

PLEASE READ THIS FIRST! **FOR A GREAT AUTHOR VISIT**

When you write for kids, visiting schools and inspiring students is the best part of your job (yes, writing in my pajamas is a close second!) Authors prepare extensively for school visits and 95% of schools prepare too. But the other 5% don't get their money's worth and wind up letting the students down. Many authors have visited schools where no one knew an author was coming that day at all! Whether payment for the visit is coming from the PTO or your school budget, your preparation insures students get the most value from the author's visit. The best visits are always those where the author, the staff and the students come prepared to learn and have fun! Some tips for the best visits (thanks to many schools and teachers for their best ideas!)—

BEFORE THE VISIT

Excited teachers = excited students. Let staff know the day/time/theme of the author visit (this includes maintenance staff and your district or PTO publicity person who may want to call a local paper or feature the visit in the parent newsletter!) Let them know WHY you chose this particular author this year. Provide teachers with information on the author, a list of books, awards, author's website, the books themselves if possible and any teacher's guides if available. My "Author Visit" folder has this information.

Selling the author's books is part of the contract. Author visits promote literacy, so does putting books in kids' hands at home. Publishers require book sales. Authors expect that you provide the students, families and teachers the opportunity to purchase our books, and we are happy to sign and personalize. If your school refuses to sell books for some reason, let the author know ahead of time. Authors may add a percentage to their fee if books are not offered for sale. No one is ever forced to buy a certain number of books. Sometimes 6 copies sell, sometimes 600 and that's unrelated to a school's demographics. Publishers offer significant discounts to schools (30-40%) as do most local bookstores and online retailers. The author or publisher can provide an order form. Your PTO may be willing to handle this part of the author visit.

Talk up the author visit to the students! You spent money for the author, spend time preparing students! Read one of the author's books to the students before visit. Have students decide on a theme, produce book reviews or other projects, mention the author visit in daily announcements, decorate the hallways or library, follow the author on Facebook or Twitter, discuss author visit "rules" or come up with questions to ask the author.

Keep your age groupings appropriate. It is difficult for the same literacy presentation to entertain all grades. One grade level is the best, two can work (K/1 or 1/2 or 2/3 etc.) more than that, probably not. The smaller the group, the better, but I've presented to as many as 300 kids at a time, so whatever works best schedule wise is OK. My maximum full-length sessions are 3 to 4 per day plus lunch with students.

Pick the best room in the school for the presentation. The library or other inviting space is best. The gym is NOT a good place for an author visit, but sometimes it's the only space. If the visit must be in the gym, try to make it special...can it look more intimate? Can you decorate? Can mats be placed on the floor so students are more comfortable? Can you turn off lights so the author's presentation can be seen more clearly? Think of where YOU would want to sit and visit for 45 minutes. Keep all presentations in the same room, it's hard to prepare and keep up energy while moving around the school between sessions.

Authors don't discipline students. Please make sure teachers stay with students in the presentation. Though it happens very infrequently, if a student needs to settle down or quit poking his neighbor, the author can't focus on one student who is out of line. Even if an author wants to address the behavior, not knowing the student, any special needs, etc. puts the author at a distinct disadvantage for handling behavior issues appropriately. Please help out!

YES, there's more on the back!

Model appropriate listening behavior. Like teachers, all authors who visit schools have “war stories.” Like the one about the two teachers who sat in the back “whispering” throughout an entire author presentation (and now we all know their very personal gossip!) or another teacher who sat next to her class texting for 40 minutes, never noticing the kindergartener pulling repeatedly at an author’s leg until she glared at the author when he tripped on that child! We realize staff are adults and have adult emergencies, but we work hard so that students are participating and listening, please support that effort!

Author autographs belong in books. Different authors have different policies, here’s mine: I will sign and personalize any version of any book I’ve written. Sometimes students ask authors to sign other author’s books, clothing, etc. I don’t sign other author’s books. If the school wishes, I will either provide a signature for you to run off or have a short “autograph session” at the end of the day to sign paper slips the school or student’s provide. I will not sign ANYTHING else without a parent’s permission (no shirts, hats, shoes, arms, legs, etc.) Please don’t make me be the “bad guy!” Have staff around to explain if the autograph questions come up.

The author appreciates the following: 10-15 minutes between sessions to regroup. A bottle of water. A microphone in case the room or the crowd needs it. Payment on the day of the visit. Directions to the bathroom. All tables, projectors, materials that the author requested set up in advance. An emergency cell number in case of lost author the day of the visit. If visit is all day, it’s nice to have lunch provided (I’m not picky! Cafeteria pizza, sandwich or salad is fine!) I love it when the school arranges a “Lunch with the Author”. I meet with 10 or so motivated students (and/or staff) that you choose and have lunch together—they ask great questions and learn so much about writing in a casual format. I promise to bring cookies!

AFTER THE VISIT

Somehow, someway have students WRITE about the visit. The visit promotes writing, so use the visit to support writing in the classroom. This can be a visit review, a class thank you letter(s) to staff or author, a journal entry, etc.

Give Feedback. If the author provides you with a feedback form (I will!) please fill it out. We love to hear how our work impacted your students plus whether you see places for improvement or have any great presentation or classroom ideas.

Send Photos. If you’ve taken photos or video, please have the courtesy to provide the author with copies or email files. I will NEVER use any student names or specific identifying information in the photos. If the visit is in your local paper or school newsletter, please let the author know or provide a copy.

Recommend. If you liked the author’s visit, please recommend their presentation to other schools, librarians or teachers. Or recommend another school or staff member for the author to contact. Most children’s book authors are not getting rich from book royalties, many of us do school visits in order to continue affording to write. It’s always nice to get referrals.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN’S LITERACY. Most authors are former students who had a caring, engaged teacher like you! We so appreciate all the time and effort you put into these visits and to the student’s lives every day. YOU ARE MY HERO AND THE REASON I WRITE!

Questions?

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