked in when building out the introductory materials.

-You mentioned that Gail Anderson (your foreword writer) suggested adding examples to the introductory chapters, and I agree wholeheartedly. The parts where you give examples in the early pages, like the hypothetical example about the theme of mistakes was powerful and a pathway into more tangible impacts of the work. I see a few different ways to do this. You could sprinkle examples throughout the introductory materials (which I'm using to mean what's now the Introduction and Chapter 1 and whatever else you add to this part of the book). Alternatively, you could dedicate a section to examples and put it close to the beginning as a way to create quick buy-in for unfamiliar readers. Also, you could do both!

-The descriptions of what each chapter brings are lovely and specific and powerful. Attention isn't mentioned in this list, so there's no lovely, specific, powerful words about what Elizabeth brings to

that chapter the way there is for other authors and chapters. Even with Attention being a bit separated out as the foundational chapter, it felt noticeable that Elizabeth was left out of this section. I wanted to know about her contribution the way I was learning about Stacy's and Lisa's and others'.

These are specific thoughts and suggestions, which may or may not feel exactly right for you, and what you choose to do will also depend on your publisher's timeline. The bigger picture is about adding significant context and scaffolding and inroads to your introductory section, perhaps re-ordering some of your opening sections and what goes in which chapter.

I want to be clear what you do have here is excellent. It can be changed, developed, expanded, given more preamble, supported by case studies, and so on, but it also should all be kept.