

# 2022/2023



## WRITERS IN THE SCHOOLS IMPACT REPORT



# SEATTLE ARTS & LECTURES CULTIVATES TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES THROUGH STORY AND LANGUAGE WITH READERS AND WRITERS OF ALL GENERATIONS.

Seattle Arts & Lectures (SAL) believes that literacy and a love for writing is a life-long process that starts in our public schools and connects directly to our public stages.

Through our Writers in the Schools (WITS) and Youth Poetry Fellowship programs, SAL connects working professional writers with students and teachers to elevate and amplify the voices of students throughout the Puget Sound region.



# EVALUATION DESCRIPTION

Since 2017, SAL has partnered with MEMconsultants, a long-established Seattle-based evaluations firm with expertise in youth development and arts programs, to hone and implement our annual WITS program evaluation process.

Based on our learnings each year, with MEM's guidance we continue to refine our evaluation process to better assess WITS' impact and inform future program decisions.





# EVALUATION DATA SOURCES

- **Program Statistics**
- **Student, Teacher & WITS Writer Surveys**
- **WITS Writer Observations**

# GUIDING QUESTIONS

- **Participation Rates:** Who participates in WITS?
- **Participant Experience:** What do students, teachers, schools, and WITS Writers experience during a WITS residency?
- **Program Quality:** Do WITS Writers deliver a high-quality experience for students?
- **Program Outcomes:**
  - Do students engage in WITS activities, build skills, and increase confidence in their writing?
  - Do students practice creativity and self-expression through their writing?
  - Do students share writing with peers and through the process build connections and learn more about their classmates?
  - Do teachers change their teaching practice with new lessons, develop fresh techniques, and/or learn new ways of encouraging students in their writing?







# PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

**22 WITS Writers-in-Residence** worked with...

**5,162 students** in...

**234 classrooms** in collaboration with...

**141 unique teachers** at...

**31 K-12 public schools** in 6 school districts and in...

**2 Seattle Children's Hospital** departments.

WITS Writers delivered **2,380 hours of writing instruction...**

A total of **over 45,059 contact hours with students...**

Or an average of **8.7 hours of instruction per student.**

# CHANGES

## NEW STAFF

In 2022-23, SAL's Youth Programs team faced major staff transitions, with two of the three positions changing.



In August 2022, just before the start of the school year, we welcomed Jennifer Lobsenz as Youth Programs Director to oversee and direct all aspects of WITS as well as our Youth Poetry Fellowship program. Jennifer has spent the last decade in the local community working at the intersection of the arts and social justice.

In January 2023, mid-way through the school year, Garfield Hillson came on board as WITS Program Manager. Garfield believes in the role of arts and education in trauma-informed social justice healing, and has worked in art administration, artist support, and youth development and instruction for eight years.



# AND CHALLENGES

## HIGH COST OF LIVING

With Seattle's cost of living continuing to rise, WITS Writers are struggling to be able to live and work in the city, so they can bring their best to the classroom. In 2022-23, SAL increased the hourly pay for WITS Writers by 15% (\$90-\$115, based on years with the program) to help provide a more liveable and sustaining wage. We continued to build our corps of talented WITS Writers, as many moved away or changed professions.

## LINGERING EFFECTS OF PANDEMIC

We are still dealing with the impacts of the pandemic in the classroom. Teachers are overwhelmed and students are struggling to learn while managing their mental health and well-being. WITS Writers continued to work with teachers to create residencies focused on joy, belonging, and community building in the classroom.







# PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

## Teacher Satisfaction with WITS

**100% of teachers** strongly agree or agree that they enjoyed working with their WITS Writer and would like to participate in WITS again.

**87%** strongly agree or agree that WITS met or exceeded their expectations.

*"In school and classroom, we encourage students to be brave and try and **WITS did a great job bringing the best in our students.** I was absolutely thrilled with the results."*

**"WITS supported a creative and collaborative student climate.** I enjoyed how much the students got to share their work and practice listening and supporting peers."

**"I loved how [our WITS Writer] was able to connect with each of my students in different ways than I do."**



## Student Satisfaction with WITS

**91% of older students** liked working with their WITS Writer;  
**87% of younger students** liked their WITS writing time.

**91% of students** reported that their WITS Writer listened to them; **86% of students** reported that their WITS Writer told them what they liked about their writing.

*"My favorite part about WITS was drawing/writing. **I like everything and showing the work to my parents!**"* – younger WITS Student

*"I loved how I could write about anything I wanted to; **the freedom made me feel strong.** Writing the poem, **I feel as if it unlocked a part of my soul.**"* – older WITS Student

*"I've always liked writing and I've kind of drifted from writing, but [**our WITS Writer**] **made me enjoy writing again.**"* – older WITS Student

*"**[WITS]** is one of the best parts of my week!"* – younger WITS Student



# Closing Opportunity Gaps

**40% of total WITS students** served historically have had the **least access to arts education and enrichment** in the classroom.

- **40% of total WITS students were low-income**, based on school Free and Reduced Lunch rates. (As a comparison, FRL rate in Seattle Public Schools is 35%.)
- **248 youth served were patients in extended hospital stays** at Seattle Children's.
- **Over 50% of WITS students were BIPOC youth.**

**60% of partnering K-12 public schools** were under-resourced with **high populations of underserved students**: 50%-85% of students qualified for FRL; 50%-95% of students were youth of color.

**All schools received subsidized residency rates at least 70% of the actual cost** to bring a WITS Writer into the classroom. Under-resourced high needs schools received significantly greater reduced residency rates up to 95% of actual cost.



# Writer Satisfaction with WITS

**100%** of WITS Writers reported an extremely or mostly satisfying overall experience with WITS.

**90%** of WITS Writers reported extremely or mostly satisfying relationships with the WITS cohort.

**100%** of WITS Writers expressed high levels of satisfaction with their relationships with both classroom teachers and students.

**87%** of WITS Writers were extremely or mostly satisfied with the support they received from SAL staff.

**87%** of WITS Writers were extremely or mostly satisfied with their compensation from SAL.

**"I really feel staff paying attention to WITS Writers and honoring our needs and feedback. Thank you!"**

**"I feel like I'm paid very generously and I'm grateful to have WITS as my anchor gig. I'm also intensely aware of how precarious it is to rely on contract work!"**

**"So grateful for this team! Thank you for everything and creating an opportunity for such meaningful labor, connection, and exchange."**





# PROGRAM IMPACT

## SENSE OF BELONGING

100%

of teachers reported a high level of student engagement during their WITS partnership.

*"[My favorite part was] **learning together as a group and forming new communities through poetry and exploration.**" – older WITS Student*

97%

of teachers reported that WITS Writers brought new and diverse mentor texts into the classroom.

*"My favorite part was the end where we did a massive show and tell and how it **connected the class.**" – younger WITS Student*

82%

of students felt acknowledged and accepted in their WITS class.

*"[My favorite part was] **not being judged** for what I wrote." – older WITS Student*

67%

of younger students and 52% of older students felt more connected to their classmates.

*"WITS **pushed our students to get to know each other, listen closely to their classmates,** and helped students **share more of themselves** in the classroom." – Classroom Teacher*

# PROGRAM IMPACT



*"I enjoyed writing a variety of poem types. **It was relaxing, and a nice break from normal LA class.** I also enjoyed reading other students' poems at the end of the program." – older WITS Student*

*"[My favorite part was] **making poems and expressing myself.**" – younger WITS Student*

*"I enjoyed **having time to write poetry** and just **not having to worry about school pressure.**" – older WITS Student*

*"I love that **students could be creative and vulnerable**, and then learn about one another" – Classroom Teacher*

## CREATIVE HABITS

**93% of teachers** reported that most or many students practiced creativity through writing.

**75% of older students** reported that they shared their writing with classmates; **69% reported** that they shared their thoughts and feelings through writing.

**Two-thirds of younger students** reported sharing their writing with classmates.





# PROGRAM IMPACT

"[Our WITS Writer] **empowered students that their stories are important, and encouraged them each to share their writing, and increase their confidence as writers** with something important to share."  
- Classroom Teacher

**"I did a poem about music, and I am VERY proud of it. Every time I read it, it makes me a little happier."** - older WITS Student

"[My favorite part about WITS is] getting to share my work and the nice **feeling of confidence when I find a good idea.**" - younger WITS Student

## WRITING SKILLS AND MINDSETS

**81%** of teachers reported that most or many students developed a greater enjoyment of writing.

**94%** of teachers reported that most or many students improved as writers.

**84%** of younger students and **79%** of older students are proud of the work they put into their writing.

**88%** of younger students believe they will keep getting better at writing; **70%** of older students will continue to use the new writing skills they learned from WITS in the future.

**Over two-thirds** of older students feel more confident about their writing because of WITS.



# PROGRAM IMPACT

"Our WITS experience provided students with **hands-on opportunities to try a range of styles of writing poetry....** The result of their work was impressive!"

"[Our WITS Writer] really fit in well with the timing of our writing curriculum. It was **wonderful to step aside and observe the students go through the writing process with a different instructor.**"

## TEACHER SKILL DEVELOPMENT

**90% of teachers** stated that they have or will apply things they learned from the WITS Writer to their teaching practice.

**94% of teachers** strongly agree or agree that WITS supported them to meet their classroom goals.





# Blessing Mom and Dad and Brother

By Noi Suzuki

3rd Grade, BF Day Elementary School

**My family is talking:  
beautiful sound.  
I am talking too.  
Bird is talking.  
Everyone talking,  
beautiful sound.  
I hear the family  
is playing sounds.  
That sound is  
beautiful too.  
I like the beautiful sound.**





# YEE

**J'zaeli Padillo**

*Dearborn Park International  
Elementary School, 4th Grade*

**As soon as you say the word  
yee  
a burst of laughter spills  
out of quietness.  
Quietness is the key  
to unlock impatience  
Impatience goes to the level of  
chaos  
Chaos is the right word for yee  
The word yee tastes like fresh  
mint  
Fresh mint is like a breeze of  
cold air.  
The breeze of fresh air  
is like a cold word for yee.**



# WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT



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WITS elevates the expressions of all students as they discover and develop their authentic writing and performance voices. Through WITS, students become authors of their own lives.



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