

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL AUTHOR VISIT

My purpose of visiting a school or library is to get the kids excited about reading, writing, and illustrating. If you apply these tips, they will surely guarantee a smooth author visit.

BEFORE THE AUTHOR VISIT

1. Be sure you can make the experience a success before pursuing an author visit. Will you have the space? Do you have the funding for the author's fee? Will your schedule allow for special assemblies? Will your administration and faculty be excited and supportive? Can they spare the time to prepare students for the visit? If not, it is probably better not to do an author visit.

2. Introduce the students to *Pond Punkies, The Arrival*. This doesn't have to be terribly time-consuming, but it makes a huge difference in the students' enthusiasm for the visit. Here are some ideas:

a. Have students visit Lisa's website at www.PondPunkies.com. This can be done as a group in part of one class period, using an LCD projector, or if you have access to a computer lab, have students explore the site individually. Have students explore the Universe Page and learn more about the eight different Pond Punkie Clans. There is also a television interview with Lisa on the About the Author page.

b. Pick an activity from the Download page. There are many to choose. These take very little time to do in class or at home.

c. Have students complete the Space Word Search from the Download page and submit it for a raffle drawing on the day of the visit. Let Lisa know if you plan to do this, and she will provide one prize per presentation group.

d. Have students listen to the first chapter of *Pond Punkies, The Arrival*. A teacher or librarian can read it to them, or you can listen to Lisa read it from the website on the Read an Excerpt Page.

e. If you have time, let students do a project on Neptune and its moons.

f. Have students participate in the poster contest. Winner receives a free autographed book. Hang posters in the hallway prior to the visit.

g. Outline the characters' journey on a map or timeline, discuss Neptune and its moons, collect magazine photos of different planets, and create a collage. Hang up before author's visit.

3. Discuss with Lisa what time the first presentation will be, how many presentations will be given, how long they will be, and how many students will attend each one. Discuss the grade range in each presentation and the times of book sale/autograph sessions.

4. Send a letter or email of confirmation with the date of the visit and fee clearly indicated. Include the school phone number in case of emergency.

5. Take preorders for the book. This is best done after students have been introduced to the book so they will be more interested!

6. Brainstorm questions. Have students brainstorm questions they want to ask Lisa, either about the book or about being a writer.

ON THE DAY OF THE AUTHOR'S VISIT

1. Lisa likes to arrive in time to get the equipment set up, at least half an hour before the first group of kids is due to arrive. Anything you can do in advance will make the process smoother (getting the equipment together mentioned below and making sure it works).

2. If possible, set up a data (digital) projector, screen, and an AV cart for PowerPoint. A table to set a few items on where Lisa will be presenting would be helpful, unless there is room for them on the AV cart. For large groups, Lisa has a PowerPoint slideshow with sound. Please make sure the sound is working for the PowerPoint presentation. She can present without this, but setting up for a PowerPoint is helpful if students at the back of the audience would have difficulty seeing a book cover held up at the front of the room. Just let Lisa know in advance one way or the other. She can bring her file on a flash drive, or project it from her own laptop, whichever works best for your school.

3. Wireless lapel microphone. Lisa can project fairly well, and does not use a microphone for groups up to 75-100 unless the acoustics of the room are problematic. For very large groups, it is best to have a wireless microphone available (the kind that clips to a lapel). Lisa moves around a lot and uses her hands as she presents! Second best is a wireless hand-held microphone. Microphones with cords are not as maneuverable, though sometimes unavoidable. The least desirable are wireless headset microphones. Please, no chair or lectern. Lisa's presentation is very active with a lot of movement. She won't be standing still or sitting!

4. Where to meet. By far, the best space to hold large group presentations is the school library. A theater space like an auditorium or lecture hall is also very good. The most difficult spaces are gymnasiums and cafeterias. They hold more students, but the acoustics are poor and the environment is not one that students associate with reading or good audience behavior.

5. Arrange the presentation groups by age. As much as possible, age groups should be similar in each separate presentation group. Putting 4th graders and 5th graders together is fine. Putting 1st graders and 5th graders in one group does not work very well.

6. Seat the students so that the younger groups are in front, oldest groups in the back. This is very important. Not only does it make it easier for the younger children to see, but also the enthusiasm of the younger students tends to energize the older students behind them.

7. If there are many books to sign, have sticky notes available. Students (or a teacher) can write each child's first name on the sticky note and put it on the book before Lisa signs it. This saves time and makes sure Lisa spells each name correctly!

8. On the best school visits:

A. The school contacted the author a few days before the visit to let her know the exact format of the visit and to give specific directions to the school.

B. An administrator takes the time to welcome the author to the school. This sends a huge message that reading is important at this school, and the priority starts right at the top.

C. The teachers set the example for appropriate audience behavior. They refrain from grading papers, chatting, leaving to do other things, etc.

D. Kids and teachers know why the author is there. They have been introduced to the book in the classroom and spent time preparing questions and thinking about the visit.

E. The teachers have talked up the book. The more excited you are, the more excited the kids will be and when the kids are excited, any message the author gives them will really hit home.

AFTER THE AUTHOR'S VISIT

1. Letters to the author. Letters to the author may be sent to:

Lisa Riebe

C/o Ravine Publishing

100 W. Commercial Street, Suite 1C #158

Morris, IL 60450

2. Book reviews and student reporting. Have a student write a review of the book for the school website or newspaper. Alternately, a student can do a news report about the author visit.

3. Turn your students into authors! After hearing about the career of a writer, have your students do a creative writing piece. This can be based on Neptune and its moons, or some other topic. Create a classroom anthology, make copies, and hold your own author-signing event where the students autograph copies of their work. You can also publish the works on line. This can be an empowering experience for the students.

4. Lisa welcomes your feedback. Let her know what you thought of the visit and if you have any suggestions!

ABOUT BOOK SALES & SIGNINGS

Selling books is an important part of an author's visit. It is a positive and motivational experience for children to have their own autographed copies. There is no minimum number of books to sell unless you have chosen the FREE AUTHOR VISIT, but Lisa does ask that each host school make books available for advance purchase by students and faculty using the book order form. This form can be printed out from the Download page on the website. Feel free to modify it to suit your needs.

Lisa will have extra books on site for day-of sales. Typically, after students hear Lisa speak, many students who did not pre-order decide they want to buy a copy.

AUTOGRAPHING BOOKS

You may choose to have your school's autograph session with or without children present. Having children present is more personal, but slightly more time-consuming. In either case, place a sticky note inside each book, at the top of the first page, with the first name(s) of the person or persons to whom the book should be autographed. (Feel free to indicate if the book is a gift in honor of a birthday or other special occasion. Lisa will do her best to personalize her message accordingly.)

If you opt for the children to be present, a signing table should be set up for Lisa. The children should be brought in with their individual purchases and lined up along the table so Lisa can meet the children as she signs their books.

Please make students aware that in the interest of time, Lisa can only autograph her books. Otherwise, requests quickly get out of hand and Lisa ends up signing hundreds of hats, arms, shirts, binders and small pieces of paper! If there were still time after signing books, Lisa would be more than happy to sign anything else the children bring to her.

*If you would like each student to get an autographed memento of the visit, whether they bought a book, or not, here is one idea from a resourceful librarian. Make one reproducible sheet of

bookmarks with a ***Pond Punkies*** book cover and the date of the visit, i.e. “Lisa Riebe visits _____ Elementary School; May 10, 2009.” Lisa will be happy to sign the master sheet during her visit day. You can then run off as many copies as you like, on either cardstock or paper to be laminated, then hand these out to students.