

Reinvigorating Literacy Instruction and Student Engagement

Exploring *Wit & Wisdom*[®] Implementation
in Skaneateles Central School District



Contents

4 [Implementation Planning](#)

Curriculum Selection

Goal Setting

Rollout and Monthly Implementation Highlights

8 [Teacher Experience, Professional Learning, and Support](#)

Working with Content-Rich and Complex Texts

Early Implementation Challenges

Teacher Voices: Mastering Curriculum Pacing

Professional Learning and Instructional Tools

14 [Student Experience and Outcomes](#)

Writing Integration and Development

Teacher Voices: Watching Students' Writing Blossom

Teacher Voices: High Student Engagement, Strong Academic Discourse

Student Engagement and Discussion

19 [Family Engagement](#)

Introducing This Resource

The Skaneateles Central School District is located approximately 25 miles southwest of Syracuse in the Finger Lakes area of Central New York. It serves 1,400 students from six small townships in four schools:

- **Waterman Primary School (Grades K–2)**
- **State Street Intermediate School (Grades 3–5)**
- **Skaneateles Middle School (Grades 6–8), and**
- **Skaneateles High School (Grades 9–12).**

The district adopted *Wit & Wisdom* as its English language arts curriculum in Grades 3–8 starting in the 2020–2021 school year.

This resource documents year one of the district's implementation journey, excerpting extensively from the journal entries that educators started keeping in January 2021, from their monthly videoconferences with the Great Minds® team, and from their end-of-year reflections.

Each section also provides the opportunity for you to reflect on the implementation experience in Skaneateles Central School District and apply it to your own district context as you assess and/or implement *Wit & Wisdom*.



Participants

Thank you to the administrators, teachers, and the media specialist who participated in this documentation effort:

- **Francine Grannell**, K–12 humanities curriculum coordinator, 25 years of experience, third year in Skaneateles
- **Seth Benjamin**, Grade 6 teacher, 18 years of experience, all in Skaneateles
- **Stephanie Donzella**, Grade 4 special education teacher, 19 years of experience, first year in Skaneateles
- **Kelly Gunderson**, middle school media specialist, 20 years of experience, fourth year in Skaneateles
- **Gisella Hendrix**, Grade 5 teacher, six years of experience, most in Skaneateles
- **Kathy Herr**, Grade 3 teacher, 33 years of experience, all in Skaneateles
- **John Lawrence**, State Street principal, 18 years of experience, second year in Skaneateles
- **Pete O'Connor**, Grade 4 teacher, 23 years of experience, 13 years in Skaneateles
- **Lauren Pohl**, Grade 7 teacher, 17 years of experience, 14 years in Skaneateles

Implementation Planning

Curriculum Selection

Skaneateles Central School District administrators and staff began the search for their first-ever districtwide English language arts (ELA) curriculum in November 2019. Teams of educators in Grades 3–8 and a curriculum committee convened to review potential ELA curricula to ensure alignment with the state’s new Next Generation Learning Standards. After meeting virtually with a handful of publishers and reviewing guidance from EdReports.org, Louisiana Believes, and New York State, the options were narrowed from four to two: *Wit & Wisdom* and EL Education.

Teachers came to school to review the two finalists’ materials and in July 2020, 89 percent of Grades 3–8 staff ultimately selected *Wit & Wisdom* as the ELA resource that best aligned with research and met the specific needs of the district.

Francine Grannell, the district’s K–12 humanities curriculum coordinator, says she and her colleagues were especially impressed with the curriculum’s rigor, emphasis on knowledge building and student discourse, commitment to equity, and the integration of social and emotional learning and cultural responsiveness into all the lessons.

89 percent of Grades 3–8 staff selected Wit & Wisdom at the conclusion of the curriculum review process.

“*Wit & Wisdom* provides rigorous and knowledge-building opportunities for students to express their own ideas about the texts and topics. [The] curriculum is teacher and student friendly [and] offers flexibility and time to dig deep into the texts and then write and discuss.”

–Teacher, Skaneateles School District

“Both the teacher guide and student handout booklet were very user friendly. I also felt that the *Wit & Wisdom* materials and expectations were more age appropriate and doable as a whole group lesson. I wasn’t overwhelmed by the material, and I feel comfortable implementing it in the fall.”

–Teacher, Skaneateles School District

Selection Process Revealed Overwhelming Support for *Wit & Wisdom*’s Rigor and Usability

Common reasons Skaneateles staff selected *Wit & Wisdom*:

- Aligned with state learning standards
- Rigorous, knowledge-building content
- Writing integration
- Commitment to equity
- Teacher and student friendly



Goal Setting

Although teachers across the district were eager to begin implementation, they were anxious too. Working with a new high-quality curriculum would mean accessing a wealth of coherent and engaging materials. But it would also require many teachers to shift their mindset and their practice to align with the complexity and rigor of the new program, all while navigating the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic and remote instruction.

To help maintain motivation and momentum with any curricular implementation, setting yearly goals that are realistic and attainable is essential—even with the inevitable bumps and busyness that all school years bring. In Skaneateles, year one of implementation was a learning phase with two fundamental goals:

1. Understand the curriculum components
2. Learn to prepare instruction strategically

To achieve these goals, administrators focused teachers on three key actions: Follow the lesson plans with minimal or no adjustment; use all elements of the curriculum (such as texts and handouts); and begin to show understanding of the purpose of the lesson's learning outcomes, sequence, and structure.

While in this learning phase across year one, administrators hoped to see students engaged in their learning; using the lesson materials; reading, listening, and speaking about complex texts; and writing to articulate knowledge.

“When I found out we were adopting the *Wit & Wisdom* program, I was very excited. I was looking forward to having a program with a scope and sequence and materials. The guesswork was taken out of what to teach and when to teach it throughout the year[But] I was nervous about implementing it during the pandemic. There were a lot of unknowns about how long we would be teaching in person, and it was intimidating for me to learn a new program and deliver it to students both online and in person.”

—Gisella, Teacher, Grade 5

“I was initially excited about *Wit & Wisdom*. We have not made changes to our ELA curriculum in so many years. It was rejuvenating to begin something new. Of course, I was nervous since I've been so accustomed to focusing on reading groups and doing benchmarks. I was worried that it would be hard to implement, but I was certainly proved wrong. It has really been fun and exciting each day to see how excited the students get when we talk about the topics for each module.”

—Kathy, Teacher, Grade 3

Rollout

Throughout the year, the district thoughtfully rolled out the *Wit & Wisdom* curriculum modules along with several group trainings and individualized support to build confidence, capacity, and success with the new material. The COVID-19 pandemic did complicate implementation but not nearly as much as in many other school districts largely because of the high rate of in-person attendance throughout the year in Skaneateles.

Although families could opt out of in-person attendance for their students, about 90 percent of Kindergarten through Grade 7 students were in school daily throughout most of the fall semester, while students in Grades 8 through 12 were hybrid (two days in person, three days at home). After a few weeks of remote learning before and after the winter holidays, most students returned to school for the rest of the year.

Monthly Implementation Highlights

- **July 2020:** Initial training of all educators using Great Minds' foundational professional development (PD) session *Launch Wit & Wisdom*.
- **August:** Grade-level teams introduced to the curriculum's planning protocols and planned Module 0 and 1.
- **September:** Initial curriculum implementation began; educators primarily focused on teaching and implementing lessons as written.
- **October:** PD provided to teach educators to use the *Wit & Wisdom in Sync*[™] digital platform as a resource to support implementation.
- **November:** Teachers transitioned to Module 2. In-depth PD provided on using *Wit & Wisdom Affirm*[®] as an assessment tool and tracker. Additional educator support focused on writing and teaching with complex texts.
- **December:** Daylong summit for educators focused on implementing effective literacy instruction for all students.
- **January 2021:** All instruction conducted remotely through mid-January with some teachers receiving one-on-one support.
- **February/March:** Educators explicitly focused on writing instruction, specifically how to give feedback to students using the *Wit & Wisdom* rubrics and [Craft Stages](#).
- **April/May:** Additional educator support provided on vocabulary instruction and learning about the role of background knowledge in helping students read complex texts.
- **May/June:** Celebration of successes, reflection on the year (especially on experiences with complex texts, vocabulary, fluency, and writing), and goal setting for year two.

Stop and Reflect

Take the time to reflect on short- and long-term goals for curriculum implementation in your district so you can make a concrete plan to achieve those goals. Having a solid vision of success in place with clear benchmarks helps ensure you are working toward desired outcomes.

- What do you value most in a new curriculum for your district? What impact do you hope it will have?
- In three years, how will you know whether the district has been successful with implementation? Consider quantitative and qualitative indicators you can use to monitor your progress.
- In the first year, what do you hope to see teachers accomplish to move the district closer to successful implementation? What do you hope to see students accomplish?
- What are some of the biggest potential barriers you may face in your district when selecting and implementing a new curriculum?
- Are there specific individuals you can involve or existing resources you can use to lower or remove these barriers? What new investments might you need to make to ensure success?

Use the following Great Minds resources for more guidance on setting, planning, and implementing yearly goals:

- [“Setting Goals and Planning for Next Year’s Wit & Wisdom Implementation”](#) (blog post)
- [Wit & Wisdom Implementation Guide](#)



Teacher Experience, Professional Learning, and Support

Working with Content-Rich and Complex Texts

From the start, educators were enthusiastic about the curriculum’s rigorous expectations and the quality of its knowledge-rich materials. Instead of leveled readers that limit engagement and deeper learning, *Wit & Wisdom* invites all students to read the same [content-rich and complex texts](#) that will build their knowledge of important topics as they master literacy skills. The selected core texts are wide ranging and varied; provide a careful balance of literary, informational, and fine art texts; and feature much-beloved, award-winning books from both contemporary and established authors, many of whom parents will remember from their own childhoods.

Teachers loved the core texts and how they helped teach students about history, science, literature, and culture. They appreciated how accessible the lessons were and welcomed their structure as well as their cohesiveness and continuity across modules and grades. Although some educators expressed concerns that the lessons were too rigorous, many teachers observed that when you challenge students with high standards, students will meet and even surpass those expectations.

“I am so amazed by the students and the rich conversations we have during class and I feel that this curriculum continuously reminds me to maintain high expectations for students and they will rise to the occasion.”

–Stephanie, Teacher, Grade 4

“I love that the curriculum includes the important Deep Dives. Many of these Deep Dive activities have never been taught in the third grade. It’s amazing what they are learning about our English language.”

–Kathy, Teacher, Grade 3

“My sixth-grade students knew very little about the Great Depression as we began Module 1. Through the reading of core texts *Bud, Not Buddy* and *Out of the Dust*, my students became passionate about the characters and built tremendous knowledge about the topic while strengthening both reading and writing abilities.”

–Seth, Teacher, Grade 6

Early Implementation Challenges

“We got started fast,” says the district’s K–12 humanities curriculum coordinator, Francine Grannell. And they did so with help from Great Minds’ Implementation Support team members along with in-house module and lesson studies. Still, learning a new curriculum is always challenging.

Some of the hurdles that teachers encountered were, unsurprisingly, related to the pandemic and having to switch between in-person and remote instruction around winter break. Some other challenges were technical and logistical, such as needing more specific guidance about how to use the included writing rubrics and finding the audio and Spanish versions of the curriculum materials online.

The biggest challenge for teachers, however, was pacing. Teachers often initially find it difficult to cover all the material in a new curriculum—especially one as complex and comprehensive as *Wit & Wisdom*—and Skaneateles teachers were no exception. It takes time to build students’ skills in reading complex texts, writing for varied purposes and across genres, speaking, and listening. To experience the full benefits of the curriculum, students need 90 minutes of *Wit & Wisdom* instruction each day in Grades 3–5. The first 75 minutes are dedicated to the core lesson and texts, which focus on reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, and the last 15 minutes provide a Deep Dive into vocabulary or writing style and conventions.

Support from the administration—and time—helped teachers improve their practice over the course of the year. Their main pieces of advice to others starting the implementation journey: Relax, trust the curriculum, and give yourself time to get used to the structures.

“Ninety minutes a day is definitely not enough time to get everything done most days. So adjusting our expectations to align more closely with the actual teaching day is important. That’s probably been the biggest challenge.”

–Pete, Teacher, Grade 4

“Our administrative team asked teachers to trust the implementation process of *Wit & Wisdom*. This took time, and as administrators, we had to take our advice in trusting the process. Initially, we outlined a specific pacing guide for Module 1 at each grade level for teachers. We quickly realized that the pacing guide needed to be more flexible and responsive to student and teacher needs. Through professional learning sessions and grade-level team meetings, we asked teachers to help co-create the pacing guides based on their day-to-day implementation and internalization of the curriculum. This collaborative approach successfully supported teachers to learn *Wit & Wisdom* by teaching the lessons as designed, using all curriculum elements (text, handouts, etc.) In trusting the process, teachers and administrators developed a deeper understanding of the purpose of the lesson’s learning, sequence, and build.”

–Francine Grannell,
K–12 Humanities Curriculum Coordinator



Teacher Voices:

Mastering Curriculum Pacing

My advice to others is to stay calm and trust the program. Everything will pan out perfectly. Even if the first writing assignments and Socratic Seminars are rough at the beginning, you will see the growth.

Gisella, Teacher, Grade 5

As I have accepted the need to be extremely flexible this year with pacing, it actually has really allowed me to learn parts of the program better out of the necessity to slow down.

Seth, Teacher, Grade 6

You have to figure out what to prioritize not only within the program but also with your cohort of students. If your group is fast paced, motivated intellectual learners, then you can probably cram a lot in. But being in a cotaught class, it is more important for my coteacher and me to prioritize their learning and focus on the things that are most important.

Pete, Teacher, Grade 4

I am noticing my confidence and ease growing with the knowledge of module topics and implementation of Wit & Wisdom. I am feeling more comfortable and understanding the processes and concepts. As my knowledge of my students and of the content grows, I am better able to support, modify, and accommodate.

Stephanie, Teacher, Grade 4

As the year has gone by and my students and I have continued the practice of Wit & Wisdom routines I feel like I no longer have the Teacher Edition attached to me My questioning, guiding of discussion protocols, and overall confidence in delivering instruction has become more confident and comfortable.

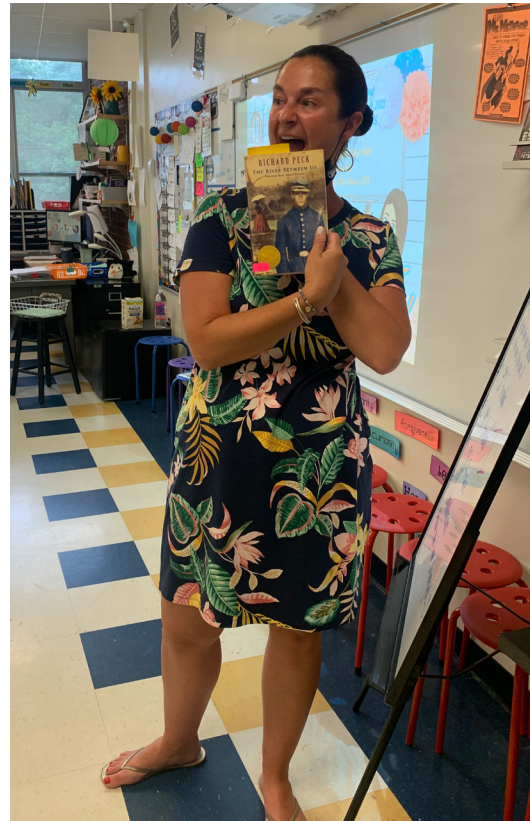
Seth, Teacher, Grade 6

Professional Learning and Instructional Tools

Skaneateles administrators strongly believed that successful curriculum implementation would require cohesive and ongoing professional learning. Teachers praised the level of ongoing support from the administration and were enthusiastic about the many instructional tools that *Wit & Wisdom* provided.

In late summer 2020, all educators participated in Great Minds' initial training—Launch *Wit & Wisdom*—and then the district provided additional team time for planning using the module protocols.

Throughout the year, professional learning communities, common planning time, and department meetings provided ongoing opportunities for educators to dig deeper into the materials. Kathy Herr, a Grade 3 teacher, says protected planning time before each lesson, along with everyday conversations during lunch, were instrumental in helping teachers build knowledge and confidence.



Overview of Professional Learning Supports Provided to Teachers

Mode	Description	Frequency
Professional Learning Sessions/Workshops (Virtual or In Person)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed to provide deep support with <i>Wit & Wisdom</i> throughout the school year Facilitated by Great Minds and/or the district's ELA Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Wit & Wisdom</i> Virtual Launch PD in July 2020 Three additional sessions in August and September 2020 Additional sessions as needed
Grade-Level Team Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for teachers to unpack, internalize, and reflect on upcoming lessons and units Discuss topics such as curriculum protocols, pacing, grading, and feedback Initially facilitated by the district's ELA coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every other week or as needed
Learning Walks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capture snapshots of <i>Wit & Wisdom</i> in action, and help determine implementation trends within and across grade levels Data from Learning Walks inform celebrations and future areas for professional learning Facilitated by a small team that can include district leaders, building leaders, and teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-2 times per month

In addition to professional learning supports, *Wit & Wisdom in Sync* offered implementation resources and instructional tools that were designed by the team of teacher-writers at Great Minds. The platform was developed to give teachers the resources to flexibly provide continued instruction whether students learn in person, online, or through some combination. Several of these tools were especially popular among Skaneateles teachers.

- **Teacher Edition:** Inside each Teacher Edition is a selection of instructional materials and tools for each module such as daily lesson plans, supplementary materials, and daily assessments.
- **Daily videos:** Through daily videos, Great Minds teachers deliver key lesson content, incorporating their experiences of successfully teaching *Wit & Wisdom*.
- **Learn Anywhere Plan (LAP):** This is the core planning resource for teachers that includes an overview of each module and the daily sequence of instruction for a full year.



“While we were remote, I used *Wit & Wisdom in Sync*. The lessons were perfect for our remote learning schedule, and I appreciated how they taught the ‘essential’ things for the students to stay on track with the program. I was extremely grateful to have these lessons to use during remote learning!”

–Gisella, Teacher, Grade 5

“Teachers vary on how we do our lessons. Some only use the book, some use the Learn Anywhere Plan, and some use both I watch the video each day and then I read all that is in the book for the lesson. This way I know that I do not miss out on anything Many times, the video has pictures or videos that I use, and then the lessons in the book are so detailed. I love the activities in the book most of all.”

–Kathy, Teacher, Grade 3

“I love the Learn Anywhere Plan. We used it prior to remote learning, in conjunction with the text. Sometimes kids need to hear a different voice, and if you preview the LAP and see how it correlates with the teaching manual, then you know when to switch back and forth. Team teaching with another person has worked well in terms of our ability to connect and to be flexible in our implementation.”

–Pete, Teacher, Grade 4

“We still continue to use *Wit & Wisdom in Sync* for times where I feel like Ms. Webb [Great Minds teacher] does a better job of explaining the task, activity, content, etc. than I would. It is helpful to hear and see another teacher explain or present material that is brand new to us.”

–Seth, Teacher, Grade 6

Stop and Reflect

Take the time to reflect on how teachers in your district will experience the adoption of a new curriculum and what they will need to be successful with daily implementation.

- What will teachers in your district find most exciting or most beneficial about adopting a new curriculum? Consider how you might be able to take advantage of curriculum features or increase involvement from highly engaged individuals across the district to ease the adoption process.
- What might teachers in your district find most challenging about adopting a new curriculum? Consider different ways you can mitigate these challenges.
- What existing structures and resources are in place for both upfront and ongoing professional learning? Consider new investments or competing professional learning goals you may need to reprioritize to ensure success.
- How will you monitor the successes and professional learning needs of teachers as they move through curriculum implementation? Consider how you can use this feedback to support momentum and continuous improvement.

Use the following Great Minds resources for more on professional learning and supports for teachers:

- [“Professional Development: For Teachers, by Teachers”](#) (blog post)
- More on [Wit & Wisdom in Sync](#)
- Overview of [Professional Learning for Wit & Wisdom](#)

Student Experience, and Outcomes

Writing Integration and Development

Great Minds believes writing is integral to student success, so practice with that skill is carefully embedded in every module and lesson of *Wit & Wisdom*. Skaneateles teachers appreciated this systemic, integrated approach for teaching reading and writing.

The first year of curriculum implementation is often a year of adjustment—both teachers and students learn new processes for reading, writing, and thinking—and teachers were honest about some of the writing struggles their students encountered. These challenges included spelling, integrating evidence from the texts, writing introductory and concluding sentences, using appropriate transitions and elaborations, and writing creative narratives. Teachers supplemented and reinforced instruction in these areas to help students succeed with complex writing, especially for developing readers and writers.

As the year progressed, students exceeded their teachers' expectations. Because the deep texts gave students something important to write about, they delivered. Students who began the year not being able to write complete sentences were writing full paragraphs with proper grammar and vocabulary by spring. Over the year, students significantly improved their ability to draw evidence from the texts and write with detail. And as their skills improved, so did their confidence as writers.

“One thing that I am really enjoying about this program is the writing component. I feel that this program has improved my approach to teaching writing. The program has a very systematic approach to teaching specific writing skills, and I find myself feeling more confident when guiding my students through the writing process.”

–Gisella, Teacher, Grade 5

“Students still seem to struggle with using appropriate transitions and elaboration. They are working on developing their elaborating skills. I have had to go back and explain elements of the ToSEEC [Topic Sentence, Evidence, Elaboration, Concluding Statement] paragraph with the students.”

–Lauren, Teacher, Grade 7

“My students are enthusiastically developing their monomyths at this point. They are currently planning the stages on their hero's journey. The biggest struggle I have seen is that they have to “relearn” narrative writing in many ways. With the emphasis on evidence-based writing and personal narratives, I've really had to challenge them to use their imaginations again to create their monomyths.”

–Seth, Teacher, Grade 6

Teacher Voices:

Watching Students' Writing Blossom

I think the biggest improvement with our students is their comfort level with writing and more willingness to initiate a task and share their ideas in their writing.

Stephanie, Teacher, Grade 4

In 33 years here, I've never had kids so excited about learning. Learning how to write a paragraph, not just a sentence. This rejuvenated me as a teacher. I love this too much to retire.

Kathy, Teacher, Grade 3

I love the format in the structure that Wit & Wisdom provides with writing. It is high level and detailed. A lot of work went into [students'] final writing piece. I was hesitant and a little nervous as to what they would produce. I was blown away by what I received. I feel like their work was really well written after their first draft. Many kids do not need much support or revisions. Their ability to write using their senses, exploding a moment in time, was fantastic. I wouldn't have predicted it, but I was pleasantly surprised.

Pete, Teacher, Grade 4

I've seen how much my own 3rd Grade son has grown as a writer and how deep his interests are. He's actually written a few books this year and sold them at school. His writing has so much more evidence and elaboration, not just writing about a summer vacation or trip.

Kelly, Middle School Media Specialist

My students' writing has really improved since September. A usual third-grade student comes into school without even being able to write a complete sentence that contains a capital letter and punctuation. Now I have most of my class writing well-detailed sentences that pertain to what is asked of them. It is totally amazing what they are doing! The students are learning far more than I have ever taught when it comes to writing with details.

Kathy, Teacher, Grade 3

Teacher Voices:

High Student Engagement, Strong Academic Discourse

The curriculum has been powerful, especially in the high-level discussion protocols, such as Socratic Seminars and TDQs. The ongoing academic discussions among my sixth graders have been such a refreshing part of my practice. Students are engaged and absolutely loving the texts.

Seth, Teacher, Grade 6

Our most reluctant writers are less reluctant, and our most struggling readers are volunteering to read aloud to a small group of peers or even the whole class. It has been very exciting! I have reached out to the parents of the struggling readers to let them know that their child is enjoying the text and volunteering to read to a group of peers, and they have been so proud as well!

Stephanie, Teacher, Grade 4

The students with learning disabilities have demonstrated success during our Fishbowl discussions and Socratic Seminars. The art analysis has provided the students with another opportunity to engage in class discussions and analyze the text.

Lauren, Teacher, Grade 7

I have seen kids that are beginning readers volunteering to read the book Hatchet in class. Out loud. Volunteering! And doing a good job! So I suppose the marriage of individualized small group reading instruction and exposure to higher level text is working! A fun thing to see.

Pete, Teacher, Grade 4

The kids got a super understanding of cause and effect in the Socratic Seminar. I was so impressed.

Kathy, Teacher, Grade 3

The module topics at Grade 6 have absolutely engaged my students in so many ways! The Great Depression in Module 1 and now Jamestown in Module 3 have really sparked an interest in my students. They are seeking out additional books from the volume of reading related to these topics. My own knowledge and interest of these topics has been deepened through the texts and daily lessons.

Seth, Teacher, Grade 6

Student Engagement and Discussion

Another high point of the year was the level of student engagement and quality of student discourse. By engaging students' natural curiosity and providing a framework for inquiry, *Wit & Wisdom* helps students build rich layers of knowledge. The curriculum enables teachers and students to more deeply experience carefully sequenced, interconnected, and increasingly complex texts and ideas. And it fosters a questioning spirit that will shape the next generation of great writers, thinkers, and leaders.

Skaneateles teachers said *Wit & Wisdom*'s consistent structure and supporting tools—such as the five Content Stages and Content Framing Questions, Text-Dependent Questions (TDQs), and Socratic Seminars—helped students engage with the complex texts and organize their thoughts.

Teachers were particularly excited by the Socratic Seminars, describing them as “fantastic,” “powerful,” and “refreshing.” Students grew comfortable asking probing questions, and they both pushed and supported each other during discussions. Teachers also found that beginning each lesson with a discussion about the visual art texts that are integrated into *Wit & Wisdom* helped open intellectual doors. Even students who traditionally were reluctant became engaged.

What are Text-Dependent Questions?

Text-dependent questions and tasks focus students on key terms, phrases, and passages for rereading and repeated exploration, building close reading habits and ultimately leading to deeper analysis and understanding.

What is a Socratic Seminar?

A Socratic Seminar is a student-led collaborative discussion centering on a thought-provoking question related to a module's content. Students engage in inquiry, elaboration, and debate while expressing their own ideas clearly. For more details, see page 89 of the [Wit & Wisdom Implementation Guide](#).

The Five Content Stages and Content Framing Questions: *Wit & Wisdom*'s Progression for Deep Reading of Complex Texts

Content Stage	Content Framing Question	Description of Student Thinking and Actions
Wonder	What do I notice and wonder about this text?	Students read the text with curiosity and attention and ask key questions about what they read.
Organize	What is happening in this text?	Students organize their thinking on what the text is about, demonstrating their literal comprehension of a text.
Reveal	What does a deeper exploration of [text-specific element] reveal in this text?	Students go deeper into the text, explore the author's craft and word choices, analyze the text's structure and its implicit meaning, and attend to other unique features of the text.
Distill	What is the essential meaning of this text?	Students synthesize their understanding of a text's elements to discern the full impact of the elements they studied. They seek to understand the text as a sum of its parts, with the goal of achieving a profound understanding of the whole work.
Know	How does this build my knowledge of [specific topic]?	Students consider the text in the context of their own knowledge and learning. They examine the impact of the text on their world of knowledge and articulate the transferrable knowledge and skills they have acquired during the course of studying a text.

Stop and Reflect

Take the time to reflect on how you hope to see students grow and engage with a new, content-rich curriculum and on where they might need the most support to be successful.

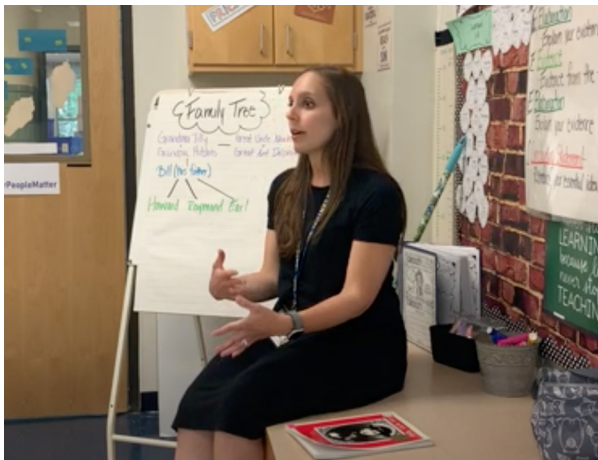
- Where do you hope to see students grow the most after one year of curriculum implementation? After three years?
- How do you want the curriculum to affect the student experience (e.g., what they know, how they converse with teachers and peers, how they learn)?
- How do you hope the curriculum affects school culture?
- What aspects of the curriculum might be most exciting to students? What aspects will be most different from what they are accustomed to?
- How will you acclimate students to the new instructional routines and processes?

Use the following Great Minds resources for more on *Wit & Wisdom*'s learning design, writing integration, and implementation support:

- [Wit & Wisdom Implementation Guide](#) (pp. 13–28)
- [“Writing to Learn and Learning to Write with *Wit & Wisdom*”](#) (blog post)
- [“Reading Complex Texts in *Wit & Wisdom*”](#) (blog post)

Family Engagement

Especially during the pandemic, when many children spent part of the school year learning from home, caregivers and families have been more involved than ever in their children's education. For the most part, Skaneateles families reacted positively to the new curriculum. One mother, a Syracuse University professor, even said she planned to use some *Wit & Wisdom* techniques with her college students. Still, there were a handful of parents who opted out of having their students read certain books included in the curriculum, with some concerns about the portrayal of violence, death, and infidelity in a few texts.



Teachers appreciated administrators' efforts to educate and reassure concerned parents. And throughout the year, Skaneateles teachers used a variety of tools and strategies to enhance family engagement, making use of the resources that *Wit & Wisdom* provides to support learning at home. Most notably, each module includes a Family Tip Sheet (in English and Spanish) that provides an overview of the module and offers additional books to read at home, questions for discussion, and activities to extend thinking and learning.

“In the middle school, I feel that we have had parent support for the adoption of the *Wit & Wisdom* program. We did have a parent reach out about the religious aspects of the *Ramayana* and one parent reached out about using the book *Fever 1793* and the graphic descriptions of the way people died in the story. In both instances, the school reached out and spoke with the families, and the student participated in reading the novel.”

–Kelly, Middle School
Media Specialist

“We have had some (not many at all) parents express some concern to our principal about some of the texts, though I strongly believe that was the influence of other parents. Our parents just needed reassurance, and after a conversation with the principal about the curriculum and text, it has been fine Our administrative team has done a lot to make parents aware of our newly adopted program and its components and what daily instruction looks like.”

–Seth, Teacher, Grade 6

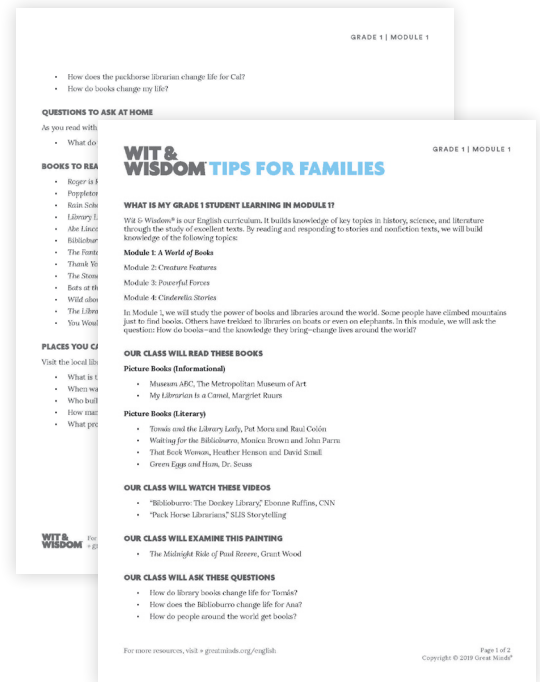
“I have been so fortunate with parental engagement. All the parents have told me how excited the children are to be learning about such exciting topics. Many of the parents have even shown the kids the movies [based on the books they've read,] like *Hidden Figures* and *Apollo 13*, at home.”

–Kathy, Teacher, Grade 3

Sample Family Engagement Strategies Used in Skaneateles Throughout the Year

- **Family Tip Sheets:** Family Tip Sheets, which are available in 14 different languages, were emailed to caregivers at the start of each module. Caregivers responded favorably to these and especially liked the overview they provided.
- **Fluency Practice:** Families and caregivers were encouraged to practice fluent reading at home with the fluency passages included in each module. Having caregivers as listeners who provided feedback to students was a great way for caregivers to connect with the curriculum.
- **Feedback Checklist:** One teacher implemented a short parent feedback checklist for each End-of-Module writing task. These led to effective conversations between students and caregivers not only about students' writing but about the texts being analyzed as well.

Francine Grannell, the district K-12 humanities curriculum coordinator, recalled with delight overhearing two conversations between students and families at a local restaurant during the fall of implementation. The first one began with a student telling his parents and grandparents all about the heart after completing Grade 4 module 1, *A Great Heart*. And the second conversation began with a student asking his grandparents how the Great Depression affected them based on his learning in Grade 6 module 1, *Resilience in the Great Depression*. Grannell noted that these conversations “really reinforced how what we’re doing in the classroom lives outside the four walls of the school building. It impacts students’ lives on an everyday basis.”



Stop and Reflect

Take the time to reflect on how caregivers and families may respond to the implementation of a new curriculum and how you can most effectively partner with them to support students' success.

- What will caregivers and families value most in a new curriculum or find most exciting?
- How will a new curriculum differ most from what caregivers and families are used to? What might they be most concerned about?
- How will you keep families informed about the curriculum adoption process and solicit their feedback?
- How can you maximize the accessibility of ongoing engagement opportunities for all families and develop their ability to successfully reinforce and extend students' learning at home?

Use the following Great Minds resources to learn more about engaging caregivers and families with *Wit & Wisdom*:

- [Curriculum Overview for Families](#) (comprehensive resource page)
- [“Activities to Engage Families Year-Round with *Wit & Wisdom*”](#) (blog post)