

## One Size Does NOT Fit All

by Alexis O'Neill

Want to keep audience from squirming? Be aware that one size of presentation does NOT fit all venues. You may want to tell every detail about your journey from childhood to publication – but really! To preschoolers?

Here are some tips to help you shape presentations for a variety of situations.

First -- ask your host these questions:

- How much time will I have?
- What's the typical age range of the listeners?
- In what kind of area will I be speaking?
- Will other presenters be on stage before and/or after me?
- Describe one of your favorite or most successful author programs.

### **Schools**

*Audience: Kids (Grades K-12 and sometimes Pre-K)*

This is where you call out all the stops. You have a chance to develop a relationship with an audience in a controlled environment where kids ideally have read your books and anticipate your visit. You can do some real teaching in your assemblies. You can connect your books with what kids are learning in class or experiencing in their lives.

### **Family Night @ School**

*Audience: Kids, their infant & toddler siblings, parents & grandparents*

Being in school at night is a mystical experience for kids. Orderly during the day, the night brings on a modest wildness in kids that is both exciting and terrifying. Go with the flow. Keep your program short (20 minutes). Seat the kids on the

floor in front of you. (They're less shy when sitting with other kids rather than their parents, who try to push them into volunteering.) Bring kids on stage to help you. Parents will eat this up. Unless you have done an assembly there during the day, don't assume that anyone knows you or your books.

### **Family Night @ the Public Library**

*Audience: Kids ages 0 and up, parents, and grandparents*

This audience loves the library, loves books – but they may have no clue who you are or what your books are about. Kids like to run around and parents like to chat and look for books. Many will read to their kids during your presentation. Usually, parents will be standing; kids will be on the floor. You are guaranteed to get (and keep) attention if you chant, sing, play an instrument, have unusual props and visuals or get kids involved. If there are other activities happening (i.e., a craft) and other presenters on the program, your program will be fine at 10-15 minutes tops. Otherwise, kids get itchy and parents tire of standing, no matter how great you are.

### **Bookstore Storytime**

*Audience: Toddlers, pre-schoolers, parents and caregivers.*

This is not the venue to get into a deep discussion of The Writing Process. Read one of your books (two if they're short). Take your time -- but not more than 15 – 20 minutes, depending on how wiggly the audience is. Show the illustrations. Give kids time to see them up close. Point out things. Ask questions. If you're an illustrator, draw something. Sign books.

Ignore the fact that the parents will sit in rapt attention while the kids are off punching buttons on interactive toys.

Take time to chat informally with parents and the bookseller. The littlest kids may forget you, but the adults will appreciate the time you spent with them. Be aware that many parents who come to these are

- 1) wanting to turn their kids into book lovers,
- 2) looking for a way to fill up time in a day, and/or
- 3) trying to find out more about how to get their own book published.

Be gracious. Every person counts, no matter how small the audience.

### **Outdoor Book Festival**

*Audience: Kids ages 0 and up, parents & grandparents.*

Can you spell “o-v-e-r-s-t-i-m-u-l-a-t-i-o-n”? Story tents, face painting, petting zoos, tons of giveaways. And then there’s you. On stage. In the wind. With a microphone. And a book. While a dedicated volunteer tries to wrangle kids and adults into chairs.

And the audience is balancing snow cones, popcorn and infants on their laps as they plan where to go next. Keep it short and lively. Then wave goodbye and go sign books.

Here’s the most important tip:

### **READ YOUR AUDIENCE!**

Are they engaged? Or are they wandering away? Don’t be afraid to change or shorten your program to keep them focused. Better a snappy, short presentation than an endless one. Everyone will love you. What more can an author or illustrator ask for?

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