

What works well: Making author visits effective

A visit from an author can seem like a big investment but, if done right, can be an incredibly valuable learning experience for the children, enhancing and extending ideas around writing in your school. Having the opportunity to see and learn from a professional writer's practice can be aspirational for children as writers and help them to see the process of writing from a new and exciting perspective.



Before the visit:

- Do your research and pick an author that is right for what you are looking to develop in your school. You can find out about our different Power of Pictures authors, their texts and how they work using our author video resources at: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures/authors-and-illustrators>
- Think about what you would like the author to bring to the learning, to make this an educational rather than an 'entertainment' experience. Do you want them to work with the children on a key element of illustration for example, modelling how they draw their characters; how to convey emotion in characters using live drawing, or do you want them to focus on an element of the writing process such as how to begin ideas for writing? They could talk about and share how to develop a storyline, using their own experiences in sketchbooks as a way of showing the writing process or how to respond to and develop first drafts, linked to how they have developed their own work from initial ideas to the finished book. You might work from where the author/illustrator would most effectively support in classes to work on progress, for example, modelling drawing for gross and fine motor skill development and to create characters in the Early Years, through to storymapping and developing plots in Key Stage One, and more specific writing workshops to support more independent writers to respond to and develop writing in Key Stage Two, even building up to making their own ideas for a picture book.
- Communicate clearly with the author, finding out what they can bring and what a realistic programme would be for a school visit from their perspective, including any resources they will need. Live drawing, for example, works best if there is a visualiser, so the children can see their actual hand movements with their chosen materials. It is more beneficial to work with less children more intently than to try and cover too many children and lose impact. A whole school introduction of the

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author and them reading one of their texts in an assembly will enable every child to be able to see and experience the author, followed by focussed work in selected classes.

- Make sure time expectations are reasonable with the author and they are clear of their timetable for the day well in advance. Don't fill every available break with additional activities like pupil interviews or book signings, it is important that the author has adequate breaks between sessions. If any changes to the agreed schedule are likely in between agreeing these with the author and the visit day, you will need to negotiate these with the author well in advance.
- Set the scene beforehand. If you are having a visit from a Power of Pictures author, share the videos as appropriate with the children so they can get to know them and their work beforehand. These can be found at:

<https://www.clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures/authors-and-illustrators>

Use the teaching sequences provided to start the focus text, build up knowledge of the text and the author/illustrator's wider work. These can be found at:

<https://www.clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures/books-and-teaching-sequences> If the author is not part of the project, find out if they have any video materials available of their own, or on their publisher's website; many authors now have videos available on YouTube or Vimeo. Read a couple of the teaching sequences to see the kinds of techniques and approaches that could be used when exploring any high quality picture books. Advice for looking at picture books can be found at:

<https://www.clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures/teaching-approaches/choosing-and-using-picture-books>

On the day of the visit:

- Ensure that all the resources needed as agreed in the initial conversation are ready and available.
- Ensure all the staff and children know the author is coming, what they look like and are ready to welcome them.
- Welcome the author, make sure they feel part of the community whilst they are there and ensure they have adequate time for breaks, lunch and know where the facilities are.



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- It's also nice to involve parents and give an opportunity for them to meet the author whilst they are there, as this makes the author real and opens up aspirations for children and parents to draw or write themselves. If there is a whole school assembly as an introduction, perhaps this could be open to parents, or you may want to negotiate with the author beforehand as to whether there could be a half hour book sale at the end of the school day where parents can take their children to buy books and have them signed to enable the children to have a memento of the visit. You could engage a local bookseller to support with this if the author is happy to do this.
- Ensure activities run to schedule so that the day does not become too long for the author, especially if you are also including a book sale. Having post-it notes attached to books with the names for dedications will help to speed up the signing process.

After the visit:

- It is always nice to send a thank you note, card or letter to the author after the visit.
- Create a central display in the school and/or focus display in the library with the author's books and photographs and work from the visit.
- Share the event on your website, in your newsletter, or in local press as a means of showcasing your reading and writing community and to raise the profile of reading and writing in the school.
- Follow up the work done in the sessions so that children extend work done by the authors. The Power of Pictures teaching sequences build up to children having the opportunity to create their own books in different forms, as an opportunity to see themselves as authors. This gives the visit added purpose and allows the flame of excitement on the visit day to burn for longer.

