



Reflect and discuss

The guest house



This poem by 13th Century Sufi poet and professor Jalaluddin Rumi empowers us to think about and react to stress in an imaginative way.

The guest house

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Translated by Coleman Barks

Activity steps

1. Ask participants what, if any, poems they like or have explored in the past.
2. Read **The guest house** aloud, or ask a participant to read it aloud.
3. Give each participant a **The guest house handout** and walk through the contents.
4. Arrange participants into small groups or pairs. Ask them to talk about and write answers to the 'reflect and discuss' questions.
5. Debrief with the group.
6. Invite participants to choose an art activity or try the 'gratitude challenge.'



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1. Consider these two passages and answer the question below:

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

- How would you summarize the poet's suggested way of dealing with emotions?
- To what degree do you agree with the poet's message? Why?

The poet uses the analogy of a guest house to describe the human condition. What are some other ways to describe it?

- What other analogies could we use?

The poet invites us to "be grateful" for our experiences.

- What does it mean to be grateful?
- How easy or difficult is it for you to feel grateful for your emotions? Why?

Get creative!

Which image(s) in *The guest house* resonates with you most? Draw or paint what you see in your mind. Or you could use art to represent your own analogy of human emotions.

Gratitude challenge!

Gratitude has health benefits. Starting the day by thinking about or writing down the good things in life can boost our mood. Write down a few things you're grateful for every morning for a week or two. Then reflect on its effects. Share your findings.