



THINGS TO DO IN ADVANCE FOR AUTHOR VISIT**

- Tell the students and front office the author is coming. It sounds obvious, but there are times when students and the front office do not know who the author is or why he/she is there. Nobody bothered telling them! You don't have to roll out a red carpet or anything, but DO make the kids aware of the upcoming author appearance starting at least a month in advance. Put the author's books on display in the school library. Put a display of book covers up in the hallway.
- Have classes read the books and write book reports or think up questions to ask the author.
- Throw a contest and have the winners receive autographed books.
- Have an art class make posters, banners, and bookmarks welcoming the author.
- Have a writing class write reviews of the author's books.
- Arrange for the students on the school paper to interview the author.
- Call the local newspapers. Maybe they'll send a photographer to cover the event. If they don't, take pictures yourself and submit them.
- If the author writes about a specific subject, make it into a theme day at school. For instance, if it is about sports, schools often allow the kids to wear team caps and T-shirts on the day.
- Talk it up. The more excited you are, the more excited the kids will be. And when the kids are excited, any message the author gives them will really hit home.

THERE ARE A FEW OTHER THINGS YOU SHOULD DO FOR THE AUTHOR IN ADVANCE OF THE VISIT.

- Provide CAREFUL directions to the school.
- Discuss what time the first assembly will be, how many assemblies will be given, how long they will be, and how many students will attend each one. Some authors prefer to talk to the whole school at once, others prefer intimate groups. Some will only do their presentation once or twice in a day. Certainly don't ask an author to do it more than four times. It's impossible to keep the energy level up.
- Discuss the grade range. Some authors give a presentation that sails over the heads of grades K-2. Picture book authors and illustrators may only do K-2.
- Find out exactly what the author will need in terms of equipment—a slide projector, screen, chalkboard, extension cord, etc. Have a microphone ready if the room necessitates it or the author is soft spoken. A glass of water or cool drink soothes a raw throat. Get everything ready in advance so nobody has to scramble around looking for things as the kids are filing into the auditorium.
- Send a letter of confirmation with the date of the visit and fee clearly indicated. Include the school phone number in case of emergency.

ON THE DAY OF THE VISIT

- **Lunch.** It's nice to give the author lunch, even if it's a cafeteria lunch. What I really enjoy is when the school chooses 5-10 motivated kids and awards them "Lunch with the Author." They set us up in a room with pizza or sandwiches and we have a great time. The kids feel special, and I get to bounce my latest ideas off them. If you prefer the author make his own lunch plans, let him know in advance. The worst idea is to make no arrangements at all and simply tell the author to go get something to eat and come back later.
- If the author will be giving multiple presentations, try to do them at one location. It's difficult to move equipment from room to room quickly to set up for successive talks.
- Don't expect the author to discipline students. Some kids are going to act up. If a student is disruptive, have someone step in and take care of the situation. Have the teachers present during the program.
- Pay the author on or before the day of the visit. Don't make the author have to track somebody down at the end of the day and ask for the check. And don't ask the author to donate his or her fee to the school. It puts the author in the position of saying no and feeling guilty about it after putting in a hard day of work.

- **Autographs.** Sometimes kids crowd around the author like he's Elvis and ask to have their notebooks, casts, caps, and foreheads signed. Other times, it doesn't occur to them to ask for autographs. Discuss this with the author in advance. Some don't want to sign anything but books. Others won't sign paperbacks. I think every kid who wants an autograph should get one, whether they buy a book or not. Just in case, have the author sign a few autographs and run a bunch off on a copier. The one time autographs DON'T work is when you have one group of kids leaving the room and the next group coming in. The author usually needs this time to straighten things up, sip a drink, and catch a breath. Don't put the author in the position of having to tell the kids he can't sign right now. Have a faculty member do it.

AFTER THE VISIT

- Have the kids write about the visit, or write a class letter to the author.

When you bring an author to your school, you are not only helping your students, you are also supporting the art of writing. With the exception of a few famous names, most authors are struggling to pay their bills. Visiting schools is very often the only way we can afford to continue creating books.

There are a few things you can do that the author might really appreciate. Invite educators from neighboring schools to watch the presentation. If the author is good, write him or her a letter saying so. It can be used to get future bookings. Tell other principals, librarians, and teachers about a successful visit. And keep the kids informed when the author's future books are published.

TO SELL OR NOT TO SELL

- The reason to bring an author to your school is obviously to promote literacy. Some schools have a policy against selling books to their students. One school of thought is if you don't give students an opportunity to get the author's books, there's no point in bringing an author to the school. Others disagree.
- In any case, authors ASSUME that autographing books will be part of the day. If that's not in the cards, discuss it with the author in advance. There's no doubt it's a hassle coordinating book orders, handling money, and so on. Your PTA will often help with these chores and possibly handle the whole thing for you. The author and his or her publishers should also help (they're selling books, right?). They can provide order forms to send home with the kids, publicity photos, book covers, posters, and other information. Most publishers offer a 40% discount to schools, bringing a \$15 hardcover down to \$9 and a \$3 paperback down to \$1.80. At that price, any child can afford a book if he or she wants one.

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