

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF AN AUTHOR VISIT

I've done hundreds of school visits and while the students are always wildly enthusiastic as soon as I start drawing and we make our story together, there's a big difference between the schools that get the most out of my visit and those that get the least. It has nothing to do with how much energy I put into my presentations – I always give 100%. The difference is in the preparation the students – and the teachers – have received.

When most of the kids and all of the teachers have read at least one of my books, they can listen with a sense of who I am and what kind of stories I tell. They get more out of hearing about my process, have better questions, and come away with a better sense of what being an author means.

I give either general presentations or writing/journaling workshops. In the presentations I talk about where I get my ideas and how I go from idea to finished book, ending with a story that the students create themselves while I illustrate it for them. We talk about different endings, how they shape the story, and what makes for a good ending. In the workshops, we work on characters, first sentences, pacing, active language, and endings. There isn't enough time to write a story, but the point is to inspire students and give them the tools so they can write on their own and not get stuck.

I give three 45-minute presentations or workshops or a mix of both. The workshops are best limited to 50, while general presentations can work for over 300 students. I don't use powerpoint, but ask that you provide an old-fashioned easel, large pad of paper, and markers (with fresh ink, please!). A mic and some water are also needed.

Students and many teachers will want to buy books. I'm happy to sign (books only!), but I don't provide books myself. I can refer schools to local independents or directly to publishers for educational discounts. It's best to send home order forms weeks in advance so that students have already paid for books by the time of the visit, but they can also bring cash that day so long as you know to order some extra books – they'll be bought, I can promise you! I've written over 50 books, so the list can be daunting, but I'm happy to put together a recommended book order that fits your school. Usually keeping the choices to no more than ten titles is a good idea.

Scheduling an author visit is an investment in time and money. If we work together, everyone will come away excited, inspired, and ready to read and write. Those are the school visits people remember, the best kind for all of us.