

# Author School Visits



## How to Have Great Author Visits at Your School

Most of this article is based on what has worked (or didn't work) for me, with my author visits at schools.

### Before you Call to Invite an Author:

Have a list of questions you want to ask and have another list with things the author will want and need to know. I know this sounds overly simplistic, but trust me, as an author who has done my share of school visits, you would be surprised at the number of schools who make the initial call with no idea when the school visit will be, or how much they can afford. An author has a schedule to check, just like the school.

### Information to Have on Hand Before You Call:

- \* Date of School Visit
- \* A rough idea of what the school can afford (fee, travel, room & food)
- \* Number of groups/presentations you will need and ages of students in each presentation/group
- \* Whether you plan on inviting the media (radio, TV, newspapers)
- \* Where you intend for the presentations to be (auditorium, library, classrooms, etc.)
- \* School's contact info

### Questions to Ask on the First Call:

- \* Are you available on the date we have in mind?
- \* Author's fee for the day
- \* Do you have creative ideas to help us hire you in the present economy.
- \* How many presentations can/will you do per day?
- \* What will you include in the presentations and will they differ by age group?
- \* Does the author allow for Q&A at the end of the presentation?
- \* Do you need a microphone?
- \* How many children per group are you comfortable speaking to?
- \* Do you give schools/students a discount on price of books?
- \* How do you arrange book sales? Book signing?
- \* Once arranged, ask for a contract/invoice from author to be sent
- \* What equipment will you need on hand, i.e., water, easel, chalkboard, chair, table

### Children/Teachers:

Make sure the children and teachers know there will be an author/poet coming to the school. Familiarize

the students with the author and their work. Some things that work well are:

- \* Read a bio about the author in class
- \* Take students to the author's website
- \* Hang a photo of the author in the classroom
- \* Make welcome banners and displays to help generate excitement
- \* Draw illustrations of author's work, then hang in rooms and hallways
- \* Read excerpts of author's work on P.A. system each morning
- \* Have students each make a list of questions to ask the author
- \* Send book pre-order form home with children so parents can plan book cost
- \* Invite parents to attend their child's author presentation
- \* If school has marquis, put school visit date and author's name on it
- \* Call media to announce upcoming author school visit
- \* Make sure school office staff knows about school visit and will welcome the author

Anything the school can do to make this an exciting time for students is helpful. Most authors will work with the school, if you ask them, so keep in touch by phone and trade ideas before the school visit. One school I visited actually used the fact that I go by my initials (CJ), and held a contest with the students about what the initials really stood for. It was fun for everyone, and the winner got a free book (I donated it) and her picture taken with me for their school's yearbook.

Another school got very creative when the school district cut their funding. To help cover the cost of an author school visit, they held (prearranged, of course) a "Dinner With The Author Night". They opened it up to the whole town, advertising in the local newspaper, and radio, that the school was holding a raffle for dinner with the author. They sold raffle tickets through the students and the school office for \$2.50 per ticket. The school was more than able to have the author visit -- it was one of the most profitable fundraisers the school ever had ... and I had a wonderful time at dinner with the winning family.

There are all sorts of ways to overcome the cutbacks in school funding in this crazy economy. Talk to the author you are thinking of hiring for your school visit. See what things have worked for them in the past and any ideas they may have for your school for now.

I've often donated a few books to schools so they can sell tickets for a book lottery. Then on the day of my school visit, they had me draw one name during each of my presentations for the winner. That worked very well and generated a lot of excitement before the school visit and during each presentation.

A few more helpful notes: during the presentations, please have the teachers remain with their classes. Children always behave better when they are seated near their teachers. Please don't put the author in the position of being a disciplinarian. They have enough to focus on and may even be dealing with a little stage fright.

In closing, if you've put the author up for the night in a motel, give them a call. Being in a strange town can be a lonely experience. You could offer to take the author out to dinner. They will probably decline, wanting some time alone to prepare for the next day, but I guarantee, the author will certainly appreciate being asked.

I hope your school visit will be a success in every way! If this article has helped and you want to show your appreciation ... invite ME to your school (wink) ...