

Back in School Again: Doing author visits to schools.

By Shutta Crum.



SETTING IT UP:

It's important to have a website. Most contacts come through my website, or via word-of-mouth. After contact is made, I send a contract and a packet with PR materials, background info on myself, and a sheet about places kids can get their writing published. [You can find a sample of my contract and the publishing page for kids on my website. Site: www.shutta.com .]

LENGTH:

For preschool through 1st grades, the longest presentation I will do is 45 minutes. It can be as short as 20 minutes, depending upon what the host school needs. ***2nd grade and up*** most presentations are an hour or slightly more. If a writing workshop is scheduled the time is often longer. NOTE: ***for some middle schoolers/high schoolers*** I find doing a series of short (20 minutes) small group sessions (10 students, or less) in a quiet spot like the library, can be fun and more useful to those kids who really want to attend. In this case not all the students are seen, just those in certain classes, clubs, or who are hand-picked by the teachers.

AGENDA for an assembly-type program: (Approx. 1 hour.)

--Introduction by teacher/principal/librarian.

--Oral participatory storytelling "Everyone, raise your hand if you like stories." I open with a telling of "The Tailor") which gets the whole group involved as there is a part for them. The tailor makes a story himself, so this leads into how authors work.

--Then a quick 30 second rundown to tell them what we are going to do;

1. Talk about where writers get their ideas.
2. Share/read some of my books and other stories.
3. Talk about how books are made, and show some of the steps along the way.
4. Show some slides of me working and where I get my ideas.
5. Assure them that there will be a time for questions at the end.

--Read one of my books. (I have all the pages on a PowerPoint presentation I can use for big crowds--as you can't see the pictures in the back if I just hold up the book.) So the teacher/librarian moves through the slides on the laptop for me as I face the audience and "tell" the story . . . or, if I have a remote I can move the slides myself. It is well worth scanning a picture book to do this!!

--Talk about where I got the idea for that book. How other ideas are generated. ***Show slides.*** * I like to move the slides forward myself as I talk and stop to show props. I bring many show & tell items. A box with "treasures" in it from vacations. A rainstick, a thunder-maker, other hand-held small musical instruments. Ideas are enhanced by all 5 senses, etc.

--For older kids I outline a typical "Goosebumps" plot--rising action on a whiteboard using a volunteer from the crowd and making up a silly scary story as I go.

OR

--For younger kids: I demonstrate how stories must have a beg., middle and end by use of a silly story of an elephant falling from the sky. (Stop after beg. and ask, "Is this a story yet?" Stop after middle, ask, "Is this a story yet?" "What do all stories need?" "An end!" they yell.)

--Show the steps in how a book is put together while also talking about working with an illustrator.

For picture books: (I also do a version of this with older kids. Some may be interested in being

an illustrator, etc.)

1. 1st messy draft
2. thumbnails/dummy/sketches from illustrator
3. better drawings (if your editor sends you these)
4. a print sheet (huge sheet that the entire book is print on). You can ask for this from the company. Great for school visits.
5. an f & G/galley.
6. Finally hardcover shows up in stores.

For novels:

I show the marked up and completely flagged manuscript. Then I pantomime how I felt when I got it back . . . and talk about persistence, practice, revision, and how many times I had to rewrite the whole 200+ pages . . . GASP!!!! (“Do you ever have to rewrite something that many times for your teachers? Do you ever get back marked up homework?” *Well . . . I don’t feel sorry for you!*)

- Read another book. Tell how I got that idea. If it’s a younger crowd, we do a fingerplay* to accompany this. If it is all older kids I read from the novel or from a forthcoming novel.
- Q & A for about 10-15 minutes. (Shorter for K-1st grades) Remind little ones that questions begin with “Who, What, Which, Why, How, When,” etc. Teachers appreciate this.) I keep an aisle down the center (behind the laptop/projector), then I can walk about and hear their soft voices.
- Leave email address for teachers in case there are follow-up questions. Sometimes I’ll bring more copies of the list indicating publishers that publish writing by children (or they can make copies for their teachers from the one I sent in the packet).

***NOTES:**

SLIDE SHOW:

Use PowerPoint, easy to manipulate. If you want to see a sample show, my school slide presentation is at AuthorStream (long!): <http://www.authorstream.com/Presentation/Shutta-88213-shutta-crum-2008-school-powerpoint-slides-visits-author-writing-publishing-childrens-books-presentation-timed-upload-education-ppt/> . Or, you can visit my website, and find a link there. Lately, I have been sending my slides in advance of my visit as an attachment to an email so it can be ready when I get there.

FINGERPLAYS:

You can use the classics, but change the words to fit one of your books/themes. Everyone can do “Five little __ (somethings) __ sitting by the door./One __ (verb here, like “zoomed”) away and then there were four, etc . . .” Or, instead of “I’m a little teapot . . .” Use: “I’m a little zebra, black and white . . .”

For my skunk book I use: “Five little skunkies jumping on the bed. . . and . . . Mama called the doctor and the doctor said, “Put that little stinker to bed!” (Always elicits giggles from the little ones. And I introduce it by saying, “You know sometimes authors take something we know well and change it a little to make it their own.)

MORE: Be flexible, have more material with you than you can use, so you can fall back on something else if things go wrong. Read the article at my website about successful programs with young children. You’ll find a link to it at: <http://www.shutta.com/appearances/for-teachers> .

HAVE FUN!

Happy visiting!
Shutta