

Let's Make a Deal

by Alexis O'Neill

Schools are on tight budgets. So am I. Schools appreciate deals. So do I. When school visit invitations come from far away, it's a perfect opportunity to say, "Let's make a deal," and sweeten the experience for both you and your host.

I have three levels of fees for school visits: a local fee (within my county), a non-local fee (within my state) plus expenses, and an out-of-state fee plus expenses.

Here's an example of a "deal" I made. I received an invitation from a school four hours away. This meant three days away: getting there, being there, and getting home. If I could book at least two visits instead of just one, it would make time away from home more worthwhile

This is what I did. I offered the school a discount if they found another school to book me on a consecutive day. They did. So, both schools paid my "local" fee (a savings of \$200 each), and they shared the cost of mileage. I was able to parlay one day into five, making the trek worthwhile for me and helping the school conserve funds.

Recently, a county office of education engaged me to speak at a festival for young authors and illustrators. Getting there involved a flight, then an hour-and-a-half drive over the mountains. Since I was traveling so far away, I asked my host if it was okay for me to book a school visit on the day before their event. (*Note: It's essential to clear any additional activities such as visits and book signings with your original hosts since they are footing the bill for expenses and don't want another engagement diverting attention or book sale profits from their own event.*) My festival host sent an email to schools announcing my availability. One school booked me, thus receiving my local rate without having to pay expenses. The upside is that I also made additional friends!

Here are some other examples of how authors and illustrators have helped schools by making a deal:

[Janet Wong](#): "I encourage schools to share my day; I am willing to do an assembly at each of four nearby schools for a single day's fee, which makes a visit more affordable for each school."

[Lee Wardlaw](#): "If I know that my fees are going to go up during the next school year, I tell interested schools that if they book me before "X" date, I will lock them in with the previous school year's pricing."

[Sneed B. Collard III](#): "I have three prices for out of state – one price for a single day, a slightly lower price for two days, and a lower price for three or more days."

[Kay Winters](#): "If a district contacts me and offers more than one school, I give \$100.00 discount per school."

[Larry Dane Brimner](#): "For bookings of five or more days, my fee is negotiable."

[Kelly Milner Halls](#): "If one librarian is willing to book a week or more of presentations for me, I will cut my rate in half for her school."

[Chris Crutcher](#): "Sometimes if a school says that my fee is beyond their budget, I invite them to make another offer that's within their reach."

[Robert San Souci](#): "I take a case-by-case look at each request. I try to 'read between the lines' and see when it might be advisable to offer a slightly reduced fee up front."

Regarding the importance of personal contact with schools, [Joan Bransfield Graham](#) says, "If I get a 'generic' how-much-do-you-charge query, they are usually just looking for the lowest bidder. But I have a high rate of booking a visit if I have a chance to talk with someone personally."

Authors and illustrators need to earn a living. School visits provide an important source of revenue. And while we can't sell ourselves short, it's always good to have some negotiating chips to put on the table when necessary to "make a deal."

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
