

Bringing An Author To Your School

by Rick Walton

Why Bring an Author to Your School

1. To get students excited about reading.
2. To get students excited about writing.
3. To teach students how to write.
4. To encourage students who might be considering writing as a career.

What an Author Can Do At Your School

1. Talk about what it's like to be a writer. Most presentations explain the pros and the cons, and emphasize important parts of the writing process, such as the need to rewrite.
2. Read the author's books.
3. Give workshops on various types of writing.
4. Answer questions.
5. Appear on panels.
6. Mentor talented student writers.
7. Judge contests.
8. Anything else you can think of.

How to Find a Suitable Author for a School Visit

1. Check out the www.ucwi.org.
2. Ask around. Contact local writers groups, libraries, children's book reviewers, children's literature professors. Get recommendations from any writers you know. Get recommendations from colleagues who have brought in authors.

3. Watch newspapers for articles on recently published books by local authors.
4. Browse the Internet. More and more authors are putting up websites with information on what they can do for you.
5. Subscribe to the Utah Children's Writers and Illustrators Newsletter. This free, monthly, e-mail newsletter will introduce you to local writers, their new books, their awards, their appearances, and their websites. To subscribe, send a blank e-mail to utahwriters-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

How to Get the Author to Your School

1. Plan as far in advance as you can. The more popular the author, the farther in advance you'll have to plan. But even beginning local authors have lives, schedules, events they have to plan around. Sometimes you can get an author just days or short weeks before your event, but don't count on it.
2. Establish a committee of people who will plan the details of the author's visit, including communicating with the author about the specifics of the campus visit. Consider involving students in the planning process.
3. Decide why you want an author to visit and how much you can pay.
4. Contact the author. [Www.ucwi.org](http://www.ucwi.org) has contact information for some authors and illustrators. You can get phone numbers and addresses from the person who recommended the author. If you know in which city the author lives you might find them in the phone book. As a last resort, you can contact them through their publisher. The publisher will usually take your phone number and have the author call you. Have alternate authors in case your first choice is unavailable.

How Much Will It Cost?

Although most writers enjoy visiting schools and talking about their work, doing so takes the writer away from his or her job, writing. They lose not only the time at your school, but all travel time, and preparation time, and recovery time. Making public appearances is stressful for many writers. The average school visit takes two to three times the length of the visit out of the writer's writing time. So most authors, as much as they like to, cannot afford to make many free public appearances. Writers on the average also make a lot less money than people think, and the money from public appearances keeps many authors from starving, especially authors whose sole income is from their writing. The more in demand an author is, the more they'll cost. Top authors charge as much as \$2000/day or more to visit a school. (Most Utah authors charge between \$300 and \$600 per day, some

less, some more.) Lesser known authors or beginning authors might come for a nominal fee. If the author has to travel a long distance to get to your school you'll also be expected to pay travel expenses, put them up in a motel or hotel if necessary, and provide for meals (often as a per diem). And if the author's going to be at your school the full day, you'll need to provide lunch, and even dinner if the event goes into the evening.

There are, however, some things you can do to lessen the cost of an author visit:

1. Go in with another school to share the author for a day, and split the author's full day rate.
2. Arrange to have the author spend a week at your school district, visiting several schools. A weekly rate will sometimes be less per day than the daily rate.
3. Arrange to have the author visit your school when the author's planning on being in your area anyway for some reason. This will save travel and room expenses.
4. Think of an in-kind benefit you could offer the author in exchange for a school visit. Is there an activity in your area the author would enjoy? One writers group in Utah entices national authors to visit by promising them one and two-day horseback riding expeditions.
5. Do some research, find out the author's interests, be creative, and make the author an offer.

How to Make the Author Visit Successful

1. Get publicity information about the author. The author will usually provide these if asked. For some authors you can also get information from *Something about the Author*, from book jackets, or from their websites. Make sure you have a list of the author's books.
2. Make sure your library has plenty of the author's books.
3. Introduce the author's books to the students. Assign them to read something by the author, or have the school librarian or the teachers read the author's books to the students. Some schools buy paperback copies of the author's books and give one to each of the students.
4. Give students some fun assignments that relate to the concepts illustrated by the author's books.
5. Plan the author visit for a time when writing is a major curriculum focus, for example, during a Young Authors fair, or during preparations for a school writing contest. Invite

parents in for the author presentation. Parents frequently get as much from the author visits as their children.

6. Prepare the students for the presentation. Give them some things to look for. If there will be question-and-answer, have them think of some questions.

7. Arrange to have the author's books available for students and teachers to purchase:

A. Arrange for the books. If you don't want to bother with ordering books, a local bookstore will usually be glad to handle the booksales for you. Or if you need a fundraiser, you can order the books wholesale, sell them retail, and keep the profit. Or you can pass the wholesale savings on to the students. Some authors have some books they can also bring to sell. Arrange for books as early as possible. It takes some time to get books in from publishers.

B. Advertise the books. Make sure students are familiar with the books a few days before the author visit. Then a couple of days before the visit send home an order form listing available books and prices. Have the kids bring the money the day of the author visit.

C. Plan time for the author to sign. Arrange to have someone besides the author handle the book sales. Let the author just sign and talk to kids. Discuss with the author beforehand what will be signed. Will the author sign things besides books? (Kids will bring up anything to be signed. I've signed papers, books by other authors, basketballs, shoes, shirts, hands, foreheads, pretty much anything a kid wants me to sign.) If all the kids in the school want a signature you might need to resort to mass production, unless you have lots of time and a very willing author who doesn't get writer's cramp. Before the event, have the author sign a bookmark or something, then duplicate enough copies for all the students.

D. Assign someone to make sure the signing runs smoothly. They should keep students in line, make sure that the author only has to sign the types of things you've agreed upon, and move students with books to have signed to the front of the line. If there are a lot of books to sign, someone should also open up the books to where the author signs and hand the book to the author. People with books to have signed should also be asked to write their names on a piece of paper so the author can get the name right.

E. If you're selling books brought by the author, settle up immediately after the signing.

8. Use the author's time well. Take advantage of the author's expertise. Fill in the author's time with presentations to students, workshopping, signing, consultation with teachers, anything you think would be useful. Make sure the author understands and agrees with the schedule. But make sure the author gets enough breaks.

Day-Of Details

1. Make sure everything the author needs is up and running. Authors frequently need Kodak Carousel slide projectors (make sure the projector works and you have an extra bulb), screens, microphones, podiums, something to write on, etc. (Many authors are moving to PowerPoint.) Have everything up and ready to go before the author arrives. It will make the event much more relaxing for both you and the author.
2. Have a glass or bottle of water for the author.
3. Consider the timing of events and seating arrangements. Plan large assemblies for when the students are most likely to be quiet and in control. Will students sit on chairs or on the floor? (Young students on hard floors can get wiggly during long assemblies. But bringing in chairs has its own difficulties.) If students are sitting at tables, make sure none of them has their backs to the author.
4. Have someone enthusiastically introduce the author.
5. If at all possible, give the author his check at the end of the day. If you need to go through district bureaucracy to get the check, make sure the author knows beforehand.

How to Treat the Author

1. Contact the author in plenty of time for all preparations, yours and the author's, to be made.
2. Confirm the arrangements in writing. In your letter you should describe dates, times, addresses, schedules, types of presentations, grade levels of students, instructions on how to get to your school, confirmation of author's physical needs (projector, microphone, etc.), fees agreed upon, book signing arrangements, and anything else you think will be useful. Explain how you are preparing the students for the author's visit.
3. Have one person in charge of making sure everything goes well for the author. Meet the author at the door of the school at a prearranged time, take them to the first presentation, make sure everything is set up properly, make sure the author gets needed breaks, get the author something to drink, make sure the author gets to lunch, and make sure the author gets to each presentation. At the end of the day make sure the author gets the agreed-upon fee and any other details are wrapped up, have everyone involved thank the author, then escort the author out.

After the Author Visit

1. Do follow-up enrichment activities with your students. Water the seeds the author has planted.
2. Make sure the author has been paid, and all the strings are wrapped up.
3. Write the author a thank you letter. Maybe have kids write thank you letters also. Authors who have positive school visits are more likely to come again and to encourage other authors to visit your school.
4. Start planning next year's author visit(s).