

Authors to Alaska

Author Visits

(Section A-6 of the *Handbook for Alaska K-12 School Libraries, 2000*)

Inviting authors to visit your school is a great motivator for reading. Students of all ages love to meet authors and authors generally like to stay in touch with their readers. Making arrangements for author visits in Alaska may be more challenging than in other states but many schools arrange author visits each year. In this section we have included names of groups to contact regarding author visits as well as tips for hosting an author in your school.

Making the Author Connection

The Alaska Library Association has a roundtable of members called "Authors to Alaska" (A2A, for short) made up of public, school and other librarians interested in coordinating author visits to Alaska. A current list of Alaska authors is available from Carol Race, the A2A Chair. Also, the Youth Services Librarians at the Anchorage Municipal Libraries and Children's Librarians at the North Star Borough Public Library in Fairbanks can usually give you information about planned author visits for any given year. Reading coordinators of the large school districts are also usually active participants in bringing authors to Alaska. The Alaska Center for the Book frequently supports author visits as well and includes members from booksellers who also sponsor visits.

Unless you are experienced at arranging visits and have contacts with authors and publishers yourself, it would probably be best to rely on, or at least coordinate with, one of these groups for scheduling visits by authors from outside Alaska.

Alaska Authors for Children and Youth

Alaskan authors are frequently easier to work with, since they have fewer travel problems and are usually well acquainted with the differences which make Alaskan visits unique. At the end of this section is a list of Alaskan authors who have made visits to schools. You can contact these authors yourself to set up visits. Please remember that all the tips given for planning and managing an author visit apply to our own celebrities as well as those who come from Outside.

I. Planning the Author Visit

Begin planning far in advance. (Busy authors book at least a year in advance.)

Be willing to be flexible in terms of dates and authors.

Be very careful with budgeting. Generally travel expenses, hotel, meals plus an honorarium are expected. Some authors will only travel first class, or may have to have special diets, or require a traveling companion. All these details need to be specifically set out in your contract. Firm sources for your funds have to be verified and reliable. (Do not plan to use money from books sold or charges collected while the author is there as part of your budget. What if there's a disaster and no one comes?) PTAs, school budgets, bookstores and other local businesses may all be sources for funds. Coordinate with a public library, other schools, districts or groups to share expenses. Publicize the event.

1. Many publishers have promotional materials such as biographies, posters, photos, study guides; some provide free books.
2. Displays
3. Newsletters
4. Press releases and/or interviews for newspapers and radio may be arranged. Prepare your students for the author's visit. Promote books, involve your teachers, have contests with books or pictures. Rehearse your students for behavior, appropriate questions, etc. Consider selling the author's books in a Book Fair-type plan (see entries under Vendors/V-1 and Book Fairs/B-5) containing a schedule for autographing. Many authors like to be involved in the planning for presentations and would appreciate some options. At the least, authors should know well in advance details on the following:
 - Age of students in groups
 - How many groups; general schedule for the visit
 - Setting (what kind of room will be used; what kind of equipment is available)
 - Length of time for each presentation
 - What you expect in the presentation (question/answer, presentation about writing, reading from book, learning activity with children, etc.)

II. The author visit:

Be sure that the author is met on arrival and transported to his/her accommodations: Think through mealtimes and menus to assure that the author is physically comfortable during his visit.

If at all possible, set up some arrangements for the author to see the sights that make your location unique and to meet interesting people. Remember, this may be the author's first (or only) impression of Alaska.

Do not expect the author to be "on" while on break or at lunch. Down time is very important for re-grouping and preparing for the next presentation.

Author expectations:

- ❖ Clear understanding about expenses and fees, usually with immediate payment.
- ❖ Adult presence (the teacher and/or the librarian) to help with discipline and maneuvering kids through autograph lines.
- ❖ Reasonable schedule.
- ❖ Feedback on the success (or lack) of the visit.

Possible questions for an author to address:

- ❖ How he/she got started writing children's books.
- ❖ Why he/she writes children's books.
- ❖ Where ideas come from.
- ❖ How long does it take to write a book?
- ❖ Stories behind the books.
- ❖ Method of writing the books (pencil, typewriter, computer, etc.).
- ❖ Family make-up and hobbies outside writing.

III. After the visit

Write a personal letter to thank the author and encourage children to do the same.

Share feedback, e.g. evaluation, student comments, with author.

Evaluate the visit with your own on-site committee and with the visit coordinator if you have worked through an outside agency. This kind of de-briefing will help you improve the next visit.