

# Writers in schools:



## inviting a children's author to your school

### Why?

An author visit to your school is a great opportunity to enthuse students about reading; utilise the author's experience as a professional writer to motivate students to write and provide a valuable learning experience for teachers and students.

An author visit enriches the school in many ways:

- It motivates students, often providing an experience they will remember all their lives.
- It updates teachers, providing a mini in-service through exposure to new authors plus a range of tips and tricks for teaching writing.
- It supports many English outcomes, enhancing teachers' English program and/or other units of work.
- It links to whole school targets identified in the annual planning documents.
- It promotes a writing culture in the school with an increased understanding and valuing of the process and craft of writing.

### What will the author do?

There are a range of presentations authors can be asked to give. The following are the most common but authors are generally happy to vary their presentation to suit the requirements of the school.

- Author talk – how they became a writer, background to some of their books, reading of extracts, answering questions.
- Author talk on publishing process – outline process of writing, editing and publishing a book including examples of drafts, manuscripts, proofs etc.
- Book talk – the author of a book the class is reading discusses it with them providing insights into text and background to writing.
- Writing workshop – practical session where the author talks about the writing process and

aspects of good writing, involving students in targeted writing exercises or drafting a story.

- Writer-in-residence – author is at the school for a number of days presenting author talks, writing workshops and master-classes for gifted and talented students.

The most common presentation requested by schools is an author talk in Children's Book Week. However, recently more schools are moving from this author event to a more focused writing workshop or writer-in-residence format.

For schools with access to a local author, the writer-in-residence format is ideal as a residency over a week or one day a week for a number of weeks offers benefits such as:

- sustained focus on children's literature across the grades and through the school calendar
- promotion of a writing culture
- opportunities for teacher-librarians and teachers to develop aspects of the school's literacy program by conducting author studies and enjoying related creative activities
- the opportunity for students to engage in discussions about the author's work, to take part in writing workshops and to enter into meaningful conversations about their own writing.

### Funding the visit

The [Australian Society of Authors](#) recommends rates and conditions for author visits to schools. Some authors ask higher fees than the ASA rates. If you use a booking agent you will have to pay an agent's fee as well. Some authors organise their own visits so check out their website for information about bookings. You will also have to cover travel and accommodation if the author is outside your area.

Some people think that if the author promotes or sells their books, they shouldn't charge a fee. In fact, authors receive a very small percentage of the RRP of their books, in most cases \$1 (or less) for every copy sold. Most authors are self-employed receiving no sick pay, holiday pay or superannuation. Many rely on income from school visits to allow them to continue writing.

The visit can be self funding by including the cost in the term's activity statement for each grade or charging a per head fee at the time of the visit.

Grants are often available to meet some of the costs of an author visit. Possible sources of funding are: priority schools programs, state and federal government funding for the Arts, state branches of the Children's Book Council of Australia, philanthropic trusts etc.

Contact your local public library, bookshop, other schools in the area or the nearest writers' centre. They may also be planning an author visit or they may be interested in a joint submission for funding.

If travel and accommodation make an author visit unaffordable, consider a virtual visit via a chat room and forum or a video conference. Most education departments have secure sites you can use for these sessions.

## Planning

### Timing the visit

- Before booking an author, make sure you have considered all activities such as camps, whole school days of celebration, sports carnivals, music festivals and days when formal testing is taking place. Talk to the sports, music and drama coordinators as they may have a tentative date that is not yet in the school calendar.
- Try to spread the author visits across the terms – having an author visit for years three and five students in term one prior to NAPLAN testing may provide support for teachers and children in developing writing skills. The best time for younger students is early in term four, when children can confidently begin to approach a supported writing task.
- Consider the venue for author presentations –

are there days when the library or school hall will not be available for these events?

- If you want an author for Children's Book Week you need to book at least six months in advance. Many popular authors are booked up years in advance. Outside Children's Book Week you will have more choice of authors.

### Research your author

- Consult colleagues prior to booking authors, some may have very definite opinions about who will be suitable.
- Find out as much as you can about each possible author: make a preliminary call to the relevant booking agency; read reviews and interviews in magazines such as *Magpies* and *Reading Time*; conduct an internet search; speak to known and trusted booksellers (many of them have extensive contact with authors via conferences and in-store appearances;) talk to other teacher-librarians to get recommendations.
- Some authors feel most comfortable working with a narrow range of ages, whereas other authors confidently work with children of all ages. Consider inviting different authors for different grades.
- Instead of timetabling a visit to every class in the school, organise an assembly so all the students can meet the visiting author then have the author present longer sessions for the most appropriate grades.
- Many of the most popular authors limit the number of author visits they do so make a list of authors you are interested in.
- Be open-minded about authors – many new and less well-known authors do great school presentations.

## Organising the visit

### Author

Speak to the author prior to the visit to:

- discuss the content of their presentation and how you can support them
- ask for an email address for ease of communication

- establish what equipment is needed – whiteboard and markers, data projector, sound system, laptop etc
- check dietary requirements
- confirm fee and method of payment; request invoice in advance (if you are using an agency this is discussed with them).

Send the author:

- detailed timetable listing grades and number of students in each session
- map of school including parking details
- information about the school and students
- your mobile number in case of emergency.

### **Administration**

- Check all dates are included on the school calendar. Provide all members of the executive and school administrative staff with the dates and brief information about author in writing.
- Create a folder for all material related to the visit
- Organise morning tea and lunch for the author
- Write up the timetable, distribute to staff and post it on the staff room notice board
- Purchase extra copies of the author's books
- Arrange for payment to be made to the author at the end of the visit (cheque or direct debit)
- Organise permission notes and collect payments from students if necessary.
- Consider contacting the local newspaper to arrange an article.

### **Teachers**

- Provide teachers with copies of the author's work and biographical information to share with their class ahead of the visit. Provide teaching ideas – some publishers' and authors' websites have excellent units of work or teaching notes available to download.
- Provide a timetable for the visit on brightly coloured paper. Arrange with each teacher for students to escort the author to their classrooms if necessary.
- Ask teachers to introduce the author and

arrange for a student to thank them at the end of the session.

- Maximise the benefits of the author's visit – teachers are expected to attend and participate in the session with their class.

### **Students**

- Read excerpts of the author's work during library times in the weeks prior to the residency. Liaise with teachers so this does not duplicate classroom activities.
- Encourage students to produce drawings and writing about the author, or to prepare short stories and anecdotes written in a style similar to the author's. Use these on a poster to greet the author on entry to the school or classroom.
- Ask students to prepare information about themselves and the school for the author – send this to the author.
- Brainstorm questions to ask the author. The questions should be about the author's books and about writing in general rather than more personal questions such as, *How old are you?*

### **Parents**

- Include an article in the school newsletter to inform parents about the author visit.

### **The Visit**

#### ***The day before***

- Ensure the venue is set up and equipment tested.
- Set up displays in school foyer and venue.
- Inform front office staff about the visitor and who to contact on arrival.
- Place cheque or confirmation of payment in an envelope with a thank you card.
- Check all involved have the timetable.
- Locate school camera.
- Send author a brief email – *'looking forward to seeing you tomorrow'*.
- Remind students if books are for sale or to bring any copies of the author's books for signing.

### **On the day**

- Greet the author and explain the layout of the school and location of the toilets, staff room etc.
- Introduce author to the Principal.
- Offer refreshment prior to their presentation.
- Provide water jug and glass for each session.
- Have students or teachers escort the author around the school if necessary.
- Introduce the author to class teachers and give them an opportunity to chat at morning tea.
- Ensure the author has a quiet spot for withdrawal during breaks; some people thrive in a busy staffroom, others are simply overwhelmed.
- Take photographs for school records and notice board.
- If possible, schedule a culminating activity so that children can share their writing and celebrate the author's visit.
- Have students thank the visitor on behalf of the school.

### **Follow up activities**

- Complete draft stories started in the workshop; discuss the author's writing tips and read more of his/her books.
- Publish children's writing and reports in school newsletter.
- Discuss the visit with students and record their comments to send to author.
- Ask teachers to complete an evaluation form.
- Provide feedback to authors, passing on relevant comments from students and teachers.
- Make a record of the visit using photos or PowerPoint for display.

### **Booking an author visit**

Lateral Learning (Sydney) <http://www.laterallearning.com.au/speakers.html>

Show and Tell (Melbourne and Perth) <http://www.showtell.com.au/>

Booked Out (Melbourne) <http://www.bookedout.com.au/>

Speakers Ink (Brisbane) <http://www.speakers-ink.com.au>

Carole Carroll (Adelaide) <http://www.users.bigpond.com/c.carroll/>

Nexus Arts (Melbourne) <http://www.artsnexus.com.au>

Children's Book Council of Australia <http://www.pa.ash.org.au/authorvisits/default.asp>

Performances for schools <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/pfs/authorisedperf.htm>

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