

Some children see themselves as readers, but many have a difficult time making the connection between the written word and writing. Meeting an author, either in person or virtually, can create new readers among skeptics and spark for your students an association between pleasurable reading and writing as a potential creative outlet—or eventual career path. Similarly, meeting an illustrator who shares their artistic process can demonstrate for your students how creative energy and talents can be channeled into unexpected formats well beyond the classroom. Arranging an author or illustrator visit is easier than you might suspect and a terrific way to enhance literacy in your school community.

Here are some steps to get you started:

1. **Survey Your Needs:** Who do you plan to serve with the author visit—a specific grade or two, or the entire student body? Knowing your audience will help you narrow or broaden your search accordingly to identify a good-fit author or illustrator for your readers.

You can also choose to host an author, illustrator or a person who is both! Some children’s picture book authors and graphic novelists are author-illustrators and create both the words and pictures for their work. It might be that one or the other best suits your community, or you might seek an author-illustrator who covers both sides of the creative process.

2. **Consider Your Budget:** It helps to have your budget in mind as you begin your search. The time these creators spend with your students is time they are not in their studio making more work, so expect to pay several hundred dollars for relative newcomers and several thousand dollars for a presentation by a seasoned or award-winning creator.

Some authors will charge you for a half- or full-day and others may charge by the presentation. If your budget is constrained, see if other schools in the area might split the cost of a day with you.

3. **Crowdsource and Capitalize:** You may have many talented local authors or illustrators available for an in-person school visit, or it could be you’ll need to plan for travel logistics and other expenses. Alternatively, if you are making virtual arrangements, you may need to work around a time change and technological logistics, but you will save money on travel arrangements and can potentially welcome an author from far away.

Check with your librarian to see if a particular creator matches what they work on with students or ties directly to classroom curriculum.

Check with local bookstores, they could be planning to host an author for a book signing one evening and the author could be interested in filling the hours beforehand with a school visit. Bookstores frequently work with the publicity departments at major and smaller publishers and can be a great partner for you, especially if you plan to offer the author's books for sale during the visit.

Most authors and illustrators have contact information on their website, and others can be reached through their social media. If you like someone's work, don't be afraid to reach out and ask about their interest, availability and rates!

4. **Selling Books or Autographing Them:** Authors may ask you to offer their book for purchase in advance of or during their visit. Be sensitive to equity issues surrounding the purchase of books and, in particular, to in-person autographing. Ask the author if they will allow students to bring in books from home or if they are willing to sign anything other than their books—you would be amazed how students will treasure a scrap of paper or notebook with an autograph on it!
5. **Location and Logistics:** Once you have made arrangements for an author to visit, be sure you communicate clearly with them (or their designated representative) about their technological needs and any special requests for logistics during their presentation.
  - Will they be making a digital presentation? You may need a special cable to attach their computer to your projector, or to download a program like Keynote if they use an iPad instead of a laptop.
  - Will the author need a microphone to project to your audience? If your microphone has a cord, be sure your set-up allows the author to move freely.
  - What art materials might help an illustrator reach their audience—an easel, special markers, or an extra-large pad of paper, or will they bring their own?
  - Does the author's presentation allow time for student questions and, if so, would they prefer to call on students or that a teacher help select which students' questions are asked?
  - Think through the space you will use for the presentation, and how to comfortably fit the audience in such a way that everyone can see a screen, if used, and hear the presenter.

- If you will be offering more than one presentation, be sure you leave time to move students in between and to give the author a few minutes to catch their breath (or visit the restroom).
- Check with the author about what you can record or document during the presentation, and do not be surprised if the author limits video recordings to protect their intellectual property or copyright.

**7. Make sure all students can participate:** Be sensitive to students who may be overwhelmed by the crowd, noise, or change in their routine. Make every effort to include *all* students in this special event. Students who struggle to connect in some traditional learning environments may find a connection here that changes their relationship with books.

Ask your presenter how they like to engage students before the event and give them ideas or suggestions on who they can actively involve all students at the presentation.

**8. Enjoy it:** Be sure to promote the visit thoroughly, let the event itself be a celebration, and reflect on the visit in the weeks that follow. Build excitement before the visit by inviting teachers to read aloud one of the author's books or create masterpieces based on an illustrator's medium or to process the artist's conversation.

Post photos or quotes from the event on a bulletin board; feature the author's work in a prominent library display; invite students to respond to the event with writing or drawing prompts.

An author or illustrator visit can be an exhilarating way to champion literacy in your school, and you'll be amazed at how meaningfully the opportunity will resonate with your readers!