



The Equilibrist

Erasmus Cromwell-Smith II

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Erasmus Cromwell-Smith II's The Equilibrist is a touching collection that weaves poems into a man's life story for a tangible example of the healing power of poetry.

Erasmus Cromwell-Smith II's *The Equilibrist* is a uniquely formatted collection of whimsical poetry embedded in a touching reconstituted biographical account of the author's father and his life as a professor and poet.

This inventive work begins with Erasmus Senior, who finds out he has a brain tumor—something that is certain to drastically change his life and his career. He decides to begin teaching his class lessons on love and heartbreak, loss and hardship, happiness and success, with his poetry worked into each lesson.

The book becomes an exercise on seeking balance through poetry, which is used as a guide throughout class discussions. Each chapter captures a new class period, introducing a new topic; relationships, love, happiness, heartbreak, and family are included. Contained within those chapters are poems pertaining to the subject of the day, adding depth and complexity to each lesson and teaching students not only about life but about art as well. The lessons prove to be a creative way to showcase Erasmus Senior's poetry; his story complements the poetry and provides context and structure.

Poems follow no set structural pattern; they are free-form verses and artistically expressive. Each poem has a distinct rhythm. The story line and its themes hold the poems together, rather than connecting styles or cadences.

Leaning more toward delivering lessons than with attempting flair, the poems are tightly grammatical and practical, focused on solving life problems like heartbreak, complex relationships, and important decision making, and answering questions about the meaning of life and achieving happiness:

*What a bewildering feat,
A pair of souls
Smitten for one another.
The whisperings and whistlings
of a pair of infatuated hearts,
in a world of their own.*

Similarly, a lesson on resilience is bolstered with the poem "The Gift of Life":

*When you hear the whispers of sorrow,
Counter them with dreams of tomorrow,
When you feel the trappings of failure,
Fight them with the thrills and excitement of being alive ...*

Poems are effortless and concise, with themes that lend themselves to discussion and meditation. Although they are

structurally basic, the poems make up for their lack of innovation with the poignancy of their subject matter. The use of straightforward metaphors (like the equilibrist, a tightrope walker, and a juggler) is ample. The theme of equilibrium is continually revisited, corresponding to Erasmus Senior's quest to achieve balance in his life. Foreshadowing hints to a twist at the end of Erasmus Senior's story, though related questions go unanswered.

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KATIE ASHER (March 21, 2018)

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