

## **Benefits of Author Visits**

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There is nothing quite like school author visits to get kids reading, writing, and understanding the creative process. It's not magic. It's not talent. It's not even the books the author has written that make these visits so successful. It's because meeting authors makes the writing process, books, and the authors themselves accessible and real to students. Here is what school author visits can do:

### **Promote reading**

When students learn the “inside stories” and ideas behind books, they can't help but be drawn to them. Students identify with the struggles and joys of the writing and publication process because they hear about it directly from the author. Authors become real to students, opening up relationships with the books they read. Because they have a new understanding of what goes on while an author writes, students can start recognizing the choices made by authors of the books they read, which helps them develop the ability to make predictions, inferences, and associations, and other traits of good readers.

### **Motivate writing**

When authors visit classrooms with their favorite tips and tricks for teaching writing, students are eager to give writing a try. Hearing from published writers about their real life process, from ideas to publication, often gets kids cranking out manuscripts long after the author visit is over. The cost of an author visit per child is low, especially when it has the potential to affect students' future success. If I had met an author as a child, I would have been on this path decades earlier.

### **Demystify creativity**

Authors are ordinary people. We're often put on pedestals, as if a magic genie granted us the author wish. We often spend time alone writing, wait in post office lines, and do our household chores like everyone else. Authors become authors by being persistent. Talent just means that something comes easy for someone, but writing is rarely easy. It never comes out the way you plan. You hit walls and want to quit. Every new story makes you feel like you don't know what you're doing. That's all part of the creative process, and an author can tell kids how it is.

### **Encourage risk-taking**

When students write specific assignments in school, their audience is the teacher. They do what they need to do for the grade and shy away from anything extra that might not please their teacher. There are exceptions to this, of course, but exposure to authors who communicate their processes and who offer support for classroom writing through their ideas, philosophies, and materials, students may learn to take risks and discover their unique voices.

**Ignite sparks**

A school author visit has the potential for jumpstarting not only writing projects, but for following any dream. I've heard from students and teachers who pursued passions they had resisted because of something I said during school author visits.

After talking about my inner critic, a teacher came to me in tears saying she figured out why she hadn't let herself paint and couldn't wait to pull out her watercolors. There is power in hearing about someone else's path.

**Validate teachers**

Teachers often tell me how they've said something over and over to their students, but it doesn't sink in until they hear it from me during a school author visit.

Teachers become like family to kids. The students use selective listening, or what is said goes through a filter they've developed. But, when heard with new ears from an author they admire, the information becomes real. As a past teacher, I'm thrilled to validate classroom teachers.

**Form friendships**

I've made wonderful friends during school author visits. Teachers and students email me. They find me on Facebook, Twitter, and other online sources. Kids grow up and continue to share their writing, artwork, and personal news with me. Some teachers have become creativity coaching clients, and others have consulted with me about writing workshops or signed up for continuing education classes from me. But greater than this community that enriches my life are the relationships kids form through their writing. Students have organized writing clubs, critique groups, or found writing partners. They find their tribe through passion, and passion is contagious.

Isn't this what we want for all students?