

Sharon Olds is placed in the moment

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Sharon Olds listened patiently and intently to the students in professor Peter Cooley's advanced poetry workshop as they posed questions about the process of and inspiration for writing poetry. Olds, this year's visiting [Arons Poet](#) at Tulane University, was generous with her responses, but perhaps even more generous with the riveted attention she bestowed on each student.



Poet Sharon Olds engages in a wide-ranging conversation with students in professor Peter Cooley's advanced poetry workshop on Monday (Oct. 1). (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

"I'm interested in the present moment," Olds said in an interview after the workshop. The succinct explanation goes a long way to distilling Olds' virtue not only as a teacher and mentor, but as an artist.

Winner of several prestigious awards, including the National Book Critics Circle Award, Olds has published 12 volumes of poetry and is known for her candid, personal and emotionally searing work. She is on the faculty of New York University.

In responding to a wide range of questions from the students, Olds discussed her abusive upbringing, her love for languages and "weird words," the tactile pleasure of using a ballpoint pen and notepad, and the concept of "loyalty" as it relates to the

people she writes about.

The notion of being in the “present in the moment” cropped up throughout the workshop.

When asked what she does when she lacks inspiration to write, Olds replied, “I don't write.”

In relating how her poems often begin as descriptions of the sensed world, she offered, “If I see a bird and I think it's a mockingbird but am not sure ? why do I think so?”

Olds says she likes to have an “empty mind,” but “once I start thinking, then I'm writing.”

In a generous admission, Olds acknowledged that she is sometimes inspired by her students work.

“When I see my students doing something I've never tried, I'm likely to find myself trying that. I'm happy that I remain ? what's the opposite of impervious? ? that I remain 'pervious' to influence.”