

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO SET UP AN AUTHOR VISIT IN YOUR SCHOOL

Picture it. Your students engaged in a gripping conversation with a popular children's author. The questions fill the room: "Why did you write such a sad ending? Where did you get your idea from? Is the main character based on someone you know?" When the author shares a passage from a new book, the children listen with wild fascination. The only thing more exciting than this will be the book-signing party sponsored by the PTA, later in the afternoon.

Author visits are exciting events that foster school enthusiasm. When authors come to speak to young people, students are inspired to want to read, write, and learn more about the process of writing. But the success of such an event depends on effective planning. Team up with fellow teachers, parents, students, and administrators and your author day will be a hit.

Prepared by Jamie Kyle McGillian, a founding editor of *Creative Classroom* and a freelance writer in New York.

THE GAME PLAN

What to know when setting up an author visit

Contact the Publisher

Once you decide on an author you'd like to invite to your school, contact the author's publisher at least six months to one year prior to the scheduled appearance. If you're not sure of the publisher, look it up in *Books in Print*, at the library or on-line.

Honorariums

Honorariums vary for each author and can be discussed with the Author Appearance Coordinator.

Get Confirmation

The publisher will send you a confirmation letter spelling out the terms of your agreement, including the honorarium, date of visit, and other details. (Authors should be paid on the day of the visit.)

Customize Travel Arrangements

As the host, you are responsible for making the author's travel plans (including but not limited to making plane reservations, booking hotel rooms, and arranging for ground transportation) unless otherwise specified by the publisher and/or author. These arrangements must be made at least one month prior to the visit. Before setting the author's travel plans, ask about his or her personal requirements. Leave no stone unturned. Start with these questions:

- Do you prefer a nonstop flight? a window or aisle seat? a certain airline?
- Would you like to travel the night before or the morning of the event?
- Would you like someone from the faculty to pick you up at the airport or do you prefer a car service?
- Would you like a health club in or near your hotel?
- Would you like a non-smoking room in your hotel?
- Do you have any dietary restrictions, or medical conditions we need to be aware of, such as allergies, diabetes, etc.?
- Would you prefer a quiet dinner in your hotel or would you like to have an informal dinner with faculty members?

Meet the Author's Needs

All authors vary in their presenting styles. Some use a slide projector, a microphone, or an overhead projector. Some prefer to make their presentations in small, informal settings, rather than large auditoriums. That's why it's best to ask the author well in advance how he or she would like the day's events to be organized.

PLANNING FOR THE VISIT

How to get organized for the event.

Prepare Students

Visiting authors agree that the most important way to ensure a successful author visit is to make sure the students have read the author's books. Be prepared by having the school librarian order multiple copies of the author's books. Post a list of the author's titles in the library. Ask teachers to plan book talks and art projects based on the author's titles. Post signs and flyers around the school to spread the word that the author is coming. Ask students to prepare a list of questions to ask the author. Review the questions with your students.

Buy the Books

Author visits that include book-signing events create much enthusiasm and excitement. This is the student's golden opportunity to exchange a few words with the author one-on-one and to receive a signed book. Order books well in advance directly from the publisher or from your usual source of supply—distributor, wholesaler or retail bookseller. Have students pay for the books beforehand so that no money will have to be exchanged at the event. (The PTA can help coordinate this.) Keep in mind that while paperbacks will keep costs down, hardcovers make treasured keepsakes.

Always order the author/illustrator's most recent book, since this is the book he or she will most likely be discussing. Make sure you order enough books so that you don't run out. If you are confused about how many books to order, you may want to follow this formula:

Paperbacks: Two books for every three children; two to three books per adults at conventions. Hardcovers: One Hardcover or paperback per adult.

Publicize and Generate Excitement

Organize a publicity committee of faculty, staff, P.T.A. members, and students. Ask each member to find creative ways to promote the event. Distribute a newsletter or flyer about the event, make posters or other announcements, and ask the librarian to showcase the author's books. Also plan to have a display of the author's books set up at the appearance. Contact the publisher to send you promotional materials. Have the committee send a press release or letter to your local media announcing the event and invite them to attend. (Always ask the author's permission before scheduling a press event.)

Have Fun Fund-Raising

Work with the P.T.A. to brainstorm creative ways to fund your author event. Host a craft fair, bake sale, or car wash on school grounds.

Set Up a Hospitality Crew

Make an author feel welcome by having a crew of teachers, parents, administrators, and students on hand to give a hearty reception to the author. Set up a welcome wagon, create 3-D displays, and ask the community to become involved by hosting a luncheon. (Ask your local supermarket to donate the food.) Volunteers from the hospitality crew can also chaperone the author on the day of the event.

Request an Honorarium Check

Remember to leave enough time before the day of the event to request an honorarium check from your school or library.

HOT TIPS

Don't surprise your visiting author

- Before you ask the local press to attend Author's Day, make sure the author has agreed to have the press there.
- Stick to the schedule that was discussed with the author. Switching the audience planned for a program or the timing of one can wreak havoc on the authors planned speech.
- Before you set up the video cameras, make sure the author has granted permission to be videotaped or photographed.
- If you're planning on treating your author to a home-cooked meal at your house, let him or her know in advance. The author may have other plans.
- A time schedule is very important. Make sure that there is enough time in between programs as well as enough time to get the author to the airport after the appearance is finished.

THE EVENT

What happens before, during, and after.

The Day Before

Make sure the space where the event will be held is clean and contains enough electrical outlets and seating. Check audiovisual equipment and microphone if the author will be using them.

The Day Of

It's up to you or another point person to keep the event running on schedule. Make sure you have the author's payment ready and give it to the author promptly. During the author's signing, make sure you have bottles of water handy. Also make sure the autographing line moves as smoothly as possible; for example, have someone open books to the correct signing page for the author if the line is long.

The Day After

Have a school-wide discussion about the event. Ask for feedback on what made the event a success and suggestions on what could make it even better.

- Send a thank-you note to the author.
- **Complete and return your host evaluation form to the publisher.** *This is very helpful to Random House Children's Books and the author in planning future appearances.*
- Send parents a newsletter covering the highlights of the event.
- Start planning your next author visit!

SAMPLE AUTHOR'S VISIT SCHEDULE
Use this as a guide when planning your schedule

8:30-9:00

Author breakfast
Faculty and PTA meet and greet the author

9:15-10:00

Author presents for first and second graders in the library

10:00-10:20

Question and answer session

10:30-11:00

School administration and local press greet author in gymnasium

11:15-12:15

Author presents for third and fourth graders in the gymnasium

12:15-12:35

Questions and answer session

12:40-1:35

Author's luncheon sponsored by PTA

1:45-2:45

Book-signing party in the cafeteria

3:00-3:20

Author is shown an array of student projects based on the author's titles

3:30-4:00

Coffee and donuts and an informal chat between the author and the faculty

Remember to allow for restroom breaks during the day!