AUTHORS UNCOVERING CREATIVITY

As schools are always thinking ahead and planning, here is a question to ponder.

Is it a good idea to have an author visit your school?

Perhaps a better question to be asking, is – Why is it a good idea to have an author visit your school?

Am I an author pushing the cause of authors/illustrators out there? I certainly am, and I make no apologies for it. During the last three years alone, I’ve personally visited close to 300 schools, from Whananaki up north to Mataura in the deep south, which I believe makes me ‘qualified’ to talk about this subject. I accept it can be costly to have some authors visit, but not all. I also know it can be a bit of a lottery, as the fact you wrote a book or two, or forty or fifty, doesn’t mean you’ll have a good rapport with children. Having a performance background, and being a drama teacher, gives me the skills to connect with kids. I personally love the challenge of the ‘staunch dudes’ down the back, the shy kids, the extroverts, and the kids who think they hate writing. A good speaker can have 99% of your mainstream kids engaged, and most of your spectrum kids. Many authors/illustrators interact the same way.

This is not all about me, as I keep promising myself I’m slowing down, (and Covid has delivered ‘slowdown’ to me in bucket loads.) Personally I’m always up for an online/digital visit. The point I’m making is, that you need to find an author with a good fit for your school requirements who can share their creativity. So do your research, look at websites, and don’t be wary of asking for references.

Why? How does it work?

For me, it’s as simple as kids loving humour and silliness. It engages them, hooking them in to what you have to say. That message is - reading is awesome, poetry rocks, words are a great way to express yourself, and they can all write, albeit in their own way.

They get to ask questions about an author’s life:

*Why do you write?*

*Is it hard to get ideas, and where do you get them from?*

*Where do you write?*

*How long does it take to write a poem/story?*

*How is a book put together?*

*Do you really have to edit your work?*

*Have you ever found a mistake?*

*Do you have a favourite author?*

*How old are you?* (Some teachers fear that question, but I see it as relevant, as I kept following my dream until I succeeded!)

The list can go on, including the famous statements like, ‘We have a dog that looks like Rosie,’ and the question, ‘Does Les ever get sick of hearing you talk?’ My husband Les made a good choice by answering, “No, as every visit is different.”)

I see the children’s faces light up when I perform poetry. They want to hear more as they get an appreciation of how poetry and language impacts on them. They want the author to visit their classroom, to tell them about their own writing, to know how they can be better at writing. They want school to buy the books, for the author to come back and visit again, and often to simply hug us. Only last week a teacher bought a book for herself, and messaged me later to say just as well she did, as when she went to the library that afternoon, they were already all on loan.

Is that success? Yes it is, as these kids are loving language and books, and many are inspired to write more, and others to believe in their ability. They learn tips and get encouragement from an author or illustrator. Your GATE kids are a gift, but your strugglers suddenly wanting to read and write, are the true reward. Here are a few of my own magical moments.

* The Asperger’s student who had stopped writing as he only wrote about black holes, then came up with a touching story about settling into a new school.
* The selective mute who suddenly started joining in during a poetry performance.
* The child who said she never knew she could write until she met a real author.
* The child who was in the reluctant readers groups I ran a workshop with, and I discovered she had brilliant ideas, but was too shy to share them.
* The children who thank me for inspiring them to keep going in their writing journey.
* The numerous teachers who tell me they can’t believe their senior boys joined in, and enjoyed language.

An author can inspire your children to love literacy and fly high.

Now let’s end with the right question?

When can we book an author to visit our school?

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