

Writing lessons from Aimee Bender

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The next time your creative juices refuse to flow, just block your Facebook page or, better yet, block the Internet altogether. Fiction writer Aimee Bender finds that this is the best way to cure writer's block; the tip is one of many that she imparted to Tulane students in assistant professor Zachary Lazar's Advanced Creative Writing Workshop during her campus residency.



Fiction writer Aimee Bender, left, greets members of the Tulane community at a book signing after a reading event on the uptown campus Jan. 28. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

Bender got the idea from an essay, "On Boredom," by Adam Phillips. "Inspiration is sometimes talked about as a magical genie that gives you ideas, but I've found it's tolerating the boredom," Bender said. "Those are the moments when you have a creative surge."

Stacy Krost, a senior English and Asian Studies double major, enjoyed hearing Bender's perspective about the creative process. "All writers like to hear about how other writers get over their blocks."

The 28th [Zale-Kimmerling Writer-in-Residence](#) has four books and two Pushcart prizes under her belt, but the award-winner took years to even self-identify as a writer.

“I was scared to take [writing] seriously,” Bender said.

Her concise style lends itself well to short stories, though she has taken on the challenge of a novel to many accolades. She finds herself inspired by fairy tales, and her stories often contain elements of magical realism. Her latest work, the 2010 novel *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*, is about a girl who can taste the emotions of whoever prepares her food.

But even those students who prefer to write in a realistic style are accomplishing something magical, according to Bender.

“It's a very magical thing when you think about what we're trying to do is to capture something alive,” Bender said. “You open those classics and they still feel alive, and when you do it in your own work, you can feel it too.”

The Zale-Kimmerling program is coordinated by the [Newcomb College Institute](#) at Tulane.

Johanna Gretschel received a bachelor's degree with an English major from Tulane in 2012, and she is in the master's degree program.