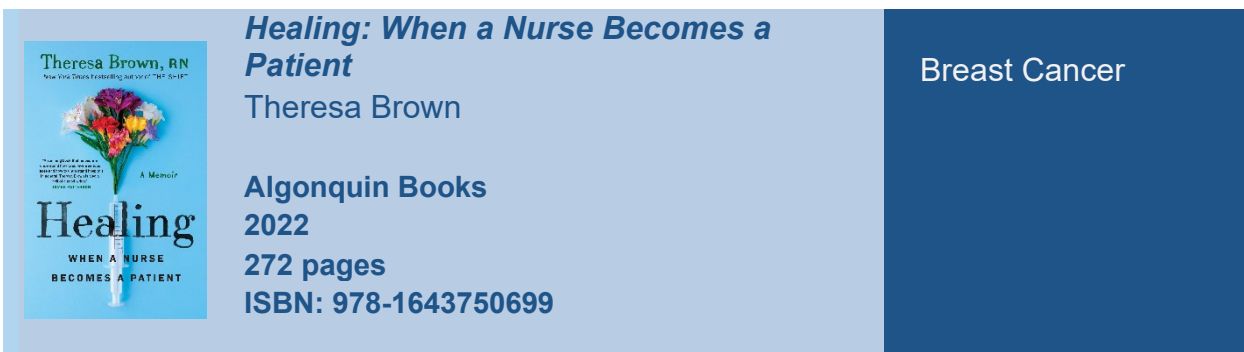


## Discussion Guide



### Summary

**From the mammogram that would change her life through her diagnosis, treatment, and recovery, *New York Times* bestselling author Theresa Brown, RN, tells a poignant and powerful story about having breast cancer in the United States.**

Despite her training and years of experience as an oncology and hospice nurse, Brown finds it difficult to navigate the medical maze from the other side of the bed. She relays the unforgettable details of her daily life—the needles, the chemo drugs, the rubber gloves, the bureaucratic frustrations—but this time from her new perch as a patient, looking back at some of her own cases and considering what she didn't know then about the warping effects of fear and the healing virtues of compassion. “People failed me when I was a patient and I failed patients when working as a nurse. I see that now,” she writes.

*Healing* is a must-read for all of us, especially the four million women living with breast cancer today, who have tried to find healing through our health-care system.

### Questions

1. When Theresa becomes a patient she forgets much of what she had learned about breast cancer as a nurse. Have you ever had a similar experience—a time when you really needed your professional expertise to help with a personal issue, but your knowledge and experience were suddenly unavailable to you?
2. Though Theresa is worried she will be labeled a “difficult patient,” there are several moments in which she gets angry enough to assert herself. Have you ever been conflicted about asserting yourself with health care providers? Did you worry it would affect your care in a negative way?
3. An oft-quoted statistic about health care in the U.S. is that we spend more money than any other industrialized country yet, for many, quality care is not as satisfactory. Do you agree with Theresa that greed is one of the problems in American health care? What adjustments would you suggest for our healthcare system?

4. *Healing* makes the argument that compassionate care leads to better outcomes. Theresa uses the term “supererogatory.” How does or doesn’t it apply in health care and why do patients define compassionate care as going “above and beyond?” Above and beyond what, exactly?
5. Throughout *Healing*, Brown highlights health disparities and the reality that people of color often receive lower quality care than white patients do. Talk about racism in the health care system, using examples from the book and your own experiences.
6. Consider some of the repeat images in *Healing*: rabbit holes, a seesaw, turtles, spatchcock, the color pink. How do you think these images work to illuminate the themes in the book?
7. The end of “Bedside Manner” (Chapter 13) includes Theresa’s wish for a more “warm and fuzzy” surgeon, even as she acknowledges that her surgeon did a very good job. What conflicts arise when technically skilled physicians don’t have good interpersonal skills.
8. “RadOnc” (Chapter 19) highlights what the Radiation Oncology Department did to make patients feel like human beings. Theresa describes their work as, “This was not rocket science.” Talk about why the ordinary kindnesses in RadOnc made such a difference.
9. *Healing*’s many short chapters alternate between Theresa’s experiences as a cancer patient and as a nurse. What do you think that choice—both the brevity and the interweaving of these two parts of her life—accomplished?
10. How did this book alter your understanding of a cancer patient? How did this book alter your understanding of nursing?