

how to host a

# virtual author

# visit

bringing authors  
& young readers  
together



**RANDOM HOUSE**  
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

# how to host a virtual author visit

Nothing brings reading alive for young readers like making a personal connection with their favorite authors or illustrators. Sometimes, though, it's not possible for authors and illustrators to come directly to schools and libraries and meet their young fans.

Technology like Skype, Google Talk, and iChat, is making it easier and easier for authors and illustrators to connect with young readers in their classrooms or libraries. Authors or illustrators can have a completely interactive, informative, and most of all, fun visit with young readers, right from their homes, offices, or studios

## what to look for in authors & illustrators for a virtual visit:

- Authors or illustrators that make the best virtual visits have outgoing personalities and interact easily with young readers.
- Consider the author's honorarium, just as you would for a visit in person.
- Ask the author or illustrator to prepare some video clips, slides, artwork, anything to keep the young readers engaged in what's happening on screen.
- Discuss with the author or illustrator a time limit for the visit. Thirty minutes is usually a good length for a virtual visit.
- Ask the author or illustrator if they are willing to sign bookplates to give to young readers to place either in their own books or in the school or library's books. Order books through a bookstore or wholesaler as you normally would for an author visit.

## how a classroom or library can prepare for a virtual visit:

- Arrange a space for the virtual visit that would be conducive to any author visit. Make sure there is ample room for a large enough screen so all young readers can see the author, and that the sound is loud enough for a full room of people.
- Prepare young readers as you would for a author visit in person. Make sure they are familiar with the author's work and have questions ready. Find support materials for many Random House Children's Books titles at [www.randomhouse.com/teachers](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers)
- Have an adult facilitate the visit. The facilitator should call on young readers when their hands are raised, help keep the program moving, and be able to troubleshoot any technical issues.
- Take a technology test run a few days before the virtual visit. Make sure you and the author test out the video program, camera, microphones, speakers, and projection on both ends.

# why host a virtual author visit?

an author's perspective:



How is a virtual visit different from a physical visit?



**Jarrett J. Krosoczka:** Surprisingly, not too different. Students are still learning about my writing process and I still draw pictures for them, too. The major difference is that I'm not physically there to control the crowd, so I rely on my host to help facilitate the conversation. When I visit with students virtually, they can see the actual space where my stories take shape. I give them a tour of my studio and introduce them to my pug, Ralph.

**Jarrett J. Krosoczka**

is the creator of the LUNCH LADY series, PUNK FARM, and more!

Are books sold during your virtual visits? Is there something worked out for autographs?



**JK:** Books can be sold during virtual visits! Hosting schools email me a list of books sold and I mail them signed bookplates to be placed in the students' books.

As an author, do you prepare differently?



**JK:** I test run the video connection with the school a day before the visit. I also make sure that my desk isn't too cluttered!



What are the pros of a virtual visit? What are any limitations to the visit?



**JK:** The most obvious pro is that it's more affordable for hosting schools. There are no flights or hotels to book. Plus, the cost of the actual author visit is cheaper. It's also easier to reschedule if winter weather cancels classes and you never have to worry about cancelled flights. The only limitation would be the students' physical proximity to me during my presentations. But from what I've found, even when visiting with students virtually, they feel like they met a professional author.



Do you ask that the kids you're visiting with prepare differently?



**JK:** I ask that educators pump the students up in the same way as my in-person visits. The kids will get more out of my presentation if they're familiar with my books. For virtual visits, it's helpful when educators work with their students to formulate a list of questions for our video chat.

Do the kids respond differently if you're communicating virtually versus in person?



**JK:** Not that I've found. They are still captivated by the stories behind my books, laugh at my jokes, and love seeing me draw. I mail the drawing to the school afterwards. So just like an in-person visit, they have a physical souvenir of our time together.

# why host a virtual author visit?

an educator's perspective:



How is a virtual visit different from a physical visit?



**Daniel Rolo**

is a fifth-grade teacher at the Monsignor Uyen Catholic School in Ontario, Canada.

**Daniel Rolo:** Believe it or not, a virtual visit can often be more intimate and personal than an actual visit! The author doing the visit is often able to give students a glimpse of his or her personal life (including their studio or work area) that would not be possible in a traditional in-school visit. These situations make the interviews that much more personal and “authentic” for students, who get to see real authors in a real setting talking about their real work.

Virtual visits also eliminate some of the logistical issues that can arise with booking an in-school visit. Distance and travel time are non-issues, and worrying about booking multiple schools in order to reduce cost and maximize the author's time in an area is also unnecessary. If problems do arise (for example, a snow day cancels the buses and there are no students at school on the scheduled visit date), virtual visits are easily rescheduled with very little inconvenience to either the class or author involved.



Do you sell books during the virtual visit, or work out some way for the kids to have autographs?



**DR:** We have not sold books during virtual visits, but the author's works are always featured after the virtual visit so that I can capitalize on student interest and engagement. The books usually fly off the shelves in the weeks that follow a visit! (It's also not uncommon for students to want to write/draw their own contributions to the author's work, and I have several students who want to submit their ideas to the author for consideration!)

We have had authors send us autographs after the virtual visit (including signed drawings, etc), which students enjoy. But I have not found that students are disappointed that they can't get an in-person autograph. It hasn't been an issue.

Do you prepare the kids differently?



**DR:** I do not prepare students any differently for a virtual visit than I would for a personal visit. I help build the hype for the visit just as I normally would. We talk about the book and the author, we read up on the author's biography, and we brainstorm some questions that we want to ask when we connect via video call. In the case of our virtual visit with Jarrett J. Krosoczka, he sent us a link to some videos of him talking about different aspects of his work and career. We watched these short videos as a class and that led to more discussion and questions. On the whole, though, preparing students for a virtual visit isn't much different.

What are the pros of the virtual visit?



**DR:** Virtual visits are generally less expensive than arranging for an in-school visit. They are flexible in terms of arranging times/dates—if it becomes necessary to postpone a video call, that's much easier to arrange than to re-arrange schedules for a personal visit. They're highly engaging for students—many already use Skype and MSN Chat, so a virtual visit falls within the “language” of their world. Virtual visits are an excellent way to motivate students and engage them with the authors they are already reading!



Are there any limitations to the visit?



**DR:** Virtual visits may be less slightly interactive than a personal visit if the personal visit includes hands-on audience participation.



Do the kids respond differently if you're communicating virtually versus in person?



**DR:** I have not found that students respond differently. On the contrary! We always generate more questions and comments during a virtual visit than is possible to answer in the given time. Students do have to be told how to speak during a virtual visit as the technology doesn't allow for multiple voices very well.



What advice do you have for schools and/or libraries that are planning a virtual author visit?



**DR:** Check with the IT department to make sure it's possible! (There are often bandwidth limitations or network restrictions in place that may make the video call impossible. It's good to know if there will be any obstacles to completing the call before actually booking a call!) As with in-school visits: promote the virtual visits, get students involved and excited about the video call, select authors based on student interest, keep the audience to about 25 students (if you want more interaction, that is). As with in-school visits, select authors who are currently being studied in class or whose work is currently "hot" among students. This ensures a high degree of enthusiasm and interest.

For a list of  
Random House  
Children's Books  
authors who can  
do virtual visits,  
log on to :

[www.randomhouse.com/  
teachers/authors/list.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/list.html)

technology  
informative  
fun

virtual visits

# recommended Web-based video programs

These Web-based video programs are easy to use and not only allow for video chat, but also for sharing files, such as videos, slides, artwork, and more.

**skype**

[www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)

(PC and Mac users)

**google talk**

[www.google.com/talk/](http://www.google.com/talk/)

(PC and Mac users)

**ichat**

[www.apple.com/  
macosx/what-is-  
macosx/ichat.html](http://www.apple.com/macosx/what-is-macosx/ichat.html)

**For more information** on

hosting a virtual author visit in your school or library,  
visit: [www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/appear.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/appear.html)