

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!

how to host a

virtual author

visit

bringing authors
& young readers
together



RANDOM HOUSE
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

how to host a virtual author visit

Nothing brings reading alive for young readers like making a personal connection with their favorite authors or illustrators. Sometimes, though, it's not possible for authors and illustrators to come directly to schools and libraries and meet their young fans.

Technology like Skype, Google Talk, and iChat, is making it easier and easier for authors and illustrators to connect with young readers in their classrooms or libraries. Authors or illustrators can have a completely interactive, informative, and most of all, fun visit with young readers, right from their homes, offices, or studios

what to look for in authors & illustrators for a virtual visit:

- Authors or illustrators that make the best virtual visits have outgoing personalities and interact easily with young readers.
- Consider the author's honorarium, just as you would for a visit in person.
- Ask the author or illustrator to prepare some video clips, slides, artwork, anything to keep the young readers engaged in what's happening on screen.
- Discuss with the author or illustrator a time limit for the visit. Thirty minutes is usually a good length for a virtual visit.
- Ask the author or illustrator if they are willing to sign bookplates to give to young readers to place either in their own books or in the school or library's books. Order books through a bookstore or wholesaler as you normally would for an author visit.

how a classroom or library can prepare for a virtual visit:

- Arrange a space for the virtual visit that would be conducive to any author visit. Make sure there is ample room for a large enough screen so all young readers can see the author, and that the sound is loud enough for a full room of people.
- Prepare young readers as you would for a author visit in person. Make sure they are familiar with the author's work and have questions ready. Find support materials for many Random House Children's Books titles at www.randomhouse.com/teachers
- Have an adult facilitate the visit. The facilitator should call on young readers when their hands are raised, help keep the program moving, and be able to troubleshoot any technical issues.
- Take a technology test run a few days before the virtual visit. Make sure you and the author test out the video program, camera, microphones, speakers, and projection on both ends.

connecting interactive

why host a virtual author visit?

an author's perspective:



How is a virtual visit different from a physical visit?



Jarrett J. Krosoczka: Surprisingly, not too different. Students are still learning about my writing process and I still draw pictures for them, too. The major difference is that I'm not physically there to control the crowd, so I rely on my host to help facilitate the conversation. When I visit with students virtually, they can see the actual space where my stories take shape. I give them a tour of my studio and introduce them to my pug, Ralph.

Jarrett J. Krosoczka

is the creator of the LUNCH LADY series, PUNK FARM, and more!

Are books sold during your virtual visits? Is there something worked out for autographs?



JK: Books can be sold during virtual visits! Hosting schools email me a list of books sold and I mail them signed bookplates to be placed in the students' books.

As an author, do you prepare differently?



JK: I test run the video connection with the school a day before the visit. I also make sure that my desk isn't too cluttered!



What are the pros of a virtual visit? What are any limitations to the visit?



JK: The most obvious pro is that it's more affordable for hosting schools. There are no flights or hotels to book. Plus, the cost of the actual author visit is cheaper. It's also easier to reschedule if winter weather cancels classes and you never have to worry about cancelled flights. The only limitation would be the students' physical proximity to me during my presentations. But from what I've found, even when visiting with students virtually, they feel like they met a professional author.



Do you ask that the kids you're visiting with prepare differently?



JK: I ask that educators pump the students up in the same way as my in-person visits. The kids will get more out of my presentation if they're familiar with my books. For virtual visits, it's helpful when educators work with their students to formulate a list of questions for our video chat.

Do the kids respond differently if you're communicating virtually versus in person?



JK: Not that I've found. They are still captivated by the stories behind my books, laugh at my jokes, and love seeing me draw. I mail the drawing to the school afterwards. So just like an in-person visit, they have a physical souvenir of our time together.

why host a virtual author visit?

an educator's perspective:



How is a virtual visit different from a physical visit?



Daniel Rolo

is a fifth-grade teacher at the Monsignor Uyen Catholic School in Ontario, Canada.

Daniel Rolo: Believe it or not, a virtual visit can often be more intimate and personal than an actual visit! The author doing the visit is often able to give students a glimpse of his or her personal life (including their studio or work area) that would not be possible in a traditional in-school visit. These situations make the interviews that much more personal and “authentic” for students, who get to see real authors in a real setting talking about their real work.

Virtual visits also eliminate some of the logistical issues that can arise with booking an in-school visit. Distance and travel time are non-issues, and worrying about booking multiple schools in order to reduce cost and maximize the author's time in an area is also unnecessary. If problems do arise (for example, a snow day cancels the buses and there are no students at school on the scheduled visit date), virtual visits are easily rescheduled with very little inconvenience to either the class or author involved.



Do you sell books during the virtual visit, or work out some way for the kids to have autographs?



DR: We have not sold books during virtual visits, but the author's works are always featured after the virtual visit so that I can capitalize on student interest and engagement. The books usually fly off the shelves in the weeks that follow a visit! (It's also not uncommon for students to want to write/draw their own contributions to the author's work, and I have several students who want to submit their ideas to the author for consideration!)

We have had authors send us autographs after the virtual visit (including signed drawings, etc), which students enjoy. But I have not found that students are disappointed that they can't get an in-person autograph. It hasn't been an issue.

Do you prepare the kids differently?



DR: I do not prepare students any differently for a virtual visit than I would for a personal visit. I help build the hype for the visit just as I normally would. We talk about the book and the author, we read up on the author's biography, and we brainstorm some questions that we want to ask when we connect via video call. In the case of our virtual visit with Jarrett J. Krosoczka, he sent us a link to some videos of him talking about different aspects of his work and career. We watched these short videos as a class and that led to more discussion and questions. On the whole, though, preparing students for a virtual visit isn't much different.

What are the pros of the virtual visit?



DR: Virtual visits are generally less expensive than arranging for an in-school visit. They are flexible in terms of arranging times/dates—if it becomes necessary to postpone a video call, that's much easier to arrange than to re-arrange schedules for a personal visit. They're highly engaging for students—many already use Skype and MSN Chat, so a virtual visit falls within the “language” of their world. Virtual visits are an excellent way to motivate students and engage them with the authors they are already reading!



Are there any limitations to the visit?



DR: Virtual visits may be less slightly interactive than a personal visit if the personal visit includes hands-on audience participation.



Do the kids respond differently if you're communicating virtually versus in person?



DR: I have not found that students respond differently. On the contrary! We always generate more questions and comments during a virtual visit than is possible to answer in the given time. Students do have to be told how to speak during a virtual visit as the technology doesn't allow for multiple voices very well.



What advice do you have for schools and/or libraries that are planning a virtual author visit?



DR: Check with the IT department to make sure it's possible! (There are often bandwidth limitations or network restrictions in place that may make the video call impossible. It's good to know if there will be any obstacles to completing the call before actually booking a call!) As with in-school visits: promote the virtual visits, get students involved and excited about the video call, select authors based on student interest, keep the audience to about 25 students (if you want more interaction, that is). As with in-school visits, select authors who are currently being studied in class or whose work is currently "hot" among students. This ensures a high degree of enthusiasm and interest.

For a list of
Random House
Children's Books
authors who can
do virtual visits,
log on to :

[www.randomhouse.com/
teachers/authors/list.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/list.html)

technology
informative
fun

virtual visits

recommended Web-based video programs

These Web-based video programs are easy to use and not only allow for video chat, but also for sharing files, such as videos, slides, artwork, and more.

skype

www.skype.com

(PC and Mac users)

google talk

www.google.com/talk/

(PC and Mac users)

ichat

[www.apple.com/
macosx/what-is-
macosx/ichat.html](http://www.apple.com/macosx/what-is-macosx/ichat.html)

For more information on

hosting a virtual author visit in your school or library,
visit: www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/appear.html

BOOK ORDERING PROCEDURE FOR AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR APPEARANCES

All book orders should be placed through the Customer Service department at:

1-800-733-3000

When placing a book order, please have the following information:

- 1) complete shipping and billing address
- 2) contact name and number of someone who can be reached during the day
- 3) actual date of author appearance
- 4) titles, quantities, ISBN numbers
- 5) if your school uses purchase order numbers, that number must be on the order

Terms of sale for author appearances:

Purchases:

- 1) 40% discount on all titles ordered
- 2) free freight
- 3) invoices are payable net 30 days
- 4) Random House Children's Books Customer Service department must have purchase order at least **6 WEEKS IN ADVANCE** of the author appearance

Returns:

- 1) option to return unsold books
- 2) return freight is the responsibility of the school
- 3) all returns must be sent to the warehouse at:
1019 North State Road 47
Crawfordsville, Indiana 47933
Attn: Random House Inc. Returns Center
- 4) if returning books, do not pay full invoice amount:
 - a) multiply return by the "unit price"
 - b) deduct this amount from the net invoice amount
 - c) pay balance only

Please make sure that you order enough books for the appearance!