

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF AN AUTHOR VISIT

I've been very blessed. I get about three hundred requests a year to visit schools. Even though my heart wants to say yes, it is just plain impossible to get to all of them. So I have to figure out which schools I should accept. I want to come to the schools that are excited, enthusiastic, and prepared. Believe it or not, some are not.

Let's talk for a minute about visits to those schools. Let me give you an example: I get up on stage--smiling, cheerful, ready to present--and I ask casually for students to raise their hand if they've read *Tears of a Tiger* (or another title). Thirty kids out of an audience of 400 raise their hand. Many of the students in the audience have read none of my books. That's SO discouraging. Why did this school invite me if the students had not read the books?

Here is another example: I get to a school and find that the students actively check the books out of the library, but none of the classroom teachers use the books in class. How can I generate enthusiasm for books that the classroom teachers don't consider important enough to include? I understand about curricular requirements and testing pressures the lack of time to teach it all. Truly I do. But if the books are not taught in at least some of the classes, there is no reason for me to come.

I've been to hundreds of schools where the kids are pumped up, the teachers are excited, and the libraries can't keep the books on the shelves. I've also been to schools where ONE teacher has read ONE book out loud to ONE class, (Yep, I've been there!). It's just more fun if everybody--staff and students alike--gets involved in the process of an author visit. I'd venture to say that any author you invite would agree with me.

When I do a school presentation, I use extraordinary amounts of energy. I laugh, and I elicit laughter. I'm dramatic, exciting, and inspirational. I read from the books, let students help me act out passages, and I dramatize parts as well. It's very hard work. When I perform in front of a group, I give my all. I expect to speak to an audience that can absorb it and share it with me. How discouraging to speak to a room full of students and ask for questions, and not one of them can think of anything to ask because they are not familiar enough with the books.

Now, I certainly don't expect every child to have read every book. But I DO expect every child to have read at least one. Two is better. They'll enjoy the presentation more, and so will I. Sometimes a school will assign a certain title to each grade level. That works fine as well. (Check with me and I'll make suggestions as to which title would be most appropriate for which grade.) But again, immersion and enthusiasm makes for a wonderful author visit day

Since I've been a teacher all my life, I feel very comfortable in just about any school situation. I'm one of the few authors that knows what it's like for teachers as they bring 500 teenagers into an auditorium. I can handle most students with ease, but occasionally someone might try to overstep the bounds of decorum. When that rare occasion happens, I expect a staff member to be there to back me up. I don't want the student to be removed, because that is the kind of young person who needs what I have to offer, but I DO want a staff member to make their presence known. Which reminds me--let's not do like the school I visited which did the "drop and disappear" technique. I found myself in an auditorium with 500 kids and 2 teachers. Legally, staff must remain with their students.

During the presentation, I'll talk to the students about reading and writing, and the writing process, and the joy of finding a good book. It's very high energy and lots of fun. I allow lots of time for them to ask questions as well. I will do two large group assemblies, (no limit to the number of students) then a smaller

reading/writing workshop with selected students, perhaps those who have read all the books or who have met other requirements (no more than thirty students). I need at least an hour with each group, with time between each session to catch my breath. We also need to plan into the schedule times for book sales and signing.

About numbers of students: I can handle very large groups with no problems (it helps to have been a teacher), but I CANNOT speak to both sides of a gym. That's just not fair to any speaker. Last school year I had a really bad experience with a school who tried to fit too many into the gym. A thousand kids, 500 on each side, and I had to do what a whole basketball team can't do--keep them focused. It was very, very difficult. So one side of the gym is fine, as long as I have that hand held wireless mike so I can move around. But two sides--I just can't do it.

I need no special AV equipment except for a wireless, hand-held microphone (not lavalier). I'd also like several bottles of water. They do not have to be cold. Actually, room temperature works best for the throat of a speaker. Other than that, I'm well prepared to educate, entertain, and inspire your students.

Send me a tentative schedule for the day well ahead of time, and we can fine-tune it so it works with your school schedule and my experience in what works best for me as well. I will not visit individual classes, nor will I do more than three student presentations. I will, however, do a workshop for teachers before or after school. It is both motivational and inspirational. Teachers are often interested in the two inspirational books I wrote for them- -Teaching from the Heart and Not Quite Burned Out, But Crispy Around the Edges.

Please do not schedule me for lunch with students. It ends up being another presentation, because I feel like I have to make them feel comfortable and special about being there, and I don't get to eat or relax. I am a severe diabetic and eating is medicinal for me. Eating with staff or teachers is fine. But please not with students. I'll join them at their special lunch function, but only if I get to eat first. I hope you understand.

I'll sign books until my fingers fall off, but I can't sign notebooks, or pieces of paper, or tee shirts, or body parts. (I've been asked!) ☺

IMPORTANT: Video recording of my presentations in any format is NOT allowed. Permission will NOT be granted to do so. Thank you for understanding.

For financial details, please contact: WME|IMG Speakers 212-903-1400

info@wmeimingspeakers.com

<http://wmeimingspeakers.com>

It usually takes about a year to set up a school visit. My schedule is very full and I block out writing times as well, so the days I have available for school visits are limited. I really want my visit to your school to be successful and memorable. Let's work hard together to assure that the students, and their teachers as well, will be excited, prepared, and enthusiastic about having me come there. It is a waste of my time and yours, and a waste of a fairly large sum of money, if the students are not prepared. Let's make it the best day they've had all year. I'll do my best to make it wonderful for them, but I need your help before I get there so the magic can happen. Let's make it fun!

I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Sharon M. Draper