TOP 5 THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN AN AUTHOR VISITS YOUR SCHOOL by Patrick Carman

1. Use kids as the first point of contact.
I love it when I'm greeted by students upon my arrival. It's not that I mind going straight to the office to check in, it's just that most of the time, the person in the office hasn't got a clue who I am and doesn't give me that warm “you're special” feeling when I walk in the door. I'm probably far away from the people who normally make sure I get fed and stuff, so I'm already nervous - will they like me? Will I bore them? Should I go back to the hotel and hide? Finding student greeters at the entry tells me many wonderful things: These people like me! I'm comfortable around kids, I can totally do this. This is going to be great! My mood is excellent, because these kids are fans. This school has prepared for my visit in the right ways. And look how excited these greeters are to see me! I have no time to think about how lonely and sad and nervous I am. I'm just doing great! (This is not an over-exaggeration).

2. Be super clear about the venue.
Trying to hide a bad microphone, a lousy projector, or the echo in the gym won't make those things go away when the speaking starts. I once showed up at a school where 700 students were filing into a gymnasium, filling the bleachers on two sides. I stood in the middle with a microphone attached to a speaker the size of a paper shredder. I had been told the venue 'could handle a lot of people'. On more than one occasion I've talked to several hundred students with no microphone at all. I once talked to 400 students using one of those five foot portable screens to project my slide show. If you're honest about trouble spots from the start there's a real risk the author will say no, but you may want him to! No one wins in a situation where kids have a bad experience because they can't hear or see what's going on.

3. Be excited for your author's arrival!
Authors go to a lot of trouble to visit schools. The day of, it can be hard for a librarian to remember that writers often spent the previous day flying, driving, getting into a hotel, and sleeping in an unfamiliar place. And when they leave your school, they get to repeat most of that all over again. Rarely is it less than a two or three day process for a writer to visit a school. And there is nothing more depressing than showing up in a low-energy environment. You'd be surprised how often this happens.

4. Get your students reading.
I've visited many schools where most of the kids hadn't read my books and had no idea who I was. It's not the norm, but it does happen. Out of 1200 or so school visits, this has happened about 100 times. Authors feel lousy in this situation. Don't take the opportunity to host a writer if you're not going to get your student body excited about the visit. It's a lose-lose. If you're going to host an author, you must find a way to entice kids into reading the author’s work before he or she gets there. Figure out a way to make it exciting with a contest or a theme if you have to, but find a way to get your students on board before the event.

5. Don't be too strict with the kids.
I've been to events where the students are practically being punished because I showed up. No kid likes to be told in public, in a not-friendly tone, that they better be on their best behavior or else! Any author worth their salt can entertain a group of enthusiastic students if numbers 1-4 above are taken care of. Of course this is a balance. If your students are completely rude in a group setting you've got other problems that should have been solved before attempting to host an author. That stuff is built into the DNA of a school. If you know you've got a student body that will be disruptive, gosh, don't put a poor helpless author in there. They'll get eaten alive. And if you have to use discipline in the middle of the event, just remember: if you get up front and say something like "I am disappointed in my students!" - all the air just went out of the room. They feel crummy and the author probably won't get many laughs. The author may, at this point, become downright surly. Everyone associates being in trouble with this jerk who showed up at their school. On the other hand, if you have students who are generally well behaved and there is a modicum of respect built into the culture of the school and you've done 1-4, just let the students be the students. As long as the author isn't a total bore, they'll be mostly polite and have a great time, and that's fine.

Patrick Carman is the *New York Times* bestselling author of such several series, including *Land of Elyon* and *Dark Eden*. A multimedia pioneer, Patrick authored *The Black Circle*, the fifth title in the 39 Clues series, and the groundbreaking *Skeleton Creek* and *Trackers* books. An enthusiastic reading advocate, Patrick has visited more than one thousand schools and created author outreach programs for communities. To learn more, visit www.patrickcarman.com.