

The Death Class: A True Story About Life

Erika Hayasaki



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The Death Class: A True Story About Life Erika Hayasaki In this gripping true story, an extraordinary professor who teaches a popular course on death plunges deep into the off-campus hours of her most vulnerable students and shows them how to live.

Why does a college course on death have a three-year waiting list?

When nurse Norma Bowe decided to teach a course on death at a college in New Jersey, she never expected it to be popular. But year after year students crowd into her classroom, and the reason is clear: Norma's "death class" is really about how to make the most of what poet Mary Oliver famously called our "one wild and precious life."

Under the guise of discussions about last wills and last breaths and visits to cemeteries and crematoriums, Norma teaches her students to find grace in one another. By following her over four years, award-winning journalist Erika Hayasaki shows how Norma steers four extraordinary students from their tormented families and neighborhoods toward happiness: she rescues one young woman from her suicidal mother, helps a young man manage his schizophrenic brother, and inspires another to leave his gang life behind. Through this unorthodox class on death, Norma helps kids who are barely hanging on to understand not only the value of their own lives, but also the secret of fulfillment: to throw yourself into helping others. Hayasaki's expert reporting and literary prose bring Norma's wisdom out of the classroom, transforming it into an inspiring lesson for all. In the end, Norma's very own life—and how she lives it—is the lecture that sticks.

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