

Terri's Tips for Terrific Author/Illustrator Visits

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The key to having a successful author/illustrator (referred to as author) school visit is **preparation, preparation, preparation!!!!** You can never start planning too early for your big event. The following is a series of tips to ensure that your author visit becomes a genuine connection between the student and author. Meeting an author should leave your students inspired to create their own work and with a deeper understanding of what an author must accomplish in order to develop a book from idea to publication. For students this should be an experience remembered for a lifetime.

Prior to Making Contact with an Author

Before making contact with an author, you must consider the following questions :

- ✍ What is your budget?
- ✍ What type of program do you want – small groups or large assembly presentations – how many students in each session?
 - What grade level(s) do you want the author to address?
 - What topic(s) do you want the author to address?
 - Where will the presentations take place?
- ✍ When do you want to have an author visit – will it be part of a week long reading event or as the highlight of your book fair week?
- ✍ Will you be inviting more than one author?
- ✍ If the author is not local, would another neighboring school be willing to host the author as well; thereby, splitting the expenses with you for the author's accommodations, etc.?
- ✍ Will you have books available for the author to autograph?
- ✍ Will you use the book sale as a fundraiser to offset the cost of the author visit?

Making Contact with an Author

You are now ready to make contact with an author! You may already have someone in mind. If not, you might consult with your colleagues, visit your local library for suggestions, attend author presentations or book signings at local book stores or contact the publisher or a booking service (such as *Children's Literature*) for assistance. When you make contact with the author or the booking service you must provide specific information that will meet your requirements for the visit.

Once you have obtained a verbal agreement with an author, you should follow-up with a contract or letter of intent. Several authors are able to provide you with their own; if not a sample *Children's Literature* agreement is included at the conclusion of our tips. It is advisable to also have your administrator sign the agreement, as their support is essential for a successful visit.

How to make the day of the visit a wonderful success

Now, the real preparation time begins! Use the following checklist and you can feel assured that the day of the visit will be successful.

- ✍ **Read the books** – the most important thing you can do to prepare for a school visit is to read the books to the students and to encourage staff to read the books in their classrooms – discuss book content and illustrations.
- ✍ Share biographical information about the author with students, staff and parents.
- ✍ Publicize the event – be sure to acknowledge where your funding has come from – for example, if the PTA is supporting the activity, then thank them in a PTA newsletter and encourage parents to attend the presentations.
- ✍ Follow-up with additional newsletter articles, as the day of the event grows closer.
- ✍ Inform your local public library of the upcoming event, invite them to attend and encourage them to publicize the event.
- ✍ To enhance your author's visit consider offering their books for sale to the students and staff for autographing. You may wish to contact *Children's Literature* for book sale information, support and fund-raising opportunities.
- ✍ Make a display of the author's books and encourage parents to come in and peruse them.
- ✍ Plan a week of innovative events to correspond with the author's visit:
 - ✍ deliver daily PA announcements regarding reading topics – invite guests, your administrator, counselor, cook, building service worker, etc. to make the announcement;
 - ✍ sponsor a bookmark making contest;
 - ✍ sponsor a school wide vote for favorite titles by authors who will be visiting and post the results outside the Media Center;
 - ✍ cover classroom doors to look like book jackets; and
 - ✍ videotape upper grade student sharing book reviews of the author's books and play them on your closed circuit or circulate the tape throughout the school.
- ✍ If you are making the books available for autographing, be sure to send the order forms out in a timely manner – and plan to send them out multiple times.
- ✍ When books arrive make sure that they are tagged and ready for the author– make sure to set aside a specific time(s) for the author to sign books on the day of the visit. Explain to students that they may not ask the author to sign slips of paper, etc. The author will only be autographing books (if students already own the books, encourage them to bring them in to have them signed!).
- ✍ Complete a schedule that you share with your administrator, as well as your guest, taking into consideration lunch times and recess times. Invite your administrator to attend a session and perhaps even introduce the author to the students.

Final tips for the day of the event:

Now that the day of the event has arrived and you are fully prepared, this last minute check list will ensure that you too will enjoy the author's visit.

- ✍ Celebrate the author's visit with a large welcome banner.
- ✍ Provide the author with morning snacks, coffee, tea, water, etc.
- ✍ Ensure enough time in the author's schedule for them to have lunch with you, fellow colleagues or students (be sure to inquire in advance what they would prefer). Also, inquire as to special dietary needs for lunch – if available, provide menus from local restaurants from which to select.
- ✍ Assure that the author has a comfortable chair and that the equipment they require is in working condition.
- ✍ Provide a table for the author to use for their belongings, books, notes, water, etc., as well as space for autographing.
- ✍ Provide illustrators with an easel and drawing paper, as many will include illustrating in their presentation.
- ✍ Ensure that teachers are seated with their students during the author's presentation – you or someone from your library staff should always be present to ensure that things are running smoothly and according to schedule.
- ✍ Begin the sessions on time and finish them on time – you must take the initiative to wrap up question/answer times in order for the author to have time to prepare for the next session or for a personal break.
- ✍ Ensure the author's honorarium is prepared in advance.
- ✍ Double check that all books are signed prior to the author's departure – this will alleviate unnecessary tears!

What's next?

Now, that you have hosted a successful author event – what's next?

- ✍ Write the author a thank you note and ask them for recommendations regarding future author visits.
- ✍ Encourage students to write the author and encourage teachers to make class books to send the author.
- ✍ Ask students' during their next visit to the library how they felt about the visit: what did they learn; were they surprised by anything that the author had to say; and what did they think about the steps the author took from concept to published book?