

# Hot Tips for Cool Author Visits

Shenandoah University Children's Literature Conference

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## Benefits

- Gives kids an extraordinary opportunity to talk with a real-live author about a book they have read. (How cool is that!)
- In this super-techie world, author visits give kids a very human connection with books and inspires them to think that maybe they could write a book someday (or even now).
- Celebrates reading (which is quickly becoming an endangered activity!)

## Where to find authors

- The Children's Book Guild of Washington, DC has a website that lists local authors and illustrators; go to: <http://www.childrensbookguild.org> and click "Buy Local" in Guild Resources box on left.
- Educator listservs – just put out a call for recommendations. This is where you'll get your best tips!
- Local booksellers and librarians may have some suggestions.
- Publishers. Ask for the publicity department.

## What do authors charge

- Fees run from \$500 to \$2000 (and way higher for really big authors; think, \$5,000!)
- Travel costs for out-of-town authors: airfare/train fare or mileage, hotel and food. (You will save money if you piggyback onto an author's appearance at a local bookstore or conference.)
- Sype visits are a lot less expensive. Some authors will charge as little as \$150 for one session.

Note: Authors do not expect to be paid in advance, but do expect to get paid the day of the visit.  
Find out from your school if a W-9 is needed from the author and request that in advance.

## Questions to ask prospective authors (to make sure you get a good fit!)

- What types of presentations do you do (assemblies? small groups? hands-on workshops?)
- What grade levels?
- What topics?
- Is it interactive? Will the students be doing a hands-on activity?

## Issues to talk over with the author once you have confirmed a date

- What equipment do you need? (Make sure the equipment is set up and working before the author arrives.)
- Confirm the fee, time and date, the number of presentations and approximate number of students in each presentation.
- The site for the visit (media center, classroom). Most authors like to avoid gyms and cafeterias (when possible) because they tend to be noisy and impersonal.
- Lunch on the day of the visit. Some authors are delighted to be invited to have lunch with a couple of staff members or even a few students; others prefer to spend lunch alone before they need to be "on" again for the students. With out-of-town authors, you should definitely extend an invitation to lunch.
- Travel Arrangements. Who will book the flight and hotel – you or the author? Will someone be meeting the author's plane or train? Will you be taking the author to dinner or suggesting restaurants?
- Book Sales (more info below): Confirm that the author will be willing to spend time signing books.

NOTE: when all the details are ironed out, send a letter of confirmation noting each detail!

## Paying for the author's visit

Most schools use PTA funds to cover the cost of an author visit. But not all schools have well endowed PTAs. Here are some other ways to help finance your author visit.

- Grant money, such as:
  1. Target provides Early Childhood Reading Grants for family reading nights, \$2,000. (Applications are accepted from March 1 through April 30 each year).
  2. NEA provides student achievement grants. <http://www.neafoundation.org/pages/grants-to-educators/>
  3. ALA Innovative Reading Grant is annual \$2,500 award for a program to encourage reluctant and accomplished readers. <http://www.ala.org/aasl/awards/innovative>
- Some schools have Title 1 funds that can be used for author visits.
- Save money by splitting the cost and the day's presentations with a school nearby.
- Charge each child a nominal fee, \$2 or \$3, and treat the visit as an in-school field trip.
- Cut travel cost by piggybacking onto an author's appearance at a local conference or bookstore.
- See if there are local foundations or organizations that might fund author visits, such as An Open Book <http://anopenbookfound.org>

## Book sales

It is a thrill for a child to take home a book autographed by a “real live” author. It tightens the child’s connection to the event and to reading. Organizing a book sale, however, does take time so you may want to enlist the PTA to help you.

### Where to get the books:

- Publishers offer discounts for school orders. Call the sales department for info.
- Some authors will provide the books but most do not. In fact, most authors’ contracts forbid them to sell books.
- If you are a school with more than 70 percent of students on free or reduced lunch, you can order from First Book. Its books are deeply discounted. <https://www.firstbook.org>
- A local bookstore may be willing to handle the book orders.

### Book order form

- Publishers and authors may provide an order-form template. Or you can make your own.
- Order forms need to go out several weeks before the author visit to get the books in time.

### Autographing books

- The autographing should take place away from the children. Otherwise the day’s schedule will get derailed and the students who didn’t get books may feel left out.
- One way to arrange the books for the author is to put them in bags. Have a labeled bag for each teacher and put her students’ books in that bag. On each book, put a post-it with the printed name of the child so it will be spelled correctly in the book.

## Generating enthusiasm for the author's visit

- If you do nothing else: Have the teachers read aloud one of the author’s books! It gives kids a stake in the presentation and makes them more excited about seeing the author.
- Consider a One School One Book event.
- Invite the children to make book trailers.
- Have a contest or raffle; the winner gets to introduce the author.
- Invite children to book talk their favorite books by the author on the school’s TV station or morning announcements.
- Put up posters around the school, on the school website and in PTA newsletter. (Have the author sign the posters after the event to use as prizes later.)
- Display the author’s books in the library.