

THE SWEET STUFF IN THE MIDDLE

## COLLEGE CREDITS TO CRAYOLA CRAYONS

Day in the life of a tutor shows  
ups and downs of working  
in elementary education

By **Tori Woods**  
STAFF WRITER

**E**very Tuesday at 7 a.m., Aila Bloomfield hits her alarm and rolls out of bed. The freshman fashion design major grabs a cup of yogurt in her dorm room to avoid the long lines already forming at dining halls. She throws on a pair of blue jeans, aqua sneakers and her navy blue and orange Syracuse University Literacy Corps T-shirt.

She arrives at the van stop outside of Lyman Hall at 8:15 a.m., although the van isn't scheduled to arrive until 8:30 a.m. She shivers a bit in her sweatshirt on a particularly chilly, overcast morning, as we wait.

Bloomfield has invited me to accompany her on this particular Tuesday. She is happy to show me exactly what she does as an elementary school tutor — to show me what exactly a day in her life is like.

We wait with another tutor until the blue van pulls up. We climb in, and the student driver starts the journey to a nearby magnet school to drop off the other tutor. Then it's on to a local elementary school, and we hop out of the van amidst the streaming children rushing into the school around us. The two of us stand out; we are a good foot taller than the crowd surrounding us.

Unfazed, Bloomfield leads the way into the guidance office for the day's assignment. She's only been tutoring for three weeks, but she already knows her way around the system. The guidance counselors and office personnel greet her by name, and tell her that she'll be starting off with a kindergarten class this week. She leaves her sweatshirt in the office, and we head off immediately toward the correct classroom.

We walk into a room of smells that are forgotten to most college students: chalkboard, paste and crayons. The colors are primary and abundant. The writing on the boards and posters is classic schoolteacher neat.

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**AILA BLOOMFIELD** a freshman fashion design major, works for Syracuse University Literacy Corps.

BRADFORD HUNTER LEONARD | PHOTO EDITOR

# 'You'd be amazed at what these kids get through'

## LIT CORPS

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The children rush up to her and holler her name. "Aila!" "Hi Aila!" "Aila, I can't tie my shoes!" "Aila, it's Tuesday!"

The teacher sets us to cutting out and tracing patterns for the kids' art project. Sitting atop pint-sized, tiny plastic chairs, Aila cuts up pieces of what will be a

decretive mouse, and I start tracing witches. It's clear my role as an objective observer has been compromised. I came with the expectation of watching a day in Bloomfield's life. It has evolved into my sharing and experiencing a day in her life.

The children go through their morning routine: Today is Tuesday; it is cloudy. They sing this week's selection of holiday-themed songs: five

little pumpkins in a pumpkin patch. Bloomfield remembers the song from her own kindergarten class and smiles.

The "person of the week," a tiny blond girl with pigtails and a missing tooth, waves a magic wand to illustrate the points of the classroom.

Each task the children are involved in lasts no more than three minutes. If it was any longer the kids would begin rustling, chattering and poking each other. Even the affable teacher must intersperse her morning routine with admonitions to sit down, stay on your space, and don't poke/talk to/giggle at your neighbor.

The whole time, various children are coming and going. One little girl forgot to come to class after breakfast in the cafeteria, one little boy's older brother had mouth surgery and his mother brought him in late.

Children are taken out for different aptitude and health testing, and then the teacher is required to step out of the classroom for a few moments for a meeting.

"They're going to tables. Aila, help with table three. Tori, table five. When they're done, they'll do their skill papers," the teacher said. She departs, no questions asked.

Some children count frogs, and Bloomfield's group starts with their skill papers. Table five is

meant to cut out and paste five objects that were non-living.

The patter begins immediately from the students. "Is a chair living?" they ask me. "Is God alive?" "Is water alive?" "Is a car alive?" "You're shorter than my mommy." "My mommy

is smarter than you are." "I said, is a car alive?" "Does it breathe? Does it eat food or drink water?" I attempt to boil down the meaning of respiration.

"A car drinks oil. Duh," the children say, almost in unison.

"Well, they don't really drink oil; it's more — well, I guess, well the engine needs oil," I say, marveling at the children's ability to outdebate me.

"OK, well the engine is alive but the car isn't. OK," they say. The children temporarily seem satisfied. Temporarily.

Across the room, Bloomfield seems to be faring better. In a testament to her training and previous experience as a tutor, the questions don't faze her, the children with their sticky fingers do not alarm her.

The children pour tablespoonfuls of Elmer's glue onto their construction paper to affix tiny, ragged cutout pictures of pizza, roller blades and a mug. One child pours the glue directly on the floor with a giggle, while another child hugs my arm as I ponder, really, what does one do in a situation such as this?

A small boy, tinier than most of his classmates, pokes me. He looks up with huge brown eyes and says, "My mommy's boyfriend took me to school today. I don't like him. He hits her and the cops come and there's lots of noise. My daddy doesn't like him, and my daddy has a gun and he says he's gonna kill my mommy."

Stunned, I realize it's time to call in for back up. I tell Bloomfield. Her eyes get wide and then sad.

"Yeah, you'd be amazed at what these kids go through," she said.

I'm amazed at what the children will tell a stranger.

Bloomfield and I tell the teacher of our disturbing discovery when she returns, and she sighs with resignation. She asks me to write down the incident and sign it. She intimates that she had suspected problems previously with the child's family. With the children rushing about at waist height all around the classroom, she looks around with just a hint of weariness. It is time for Bloomfield's next assignment.

She heads upstairs to assist with the second-graders, and we help two students who were having difficulties composing poems they are writing. Bloomfield is patient, and knows when to prompt the student, how to help them sound

## LITERACY CORPS INFO

Working for Literacy Corps is an exciting job opportunity that deserves a second glance. The program is both educational and exemplary of how various on-campus organization help in building life skills.

- Literacy Corp is an ideal program for those students who have an awkward schedule, with weird breaks and little time to get a job. All that is required is a three-hour block of time and you can work any day of the week during normal school hours (approximately 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.) and in the after school programs (approximately 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.).

- Literacy Corps can be an added bonus to any resume. The program greatly improves every participant's communication, facilitation and small group configuration skills.

- Little kids are honest and funny. They can be a great escape from a stressful day and their open love and admiration is a guaranteed confidence boost.

- Most teachers need the help, so you will have an effect on what is happening in the classroom. Participants have the ability to change what they disliked in elementary school from annulling the old name on the chalk board to suggesting extended recess.

- The program is available through SU work-study. Participants can use the work-study element, as means to help with their financial aid.

COMPILED BY KAYLEIGH MINICOZZI | STAFF WRITER

out words, how to praise and cajole. I am lost, and wonder how something that comes so easily to me could be so hard to impart to a student. But it is.

The whirlwind morning ends as the lunch bell rings, and Bloomfield walks with me to the van. She seems a little more tired, but satisfied.

"It's not usually this crazy," she says. "It can be hard, especially when you hear things like you did. But what can you do? You keep going back, because you hope that you make a difference."

We climb into the van. Bloomfield notices that after all, the sun had finally come out that morning.