

How to Get Gigs

by Alexis O'Neill

Meeting your readers at school visits makes fans, helps sell books, and can augment your income significantly. Appearances help you build a larger audience “platform” for your future books and can keep older books in print longer.

So how do you get invited to do school visits? Simple answer:

Become famous locally first.

Name recognition – of you and of your book titles – is paramount.

Here are a few of the ways to establish name recognition and help potential hosts find you.

1. Be Active in Your Community: The activities you're involved with where you live (city and county), the listservs you participate in, and the associations you belong to (professional and social) all count. SCBWI Regional Advisors field many requests from hosts to find authors, so make sure your RA knows you and your books. To find your RA, go to www.scbwi.org. Shake hands with local librarians, booksellers, community newspaper reporters. Let everyone know that you LOVE doing school visits.

2. Distribute Printed Materials: Have your professional brochures, postcards, bookmarks or business cards ready to hand out at all times. You might also consider doing direct mailings of your brochures to targeted lists of public and private schools.

3. Maintain an Author Website: If you don't have a website, you might as well be invisible.

4. Present at Meetings and Conferences. Most authors are hired as a result of word-of-mouth recommendations rather than solely from

a print source such as a brochure. Submit proposals to regional or state conferences for teachers, librarians, administrators, parents, booksellers and writers/illustrators. Circulate at city, county and state conferences and events. Walk the trade show floor. Offer to do 5-minute presentations at meetings of librarians or teachers in your city. Work with your regional reading council and investigate opportunities at the state level. Example: <http://www.reading.org/General/LocalAssociations/NorthAmerica.aspx>

5. Join Speakers' Lists: Literary organizations often post lists of their author members on their websites (i.e. SCBWI, Authors Guild, The Children's Book Council, etc). Typically, this service is free with your membership in the parent organization. You might also consider joining a speakers' bureau. Speakers' bureaus are agencies that represent and promote a select group of authors and illustrators for school visits. Some have performance requirements for inclusion. They charge a fee for you to be included or take a percentage of your speaking honorarium after you're hired.

6. Join Publishers' Lists: Let your publisher know that you are eager to do presentations. Publishers will send the school's request to you or to your booking agency.

7. Do Showcases: Local performing arts organizations, county education offices, libraries or bookstores sometimes host Program Preview Days or Local Author Days where presenters do a short showcase presentation. This will highlight your books and your “presentation personality.” Consider creating a team of authors and illustrators and offer a showcase to your local bookstore or library, or as part of an

existing conference.

8. Participate in Book Fairs and Literary Events

The Center for the Book: Library of Congress publishes a list of Book Fairs and Festivals held throughout the country. See which ones have events that include children's book authors and illustrators. Contact the event organizer and ask if you might be included to do a presentation or sign books.

<http://www.read.gov/resources/statefairs.html>

It takes time – and multiple methods -- to establish name recognition and have word-of-mouth do its magic. The more active you are *locally*, the more people you'll meet, and the more likely someone will ask, "Do you ever do school visits?" And *voilà!* You're hired!

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
