

Wonder as you write, poet advises students

November 08, 2011 12:15 PM Mary Ann Travis
mtravis@tulane.edu

"It's accuracy that I love," poet Marie Howe told the 14 students in English adjunct professor Melissa Dickey's creative writing class on Monday (Nov. 7). Howe said she "obsessively" writes a poem 80 or more times, throwing out most attempts before she is satisfied.



Students in a creative writing class soak up the advice of visiting writer Marie Howe, the Florie Gale Arons Poet, sponsored by the Newcomb College Institute. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

"It's not thinking about word choice, it's wanting you to understand," she said. [Howe](#) has published three volumes of poetry, including *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time* (2008), *The Good Thief* (1988) and *What the Living Do* (1998).

"Writing one poem is a miracle," said Howe.

When asked why she writes poetry and not fiction, Howe replied, "I don't know how to make things up."

The most important way to learn the art of poetry is to read, Howe said.

To a student who said that her own poetry seems insignificant, Howe emphatically said, “No. Don't feel that way. Here's the good news, I don't think we have to know anything to write a poem. We have to wonder about things and write our way into them, wondering as we go.”

She encouraged the students to write their way into discovery and to open up their writing to what they don't know. “Art is about not knowing,” Howe said.

She doesn't believe in laborsaving devices, suggesting that the students try handwriting their poetry for two weeks. “Let yourself have an experience that changes your writing,” she said. “You have to leave the world in order to create a world.”

In the end, Howe said, “The world needs you. We need to hear your voices. We need to hear your writing. Please write yourself into not knowing what you're doing and see what happens.”

Howe was on the Tulane campus as the [Florie Gale Arons Poet](#), sponsored by the Newcomb College Institute.