

Avoiding a “Bad Day”

by Alexis O’Neill

Bad days. We all have them. But when the bad day is caused by a school visit, how you deal with it makes the difference between your hosts viewing you as a diva or a darling.

What’s a “Bad Day”?

According to seasoned presenters, a bad day is primarily caused by a school’s lack of preparation for your visit, including:

- Teachers and students are unfamiliar with you or your books
- Lack of proper equipment and set-up
- Impossible schedule
- Your books are not available for sale

Heading a Bad Day Off at the Pass

- As soon as you schedule a visit, record names and email addresses of key people at the school. (For example, the PTA program chairperson, librarian, principal, assistant principal, reading coach). Send an email to all of them before your visit. Tell them you’re excited about coming.
- Send an Author Visit Packet to your host including materials that can be posted on the bulletin board or duplicated for the staff. (Go to <http://www.childrensauthorsnetwork.com/author/AO.htm> and scroll to the bottom to find three samples of what I include.) Include a list of equipment, and, if it’s important to you, a diagram of how the room should be set up.
- Send one or two of your books as a gift to the library. Request that they be circulated to teachers before your visit.
- Be firm about reviewing and approving your schedule in advance of your visit.
- Ask your host about how the school plans to handle book sales. Include a sample book order form in your Author Visit Packet so the host doesn’t have to design one. If the school

declines to sell books (or refuses to let you sell books yourself), have book order forms ready to hand to teachers in case they wish to order an autographed copy from you or a local bookseller.

- Maintain email communication with your host from the time you are booked until the day before your school appearance. Re-check arrangements for your schedule, books and equipment.

Have a Backup Plan

You won’t know until you arrive if the school is unprepared. So, have at least two versions of your assembly ready: Assembly A is geared to kids who have read your books; Assembly B is geared to kids who don’t have a clue who you are or what your books are about. If you’re a novelist, be prepared to give a synopsis of your book and read a page or two from it. If you write picture books, be prepared to read the story, or a good portion of it, and show illustrations of the pages. Give the audience a flavor of your style – as a person and as a writer or illustrator.

Attitude

When kids are prepared for your visit, the impact is huge. But don’t sulk if, in spite of all your efforts, they are not prepared. It’s not the kids’ fault. And you are getting paid to do your program regardless. When things don’t go as planned, be a darling, not a diva. Schools will likely remember your attitude when it comes time to recommend you to other schools. Most of all, you have the power to impact students’ lives whether they are prepared for your visit or not!

Alexis O’Neill, Ph.D., is the author of THE RECESS QUEEN and other award-winning books for children. She has been an elementary school teacher, a teacher of teachers, and a museum educator. She is a popular school visit presenter and helps other authors create and deliver quality programs. Visit her at www.schoolvisitexperts.com
