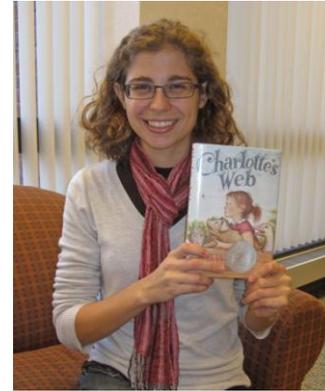


Summer Mentoring and Reading Together:

S.M.A.R.T.!

by TESOL intern Lauren Mobley



Last summer I spent four weeks at the library... and I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of my experience!

Through the UW-L Office of Multicultural Student Services (OMSS), I had the opportunity to work with the S.M.A.R.T program. S.M.A.R.T. is the acronym for Summer Mentoring and Reading Together. The program, which ran from the end of June to the beginning of July, works with students who need extra help with their reading skills. I worked with thirteen other tutors from UW-L. We met with elementary and middle school students at La Crosse's Main Library and at the public library in Norwalk, about an hour east of La Crosse.

I had the privilege to work with four students, two at each S.M.A.R.T site. In Norwalk, my two boys were going into fifth grade; and in La Crosse I worked with two girls, one going into sixth and the other into seventh. Our agenda was straightforward. The program started with lunch, then, as a large group, we did an ice breaker planned by pairs of tutors. Afterwards, tutors and their students worked together on improving reading skills. We followed that with another group activity and enjoyed a snack to end the day. At the end of the program, we took the participants on a celebratory trip. The Norwalk students went to Circus World and Devil's Lake in Baraboo. La Crosse students traveled to the Minnesota Zoo.

I spent most of my time outside of the program planning activities for my students. For example, one of the boys I worked with read *Charlotte's Web*. He told me that he enjoys drawing, so I planned art activities to help him understand and relate to the book's characters. He made acrostic poems with words that described the characters and drew pictures based on their descriptions. The student enjoyed the book and learned a lot from the experience.

As an education major, I try to find opportunities related to my future career. The S.M.A.R.T program provided me with interesting insight into the world of education. We picked up the students at their homes. That was probably the most humbling part of the whole experience. The S.M.A.R.T students came from different backgrounds and most came from lower income areas. Despite having so little, or maybe because of that, they valued learning. The students looked forward to the program all year. Many returned, eager to see their tutors from the previous year. We all know how important reading is to education, and helping these children with their reading skills gives them a chance for a brighter future.

Working with the S.M.A.R.T program last summer was an amazing experience. If you are interested in applying for next year, check the [OMSS website](#) or call (608) 785-8225 for more information.