



wits

working in the schools

**Building
Communities.
Empowering
Readers.**

Workplace Mentoring & Mid-Day Mentoring

Volunteer Orientation 2023

Today you will learn about...

- WITS mission and vision
- Why WITS
- Community: Who do we serve?
- Empowerment: How do we support our students?
- Consistency: What is your role as a mentor?



WITS Vision & Mission




Vision

WITS creates opportunities for every student in Chicago to be literate.

Mission

WITS believes that literacy is the foundation on which all other learning develops. Our mission is to empower Chicago elementary students to discover themselves through reading while developing foundational literacy skills. We do this by creating community through [literacy-based mentorship](#), enabling teachers to build diverse classroom libraries, and promoting [book ownership at home](#).





Foundational literacy skills

- According to most recent data, 28% of CPS 4th graders are proficient readers.
- At WITS, 63% of students affected by our programs out-perform the national average of yearly reading level growth.
- Learning happens in the context of relationships: WITS mentors provide undivided and consistent attention to students. This opportunity for one-on-one discussion is extremely valuable and found in few other settings.

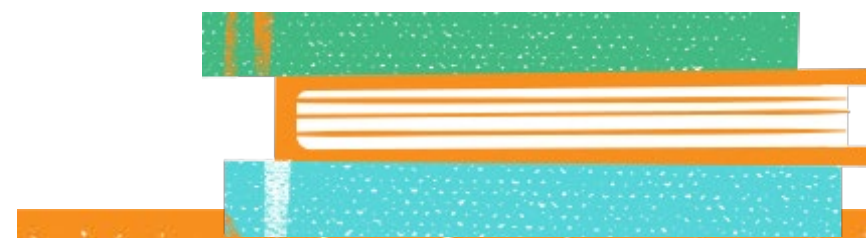


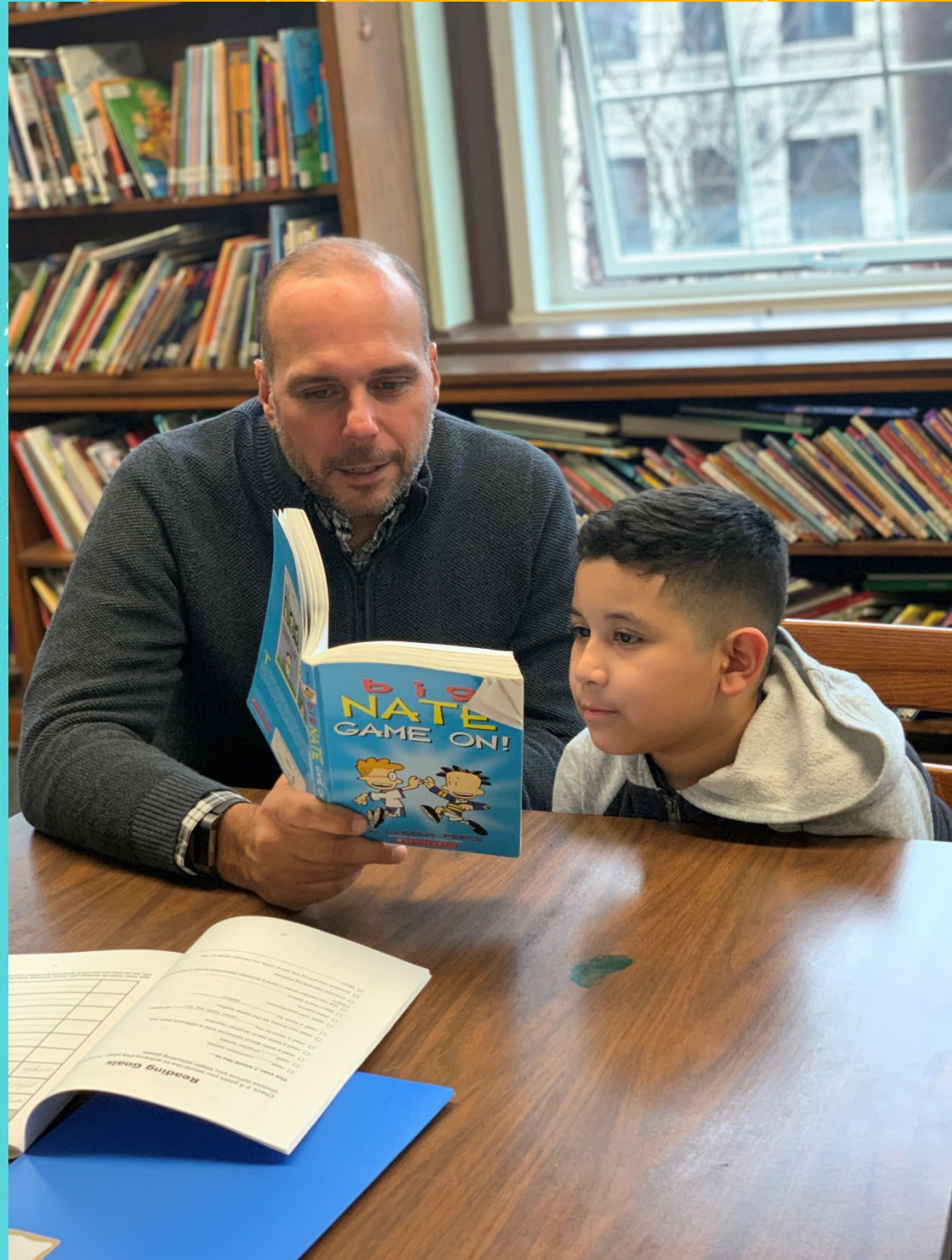
Empowering Students As Readers and People



Advance Illinois' report "The State We're In 2022" relays that "disruptions to schooling left significant gaps in students' social-emotional development." Consistent routines and expectations are essential for student development and advancement. ***WITS mentors provide consistent, caring, one-on-one time with students for a whole school year.***

- 85% of students reported that WITS participation made them want to read more for fun.
- 90% reported feeling good or very good about spending time with their mentors.





Community

Who do we serve?

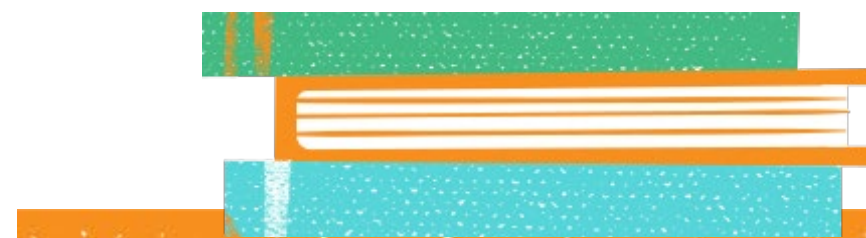
4th Graders

- COVID's effect: all of first grade was during lockdown
 - A significant part of early elementary was during remote learning/interrupted by quarantines
- Social
 - Peer relationships are very important
 - Developing self-identity and learning to self-regulate
- Academic
 - Schoolwork more focused on writing and critical thinking
- Physical
 - Growth spurts can cause clumsiness and frequent hunger
 - Onset of puberty can cause big emotions




Who are WITS Students?

- 2nd-6th grade CPS students
- Teachers sometimes recommend certain students for the program
- Students of any reading level and any social skill level
- All students benefit from the focused attention of a caring adult
- All students benefit from conversations about books with an adult
- Struggling readers benefit from being read out loud to: they can access more interesting and complex texts than they could on their own
- WITS believes that all students - regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, citizenship, or ability - deserve the space to be themselves





The WITS Community

- **WITS Program Staff Members** are your main point of contact for questions and concerns about the program or your student.
 - **Corporate Coordinators** organize WITS for your company and are your main point of contact for questions about how your company works with WITS.
 - **Mentors** build positive relationships with students based on mutual respect and a shared love of reading.
 - **Caregivers, teachers, & administrators** provide behind-the-scenes support for WITS and ensure that students can attend each week.
 - **Students** are the reason we show up every week! All adults work together to make sure they are staying safe and having fun.
 - ***Workplace Mentoring only:* School Coordinators** chaperone students to and from program. They communicate with students' caregivers and ensure student safety at program.
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WITS Programs Are...

- Student-directed reading
- An enrichment program
- Focused attention from a caring adult
- Student-centered
- A community of students and mentors

WITS Programs Aren't...

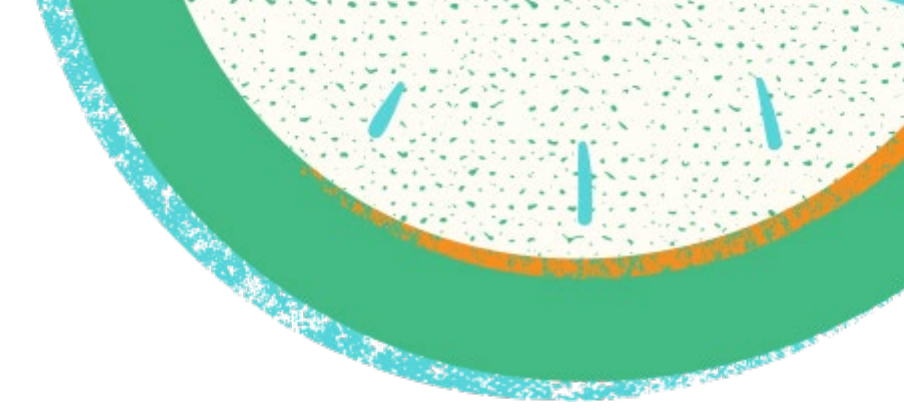
- Tutoring
- Academic intervention
- Workforce development
- Adult-centered





Empowerment

How do we serve our students?



Program Logistics

- Once a week
- October-May
- Mentors volunteer weekly, every other week, or as subs
- Mentors work one-on-one with the same student for the program year



Mid-Day Mentoring Session Structure



- First 5 minutes: Community building
 - Activities or conversation-starters to get to know your student and the entire group better
- Next 40 minutes: Shared reading
 - Mentors go up to the book bin with students to help select a book
 - Students and mentors take turns reading aloud to each other
 - WITS provides all the books and materials





Workplace Mentoring Session Structure



- First 10 minutes: Community building
 - Activities or conversation-starters to get to know your student and the entire group better
- Next 30 minutes: Shared reading
 - Mentors go up to the book bin with students to help select a book
 - Students and mentors take turns reading aloud to each other
 - WITS provides all the books and materials
- Last 20 minutes: Homework, reading, or return to activity



Top Five Tips for Reading at WITS

1. Encourage your student to choose books

- Go up to the book bin with your student to help them choose a book. Your WITS staff member can help!
- This sounds like: “Do you want to try fiction or nonfiction today?” “Is there anything you’re learning about in school that you would like to read more about?” “Do you have a favorite author?”

2. Ask open-ended questions

- This sounds like: “What do you think will happen next?...” “How do you think this character...” “Why...”

3. Model your own thinking

- When you have a genuine reaction to a book, share it!
- This sounds like: “I wonder...” “I’m confused about...” “I am surprised that...”

4. Talk with your student

- Talking with your student (about anything!) is crucial in building your relationship.
- Conversations about books are especially important for comprehension and in forming an identity as a reader

5. Don’t over-correct

- If a student stops because they can’t say a word, wait three seconds, then tell them how to say the word.
- If this happens more than 3-5 times on a page, the book may be too hard for them to read on their own.





Students' Big Questions

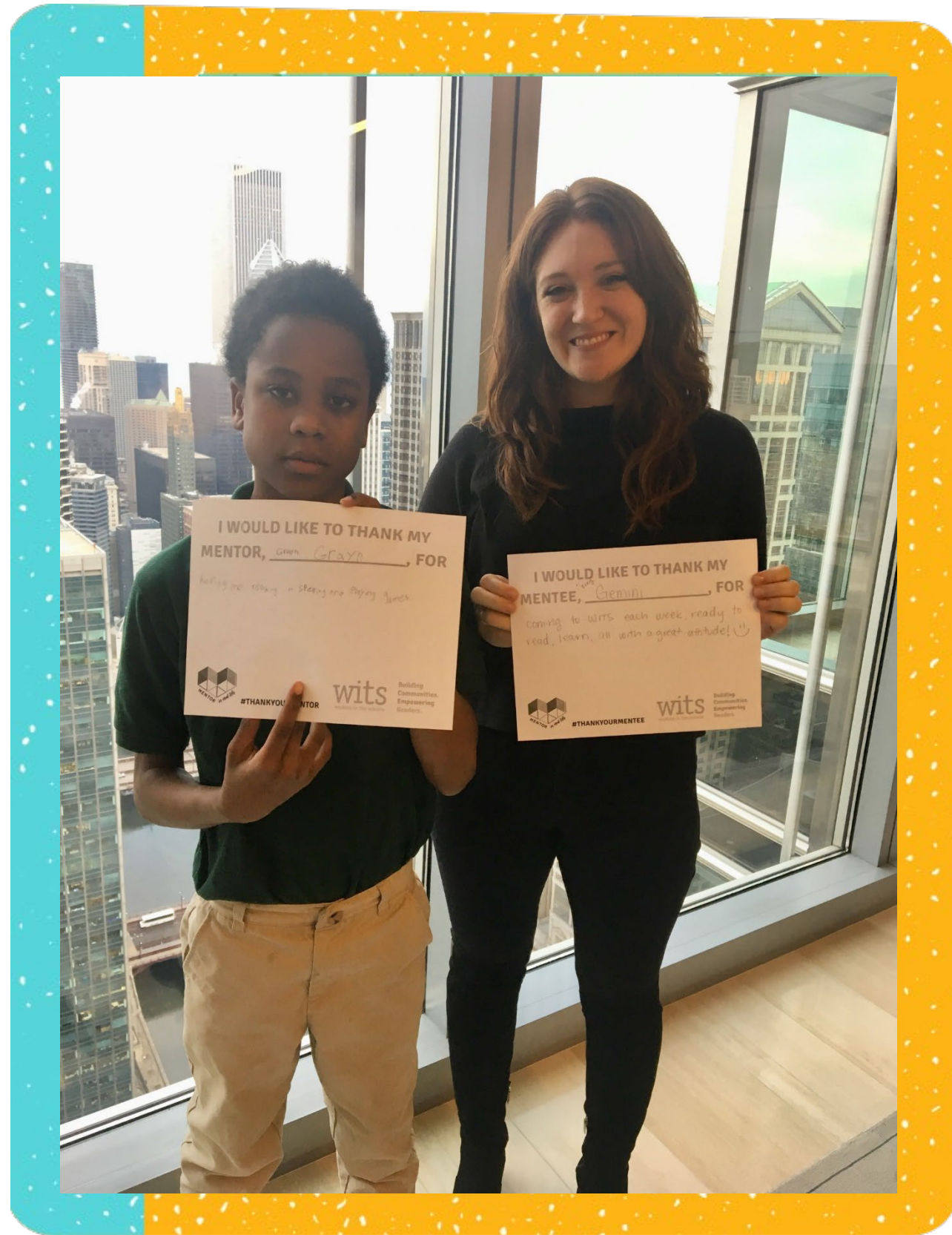
1 Always take your cues from students. Listen to them and validate their experiences.

2 If you are asked a question that you don't feel prepared to answer, here are a few supportive responses to start with:

- "That's a good/interesting question..."
- "It sounds like this is really important to you..."
- "I appreciate you sharing this with me..."

3 If you find yourself in a conversation you do not feel equipped to have, or you are not the best person to have that conversation with, you can say:

- "I'm not sure I have an answer right now, but you've given me a lot to think about."
- "I'm not sure I'm the best person to talk to about this, but I can try to find someone who is."
- Ask your WITS program staff member for support afterwards.



Consistency

What is your role as a mentor?

Assume the Best

As adults working together to support young people, we operate with the understanding that we are all doing our best for our students. WITS staff, mentors, coordinators, school staff, and students' families are all on the same team!

We all ask questions in good faith and communicate in order to understand each other and do right by our students.



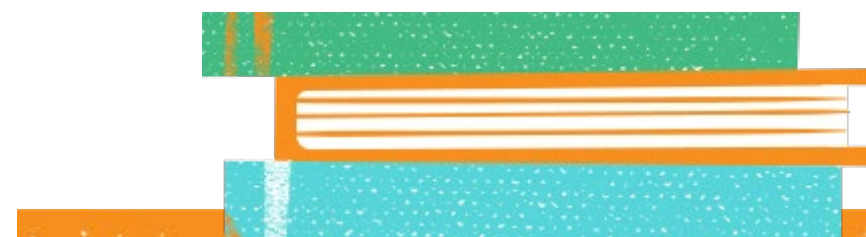
Keeping Sessions on Track

- At program we will be doing community building activities, reading, and doing homework: our goal is to be flexible with students within those parameters
- All adults at program have a shared responsibility to make sure students are staying safe and having fun
- Mentors are role models and can direct students to behave appropriately
- Behaviors to redirect:
 - Unsafe behavior: tipping back in a chair, using materials in an unsafe manner, leaving the group
 - Disrespectful behavior: talking while WITS staff is giving directions, name-calling/trash talking, mishandling materials, excessively distracting others
- Talk to your WITS program staff member if you need support in redirecting your student









Mentor Expectations

- Attend at least 80% of scheduled sessions
- Communicate with your program staff member if you need to miss a session
- Let your program staff member know of any concerns you have related to program
- Be fully present and engaged with your student during sessions
- Participate fully in all program activities
- Review all emails from your program staff member and reply if necessary
- Set boundaries with your student
- Follow all program policies



Program Policies

-  Contact your WITS staff member if you have any questions or concerns
-  Do not be alone with a student
-  Do not take photos of students
-  Silence your cell phone during program.
-  Do not contact your student outside of program time
-  If you are suspicious of child abuse or neglect, tell your WITS staff member immediately

A decorative orange calendar icon with a grid of squares, some of which are highlighted in a darker orange.

Health Protocols

A decorative illustration of a watermelon slice with a green rind and a speckled red interior.

- Per [CPS's health screener](#), do not attend WITS if:
 - You have experienced COVID-19 symptoms in the past 24 hours
 - You have tested positive in the last 5 days
 - You are awaiting COVID-19 test results
- Do not attend WITS if you feel sick





Working with the students was very fun and rewarding. It's great to see them excited to show up and hang with their mentors, whether just catching up, reading or doing homework.

WITS Mentor



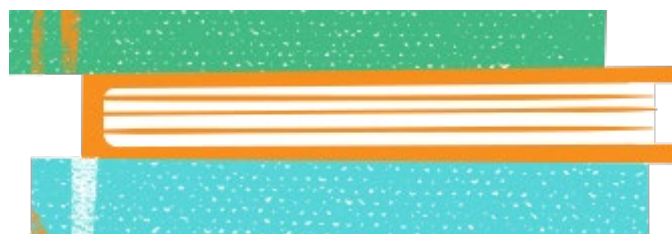
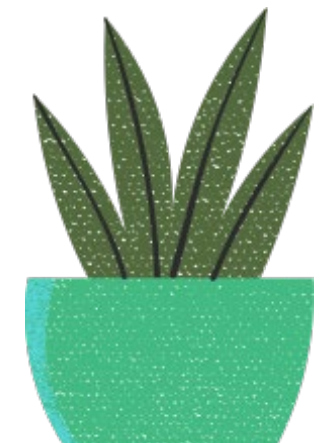
Our students really need this 1:1 opportunity to speak, talk, and read with an adult other than a family member. While our students like reading during school, this program gives them a new, authentic way to share books and have discussions with others about books.

WITS Teacher



What is special about your relationship with your mentors, you get to hang out with them and they're cool and they're good readers who like to do activities and they help with homework.

WITS Student





Resources

- witschicago.org/volunteer-resources
- Your program staff member
- [WITS Talks](#)
- [Study Hall](#): WITS online book club
- witschicago.org/blog



Thank You!

