

How can I help ensure that my school visits go smoothly?

Q: I usually make my own arrangements to speak at schools. What do you recommend doing to ensure that these visits go smoothly?

You should decide in advance what you would like to charge for a two hour visit, a one day event, or an overnight stay and establish an honorarium rate. This amount varies depending on how well known an author or illustrator is and how willing they are to spend time on the road doing appearances. The best way to get an idea of the rates you can charge is to talk with other authors and illustrators on the school and library circuit. Once you've decided on a rate structure, you should specify that up front when you are asked to do an appearance. If there are travel and lodging costs involved with a particular engagement, you should ask for reimbursement for your out-of-pocket expenses. These costs can be tallied and submitted after you return home, but it is advisable to ask that the honorarium be paid with a check at the end of your visit.

You should also think in advance about the kinds of presentations you are willing to do. Will you speak in front of a large audience? Are you equally comfortable talking with children and adults? Do you prefer that the teacher stay in the room while you speak? (This is usually a good idea, or you may find yourself acting like a substitute teacher trying to discipline a class, rather than like a special guest). What type of equipment do you need to do your presentation? How much time do you need between sessions to prepare for a new group?

Consider the preparation you would like to have the coordinator do to prepare for your visit. Ask that the class or group read at least one of your books in advance. Suggest that they prepare questions. Advise the coordinator on how to order books from the publisher for resale, or suggest that they contact a local bookstore to arrange for books to be sold. Talk with the event coordinator about all these issues before you agree to make the visit to find out what their expectations are and to explain what you are willing to do.

Finally, draw up a contract with the specifics of your agreement with spaces for you and the coordinator to sign. Send one copy for the host to sign and return one copy to confirm your agreement. 6:7/94