WITS Helps Schools Reach Their Goals of Teaching Writing Across the Disciplines

WITS programming reinforces the real world importance of reading and writing in all professions, and is designed to meet state and national standards for the arts and language arts. Each residency is tailored to support, deepen, and extend existing curriculum and to contribute to student achievement in writing.

Inspiring the next generation of readers and writers

Writers in the Schools (WITS) inspires public high school students to write, revise, edit, publish, and perform their own creative writing. During semester-long residencies, poets, playwrights, graphic novelists, and fiction and non-fiction writers model and share their disciplined writing practices with students.

A snapshot

- **11** Portland High Schools served
- **44** Classes worked with a writer
- **34** Teachers learned new strategies to teach writing
- **22** Local Writers shared their expertise with youth
- **3,466** students served
- **84** were mentored by community members at college essay writing events at Franklin, Madison, and Roosevelt High Schools
- **30** competed in Verselandia! poetry slam
- **1,124** participated in semester-long residencies
- **1,732** attended an author event at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, including the Everybody Reads lecture with Sherman Alexie
- **7** were mentored individually by writers
- **6** students performed in The MothSHOP at Franklin High School
- **202** students attended The MothSHOP event at Franklin High School
- **279** participated in author visits to schools
- **3,466** students attended an author event at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, including the Everybody Reads lecture with Sherman Alexie
WITS Invests in Our Schools

WITS tailors its services to meet the needs of each school.

WITS provides professional development for teachers. 27 of the 34 teachers served by WITS this year had already hosted a writer in the past, demonstrating their confidence in and enthusiasm for the WITS program.

WITS hired 22 writers: 14 returning writers to maintain program stability and 8 new writers to diversify our roster in terms of ethnicity, genre, and aesthetic.

1124 students participated in semester-long residencies; WITS helped schools meet their goals of teaching writing across the disciplines by providing residencies in Government and Civics, Art History, AP Spanish, Communications and Radio, and English Language Development, as well as in many Language Arts classes.

WITS served 7 new-to-WITS teachers, demonstrating our commitment to reach new teachers each year.

WITS served 1100 students.

WITS Brings the Literary World to Schools

WITS extends literary experiences beyond the classroom.

WITS provided student tickets and transportation to all Portland Arts & Lectures and special events featuring Mark Bittman, Jeffrey Toobin, Barbara Kingsolver, Jonathan Franzen, Stephen Greenblatt, and Nikky Finney.


WITS partnered with Multnomah County Library and the Library Foundation to host Sherman Alexie, author of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and *Ten Little Indians*, at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, providing tickets and transportation to over 1100 students and teachers from Portland area high schools. Sherman Alexie also made visits to speak with students at Franklin High School and the Native American Youth Family Center.

The Moth, a storytelling nonprofit from New York, visited Franklin High School for a week-long MothSHOP with 6 students. After working with professional directors all week, these students performed their personal stories, without notes, for 202 of their classmates.

The Real Cost of WITS

Since 1996, WITS has invested over $2.6 million in Portland Public Schools. The program’s total cost for 2012-2013 was $285,000. Combined, schools contributed a total of $21,000 or approximately 8% of the total cost.
WITS Published Student Work

WITS students experience the excitement of being published.

WITS published a new anthology, *There is a Fire/Que Hay un Fuego*, featuring the work of 55 students. WITS also published five digital chapbooks, *Our Knowledge is Always Deepening*, *Hope is the Sound of Water*, *Walking Through a Child's Heaven*, *The Last Thing This Eagle Sees*, and *Hey, Moon, Guess What?* These chapbooks, which are available for download on the WITS blog (witspdx.com), feature the work of 69 additional students.

**Student Honored**

Editors from local publications the *Oregonian*, *Glimmer Train*, *Burnside Review*, and *Tin House* honored students by selecting their favorite pieces from the print anthology and awarding prizes for poetry and prose.

“It's awesome to pour yourself into a piece and then present it.”

—WITS Student

WITS Coordinates Student Readings

WITS students share their work with their communities.

WITS coordinated 11 student readings at local cafes, bookstores, galleries, and restaurants: 9 individual school readings, and 2 district-wide readings at Powell’s City of Books and at the WITS Fundraiser at Bluehour restaurant. A total of 187 students shared their work with a total audience of 695.

*Our Community Partners Hosted WITS Readings:*


“I took chances with my writing, tried something new (poetry), and explored techniques I wouldn’t have tried on my own.”

—WITS Student

“Check out our chapbooks on the WITS blog (witspdx.com)”
WITS Evaluates Results

After working with a WITS writer...

100% of teachers report that the writing workshop usually or always met their goal for arts learning in the classroom.

100% of teachers reported that the writer usually or always sparked students’ creativity.

96% of teachers agreed that their own teaching was enriched and they will use WITS lessons in the future.

82% of students reported that they usually or always know how to get started writing.

86% of students reported that they usually or always know how to sustain a piece of writing.

79% of students report that they usually or always know how to revise their writing.

“ They were humble, hilarious and heartbreaking. They wrote and wrote and rewrote. It kept getting better.”
— Amy Minato, WITS Writer

WITS Contributes to College Readiness

WITS trains volunteer mentors to work with students on the essays they need for college and scholarship applications.

WITS provided College Essay Writing Workshops at Franklin, Madison, and Roosevelt High Schools. WITS and Franklin faculty Susie Bartley trained 67 volunteers who worked with 84 students on their essays for college and scholarship applications. Volunteers helped students generate ideas and revise drafts.

For the fifth consecutive year, WITS collaborated with show:tell, a two-week summer workshop for teen writers at Marylhurst University. Show:tell provides several full scholarships to Portland high school students who have participated in the WITS program. These students receive college-level instruction in creative writing and fine art.

“I enjoyed getting to know the student, hearing her story, helping her find her narrative thread, and seeing her eyes light up when she wrote an awesome thesis.”
— Adult volunteer, WITS College Essay Writing Workshop
Verselandia! is the Portland Public Schools high school poetry slam—the Grand Slam for individual school slams hosted by PPS high school library media specialists.

30 students from 10 high schools competed for an audience of 450 peers, parents, teachers, and poetry fans.

This year’s top five finalists came from schools across PPS:

1st Micah Fletcher-Madison High
2nd Ke’Shayla Brown-Metropolitan Learning Center
3rd Jess Paunt-Cleveland High
4th Sydney Oliver-Grant High
5th Lauren Steele-Jefferson High

Verselandia! 2013 was hosted by National and International Slam Champion Anis Mojgani at the Wonder Ballroom. The judges were Turiya Autry, April Cuprill-Comas, Randy Gragg, Desmond Spain, and Max Williams.

Wieden + Kennedy generously sponsored Verselandia this year and brought the five finalists to their offices in Portland for a day following the competition. Portland Monthly was the media sponsor. During their time at Wieden + Kennedy, students performed in the atrium for W+K staff, where they received a standing ovation and whistles of appreciation. Then they were interviewed and performed on OPB’s live show, Think Out Loud.

"Thank you for giving us the opportunity to express ourselves through our poetry. Thank you for letting it out into the world."

— Verselandia! participant

Support for the Writers in the Schools program is provided in part by:

Wieden+ Kennedy

We are also thankful for the generous support of over 260 individual donors, with a special thanks to those members of our Portland Arts & Lectures audience who gave to our Send Students to the Schnitz Fund.

Wieden+ Kennedy

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VERSELANDIA!
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Our mission is to engage readers, support writers, and inspire the next generation with great literature.

literary-arts.org