

A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS ORGANISING AN AUTHOR VISIT

Today, children, we have a very special visitor...



Writer and illustrator Sarah McIntyre at a school

A visit from a writer, poet or illustrator to a school or library can be an immensely rewarding experience for all involved. For inspiration and a list of the benefits of an author visit see our slideshow 'What's the point of author visits?': slidsha.re/1uWYjnj.

Careful thought and planning are essential to ensure everyone gets the most out of the experience. The following guidelines and suggestions are given in the hope they will be of benefit to all those involved in organising an author visit.

Throughout this guide we will refer to 'author' meaning either a writer or illustrator.

WHY HOST AN AUTHOR VISIT?

For pupils

Author visits have been shown to have 'profound and lasting impact' on pupils. Visits:

- improve literacy
- encourage reading for pleasure
- inspire reluctant readers
- enthuse pupils in their own writing
- give confidence
- broaden knowledge of literature
- allow pupils to meet a favourite author
- provide an opportunity for children to ask questions

For teachers

Author visits also have a positive impact on teachers who can gain professionally and personally from the experience, providing:

- new insights into literature
- new methods for encouraging pupil engagement
- renewed enthusiasm for promoting reading for pleasure

For the curriculum

Author visits are complementary to the National Curriculum, they can be used to:

- fit into a scheme of work
- generate a new scheme of work
- tick National Curriculum boxes (e.g. research and editing)

For the school

Author visits can be beneficial to the image of a school and can:

- be part of a programme of events (e.g. World Book Day)
- generate positive publicity
- have a favourable impression on Ofsted

These and many more reasons can prompt the organisation of an author visit. Asking what you hope to achieve at the outset will help you to shape the visit and ensure you get what you want from it.

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, HOW?

Once you know why you want to have an author visit you can start to plan and research. We recommend starting to plan six to 12 months in advance as experienced authors are in demand and will be booked up quickly.

What type of author?

Authors often specialise in writing books for a particular age group so make sure the author will be suitable for your intended class(es) or year(s).

What type of visit?

What do you want your author to offer? Different authors will offer different types of events, ranging from simple readings with Q&As to interactive workshops or drama sessions. Should the session cover aspects of the curriculum? To avoid any misunderstandings discuss the nature of your talk, the schools' needs and expectations and confirm any specifications in advance.

Who will your audience(s) be?

How many people do you wish the author to see during the day? Do they offer small workshops or large-scale presentations?

Recommendations

Does an author come recommended by colleagues, local library services or local book groups? If possible speak to others who have organised a visit to get suggestions.

Availability

Big name authors are usually booked up years in advance and some do not undertake school visits. Even lesser known authors can be booked up six to nine months in advance, especially around times of National Book Week, World Book Day etc.

What fee can you offer?

The negotiation of fees is a matter for individuals. Fees should take into account travel and preparation time as well as actual performance time and should be based on the annual salary an author would expect to earn as a freelance.

In 2013 the SoA's Children's Writers and Illustrators Group members reported a wide range of fees (excluding travel and expenses) from £350 to £1,000 per day (for authors in high demand). Half-day rates ranged from £150 to £800. Single session fees were quoted at £150 to £250 plus travel for a single session (not exceeding an hour) when the author or illustrator is visiting a local school/library or carrying out a number of separate visits in the same area. Average rates were around £400-500 for a day, £300 for a half-day. Many authors said they would only consider single visits local to them.

We also recommend [Andrew Bibby's reckoner](#) which shows daily rates to equate with different salaries. Using that reckoner a day rate of £400-£600 equates to a NASUWT 2013 salary for a Leading Practitioner (excluding London and the Fringe) of £37,836 - £57,520.

Scottish schools and libraries may be able to apply for Live Literature Funding when using Scottish authors registered at scottishbooktrust.com/author-search. Author fees are a minimum of £150 (£175 from January 2017) for an hour event. All travel and subsistence expenses are reimbursed. Please note that some authors may charge more within the scheme if the school/library agrees to cover the difference.

These figures and suggestions are taken from a survey which can be found in the SoA's *School Visits Fees Guide*.

Tax and National Insurance

When paying freelance authors, neither tax nor National Insurance should be deducted. Most authors are self-employed (even where they invoice as a limited company) and a one-off engagement does not create a contract of employment.

VAT

Authors who are VAT-registered are legally obliged to charge VAT on top of both the fee and expenses (unless you book travel and accommodation).

Venue

Do you have a venue that is suitable and spacious enough for the type of session(s) you wish to hold? If not, is it possible to join together with other schools in the area to access a suitable venue?

Funding

You may also want to join with other schools to generate sufficient funding for an author visit, or to collaborate with local libraries, bookshops, literary festivals or book awards.

Alternatively you can seek to work across departments to gather funds by combining budgets. You could plan a visit that intersects with the curriculums of other subjects such as History or PSHE or with programmes such as SEN and Gifted and Talented.

Various sources of funding are also available, including publisher subvention (especially if they want to promote a new publication) and organisations and schemes that exist to get authors into schools such as [Patron of Reading](#) or [Live Literature Funding from the Scottish Book Trust](#).

Bookselling

Signed books can really inspire a child to read for pleasure, so a visit from an author should be accompanied by the exciting opportunity to buy their books and get them signed. Make sure that the **school sends a letter home to the pupil's parents/carers, outlining what books will be available and the prices.** You may also want to liaise with the author and their publisher about posters and other promotional materials. Clarify who is responsible for providing books to sell. With this in mind there are three options:

- The school organises a local bookshop to provide copies (they should be able to offer the school a discount on books or 10% commission if selling works themselves).
- The school buys in books on a sale-or-return basis from a wholesalers/distributor such as Gardners.

The author brings in books themselves. Supervision and a member of staff to sell the books will be required so the author can concentrate on meeting the children, answering their questions and signing books without having to worry about giving the correct change! Alternatively, you could ask the author to leave an order form with the school and send on signed books at a later date. Some authors will encourage sales by offering promotional deals or free books for the school if an agreed sales threshold is reached.

Photography

Not all authors are comfortable with being photographed and it can be distracting if it is unexpected. Some may prefer to have a designated photo session before or after the actual session. Confirm plans for photography in advance and agree the usage of the photos with the author.

Recording events

Films can be a useful resource, but cannot replicate the excitement and interaction of a real-life visit. Unexpected recordings can be disruptive and off-putting (for both pupils and the speaker), so you must seek permission to record the visit and specify planned usage in advance. Authors may charge an enhanced fee for filming and may restrict broadcast rights.

If the event is recorded you must agree the following points:

- If the appearance fee should be higher to reflect further use of a recording. The simplest licence would be a buyout for classroom use-only within the specified school. A wider licence would bear in mind the duration of the recording, length of the licence – number of years and/or showings – and the availability when setting the fee.
- That the author and the copyright of their talk are credited on the recording (the recording itself will belong to the school).
- That any featured copyright material (including quotes and images) are licenced, acknowledged and credited.
- That a copy or link to the recording will be sent to the author. The authors may like to negotiate use of the recording on your own platforms.
- That any editing of the performance is to be subject to the **author's** approval.
- Whether the author would like to impose any restrictions within the licence e.g. non-commercial use with the specified school with showings restricted to appropriate year groups; not for commercial use; not for YouTube etc.
- Whether classroom showings should be restricted to the appropriate year groups.

Administrative and legal requirements

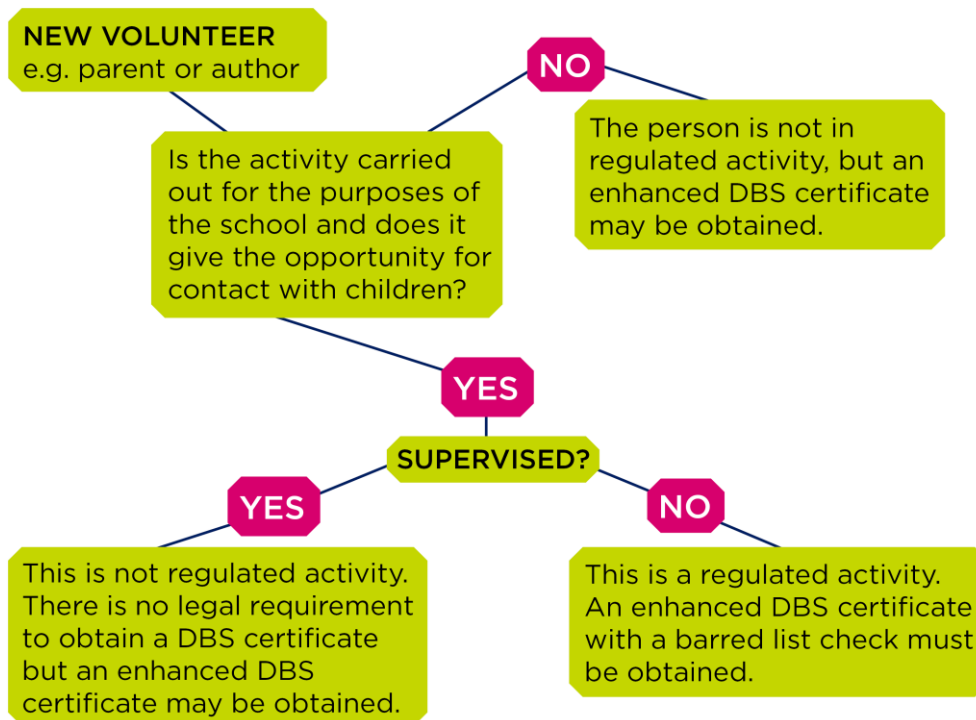
Any requirements the school has – such as Public Liability insurance, DBS clearances or other security checks, should be clarified well in advance. **It is to nobody's benefit if there are problems which only come to light on the day of the author's visit.**

Public Liability insurance

Authors visiting schools are likely to have Public Liability insurance. This is not a legal requirement, but is requested by many councils. A condition of such insurance is that the author will be accompanied at all times and will not be left alone with children.

Identification – if the school requires ID, it needs to be clear what forms of ID are acceptable (especially if it has to be photo ID, e.g. passport or driving licence).

Disclosure Barring Service Clearances



This diagram is based on that given by the Department of Education and Ofsted who are clear in their guidance that a Disclosure and Barring Service (formerly CRB) check is only needed when there is 'Teaching, training or instruction of children, carried out by the same person frequently (once a week or more often), or on 4 or more days in a 30 day period, or Overnight'. It is not required for a one-off, supervised visit. For authors undertaking frequent visits and residencies schools should be aware that subscribers to the DBS Update Service can take their certificate with them from school to school. See gov.uk/dbs-update-service for more detailed information.

FINDING AN AUTHOR

Most authors can be contacted directly via their websites or by social media, but can also be approached via publisher publicity departments and literary agents (be warned that they are usually very busy and may not respond instantly).

We recommend the following resources:

- [Society of Authors' searchable database](#) is a directory of SoA members (it is optional and not all members are listed).
- [Booktrust](#)
- [Contact an Author](#)
- [Centre for Literacy in Primary Education](#)
- [National Literacy Trust](#)
- [National Association of Writers in Education](#)
- [Patron of Reading](#)
- [Reading Zone](#)
- [Reading Force](#) (resources to support schools, community groups etc. that host children who have family in the Armed Forces)
- [Scottish Book Trust](#) provides subsidies for talks for Scottish schools and authors. See [Live Literature Funding](#)
- [Start the Story](#)
- [World Book Day](#) (now a year-round resource)

There are agencies that specialise in the organisation of author visits. Please note that agencies will **charge a commission on top of the author's fee and that it is usually cheaper to book an author directly**. Agencies include:

- [Apples and Snakes](#) (performance poetry)
- [Authors Aloud UK](#)
- [Pop Up Education](#)
- [Speaking of Books](#)

Nothing energises a classroom like a live visit, but you can find short pre-recorded interviews on [behindthebookshelf.co.uk](#), Booktrust, publisher websites, [worldbookday.com](#) and YouTube. These may help you select or plan your author visit but some authors may be happy to do short Skype interviews if you contact them directly or see [virtualauthors.co.uk](#).

PLANNING THE VISIT

Once you have decided on who you would like to invite, make contact with the author and/or agency (if possible, directly speak to or correspond with the author).

A letter or email is a good starting point – include a contact number and address or ask the author if you may phone them.

Ensure you discuss and confirm all the following details well in advance in writing.

Date and timings

- The date of the visit
- The number and timing of the session(s)
- Length of the session(s) including time to reach each session and for the author to recalibrate or have a comfort break. Each author may have different preferences

Nature of session

- Age group of the pupils
- Group size
- What format should the session(s) take – e.g. reading and Q&A, workshop, etc.
- Any specifications or curriculum requirements you would like the author to address

Venue and equipment

- Where the session(s) will be held
- Any technical equipment (projector, flipchart, etc.) you require and the name of the person who will be on hand to operate the equipment and provide passwords
- Any artistic equipment the author or the children will need for the session. You may wish to invest in new materials to capitalise on the excitement and enthusiasm for this special occasion

Transport and accommodation

- Arrangements for getting the author to the venue
- Accommodation arrangements, if needed
- Whether the school or the author will book the transport and/or accommodation
- Whether parking is available if the author is arriving by car

Refreshments

- Arrangements for refreshments and meals
- If the author has any dietary requirements

Books and publicity

- Book(s) the author will be discussing

- Arrangements for sales and signing
- Showcards or publicity materials from the publisher

Recording and coverage

- If press have been invited and are attending
- Permission for photography – if you wish to take photos you must request the author's permission in advance
- Permission for audio or audio-visual recording – and whether this will be reflected in the fee

Administrative and legal requirements

- Public Liability insurance (if required)
- Disclosure Barring Service Clearances (if required)
- Identification (if required)

Fee and expenses

- The fee per session
- The expenses (travel and subsistence) and whether these need to be approved in advance
- Who will book travel and accommodation
- Whether VAT applies to the invoice (including any expenses that you do not book and pay for in advance)
- Details for payment. Whether the author needs to supply an invoice and when. Does it need receipts and a reference number? To whom, at what address, should the invoice be sent? The author should be paid within 30 days of the event

Cancellation

- Your cancellation arrangements. Any cancellation fees and timings must be made clear and if the booking is conditional then this must be clarified at the outset. We suggest:
 - The author must be paid in full if the event is cancelled within six weeks of the event date;
 - The author must be paid 50% if the event is cancelled earlier;
 - Any out of pocket expenses already incurred must be reimbursed whenever the event is cancelled
- The author's cancellation policy. You should also ask the author if they have their own policy should they need to cancel the visit or if due to unforeseen circumstances they are unable to attend



PREPARING FOR THE VISIT

The longer lead up you have, the more excitement can be generated.

- Make sure you have a venue available (double-booking of school halls is not unknown).
- Make sure colleagues know of the visit and how this may impact on their schedules (e.g. children needing to go to extra-curricular activities).
- Involve the PTA and wider community (feeder or link schools and/or local library).
- Prepare the children by:
 - Introducing the author's work.
 - Making a display of books, pictures, posters etc.
 - Reading sections of author's work.
 - Visiting the author's website (if they have one).
 - Discussing the questions the children might ask of the author.
- Contact the author or their publisher(s) and ask if there is any display or promotional material available. Organise the availability of books through your local bookseller or equivalent (some authors may bring their own books to sell) - these can be sold in advance to the children, and/or on the day of the visit.
- Write a letter to parents or carers telling them of the visit - include details of the price of the books available to buy.
- Charge batteries for digital cameras if they are to be used (ask author's permission about taking pictures or filming the event).
- Press and publicity - if the author is willing, contact local papers with details. Check the position regarding parental consent and the publication of pictures.

ON THE DAY

Each visit will obviously be different. The following are guidelines to ensure a successful day:

- Remind staff of the day's activities.
- Be in good time to pick up the author if they are arriving by train or bus.
- Be ready to meet and greet the author. (Make sure that the school receptionist or equivalent is aware of the writer's arrival - a welcoming drink generally goes down well!)
- Have refreshments available throughout the day.
- Make sure that the venue is clean and equipped with suitable seating, necessary technical equipment or creative materials.
- Make sure children and staff are in place on time for the session(s).
- Introduce the author to the audience.
- Make sure that staff or pupils do not wander through the venue when the talk is taking place.
- Escort the author to the correct venue.
- Don't leave the author to fend for themselves in staffrooms at break times or lunch.
- Make sure that books are available for sale and bookselling is organised in an orderly manner.
- Make sure that payment is given or invoice requested.
- Thank the author appropriately.
- Make sure arrangements for leaving are in place (lift to station etc.).

Some common pitfalls to be aware of:

- Do not leave the author alone with the pupils at any time. An author's Public Liability insurance is invalidated if an author is left unsupervised. Authors are not to be regarded as substitute teachers and be left with a class or classes.

- The members of staff who would normally teach the children should be present (and other teachers/teaching assistants, if available) and to offer a good example to the children should be fully engaged with the presentation, not filling in forms or marking books.
- It is a good idea to let the author know of any children with special educational needs or behavioural problems.
- Make sure that there are no problems with noise in other classrooms (or from author's sessions). Exams and author visits tend not to mix!
- Make sure that the session is not going to be interrupted by wandering staff/children or noise from other classrooms/parts of the library. Find out if any children have to go to any unavoidable extra-curricular activities and discuss how this disruption can be minimised (by engineering a natural break, the children not returning to the event, exclusion from the outset etc.)
- If having a local press photographer, make sure that they do not arrive mid-session. Photos should be taken before or after sessions in order not to interrupt the event.



Author Michaela Morgan visiting a school.

AFTER THE VISIT

- Encourage the children to write and thank the writer.
- Talk to the children about the event.
- Undertake follow-up work with the children.
- Make sure all payments are made in good time.

AND FINALLY...

Begin to arrange the next author visit!

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