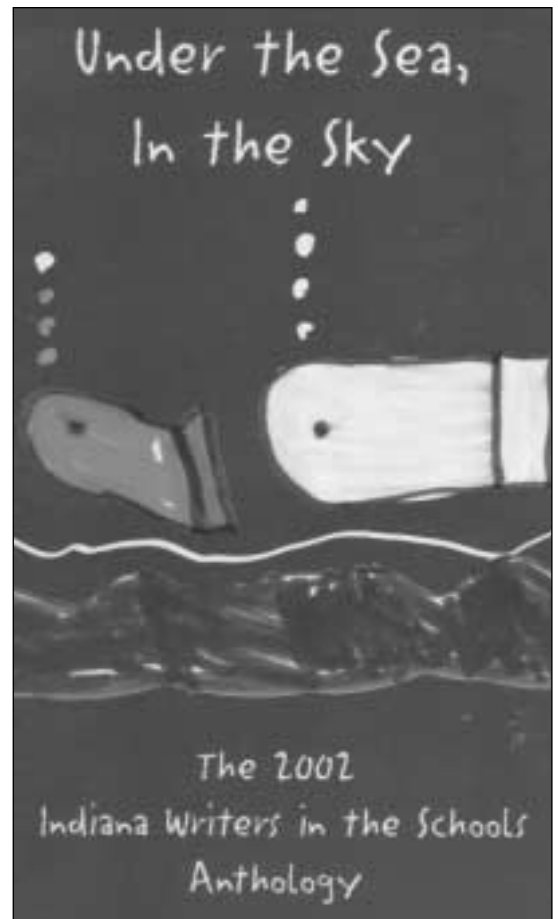


## Tasty Bells and Fragrant Polish



Above: UE student Aurion Johnson (center) assists Montessori Academy students with their writing. Right: Cover of a compilation of elementary students' writing.



"I want you to write a concrete poem," said senior theatre major Aurion Johnson to a class of kindergarten through second graders at Montessori Academy in Evansville. "Do you know what 'concrete' means?" he asked the group.

When met with silence for a few seconds he explained, "Something that is concrete is anything you can put chocolate sauce on or pour milk over." UE alumna Elisabeth Meyer, who graduated in 2003 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in creative writing, elaborated explaining that "my idea of beautiful may be different than yours, so it is important for you to describe what you mean by beautiful."

Johnson and Meyer continued by telling the students that they can explain what they are thinking by using at least three of the five senses and a sixth sense, imagination. The students settled down to work, sniffing, tasting, feeling, rattling and generally observing the items they selected to write about. One second grade student who wrote about nail polish, polished a few of her nails before writing. "The color is maroon," she wrote. "It smells good." Another girl looked at a pillow, thought for a while, then wrote, "If I were a pillow, I would feel soft."

Hollie Trevathan, who completed a Bachelor of Arts in writing last summer at UE, was in the corner with a boy who was trying to describe a bell in poetic terms. Suddenly, he stuck his tongue out and licked it, then grimaced. Unfazed, Trevathan asked him, "What type of metal have you tasted before? If you have tasted a penny and it was sour, what does this taste like? Compare this taste to that taste."

This work is part of a program called Writers in the Schools (WITS). According to Rob Griffith, assistant professor of English and coordinator of the program, WITS introduces principles of creative writing into Indiana public schools and institutions. WITS fellows travel the area in teams of two, serving students in grades K-12. Students volunteer for training in the WITS program. When they satisfy the training regimen, they are designated teaching fellows.

Students in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program in creative writing and the Bachelor of Arts programs for English litera-

ture and for secondary education volunteer for WITS. The training begins with a series of meetings on campus in which experienced fellows present methods of teaching poetry and fiction writing in Indiana schools. The emphasis is on continual innovation and on encouraging fellows to design their own methods for teaching students to use concrete, sensory-based language to describe their experiences and feelings. Following these introductory sessions, new volunteers are paired with experienced fellows who serve as mentors and work with the new fellows during their first year in the program. WITS also holds follow-up training sessions at which fellows share ideas that have worked in the classroom and work in small groups to brainstorm new ideas.

According to Trevathan, UE students really like participating in WITS not only for what they are doing for the younger students, "although it's great fun," but also because "it really helps us to define our own poetry." ■

*"...although it's great fun, it really helps us to define our own poetry."*

Hollie Trevathan