

Are author appearances at bookstores are beneficial?

Q: Do you feel author appearances at bookstores are beneficial? How can I interest stores in inviting me to speak or do signings at their stores?

The advantages of doing bookstore appearances generally outweigh the disadvantages. These include helping to sell more books in the local community and gaining additional publicity. The most important reason for doing store appearances, according to Hannah Schwartz, owner of Children's Book World in Haverford, Pennsylvania, "is to develop strong relationships with store owners and employees who are in a position to recommend your books –not only to consumers, but to teachers, librarians, and book fair buyers."

Many authors who have done bookstore appearances will tell you that the down-side is that you can never tell how many people will show up. With that in mind, authors should make sure to help stores draw crowds.

One way is to go beyond a basic autograph session and develop a special program. If you have a Halloween book, do a pumpkin-carving workshop. If you have a book about relationships, ask the bookstore owner, a reading specialist, and a guidance counselor to join you in conducting a program for parents about selecting related children's books. You may also want to help your area bookstore coordinate a local authors night. These are much more likely to attract the public than a two-hour autograph session.

Be sure to give the store enough advance notice to list your event in their newsletter and to send out promotional flyers. Ask people you know to come to the event and to spread the word. Find out what publicity the store plans to do. If necessary, supplement the store's efforts by sending announcements to local newspapers and radio stations to get listed on event calendars. If the event is newsworthy, call editors to offer to do press interviews. You or the store should also notify area librarians and reading teachers, who may bring groups to the event.

If store owners realize you are willing to help make the event a success, they are more likely to have you back in the future and the relationship may have long term benefits for you both.

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