



Fee or Free?

by Alexis O'Neill

An author recently wrote to me: *"Schools that say they can't afford me break my heart, but I can't pay to drive across the state, stay in a hotel, and do a school visit for no money. When does an author charge or not charge for a school visit?"*

As the economy struggles, the number of requests for us to do free events is rising. But authors are professionals, as deserving of income as other working professionals.

Are there guidelines for when you should do presentations for a fee or for free? This information can help you decide.

Schools

Fee: Assemblies are typically funded by parent groups, grants and special budget divisions such as Title 1. Author visits support Common Core Standards that focus on creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking. Many author visits are funded by grants, from service organizations or commercial companies, that are written by a teacher, librarian or parent. Money is available for the motivated school!

Free: Some authors waive fees for an assembly at their own children's school, when they are experimenting with a new presentation; or helping a local school's fundraiser. Many limit their *pro bono* visits to one or two per year. There is no blanket rule.

Bookstores

Fee: The only time a bookstore gave me an honorarium was when I was part of a multi-day writing conference where participants paid a fee to attend.

Free. Author appearances stimulate sales, garner publicity and build fans, so free appearances at bookstores are a promotional tool that benefit both author and bookseller.

Libraries

Fee: Asking for an honorarium won't rob a library's

book budget. Library programs are often funded through the Friends of the Library or are included in the library's annual budget.

Free: Sometimes libraries invite local authors to do *gratis* events, but it's up to you how many of these you donate.

Book Festivals

Fee: A main stage presenter might receive an honorarium. If your publisher is sending you to do book promotion, you may or may not receive remuneration.

Free: If you are just signing or doing a reading and are not a featured speaker, you will not be paid.

Service Groups (Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.)

Free: Community service groups often make substantial donations to educational and literacy projects. Many meet weekly or monthly and do not pay for speakers. But these venues help you reach new audiences who support important causes.

So what's my general rule of thumb for freebies? If an event puts me in significant contact with teachers, librarians and parents who are potential author visit hosts, I may participate for free as a way to promote my availability to do assemblies and workshops. Otherwise, my fee stands.

Donating or charging will always be a personal matter. But remember -- doing presentations is part of the business of being a writer. When you value your skills and your time, others will value you and others in this profession.

Alexis O'Neill, Ph.D., is the author of THE RECESS QUEEN and other popular books for children. She has been an elementary school teacher, a teacher of teachers, and a museum educator. She is much in-demand as a school visit presenter and helps other authors create and deliver quality programs to schools. You can contact her at Info2@schoolvisitexperts.com or visit her at www.alexisoneill.com.