



Library: Webster Public Library

Title of Program or Event: Author Chat

Age level: gr. 5 – 12 (ages 10 – 14 yrs.)

Description of Activity: Students have an opportunity to visit with an author, long distance, through the use of a telephone call with a speaker phone.

Objectives / Goals: To promote awareness of disabilities using a book featuring a character with disabilities; To learn about an author's writing process and their view of incorporating a character with a disability into their story; To encourage excitement and further reading by having an opportunity to visit with an author students enjoy.

Suggested setting: Library meeting room

Time required: 1.5 hours

Materials needed: \$100 honorarium for author (for 30 minutes of conversation); speaker phone with regular handset; Internet connection to author's web page; laptop computer; media projector (optional) to project author's web page (e.g., photo of the author, book descriptions) for all participants to review; refreshments based on some element of the book; supplies for hands-on activity; multiple copies of the book discussed and other titles by the author to circulate; display of books and "read-alike" book list of titles with similar themes; name tag for each participant; autographed bookplate (see below); new copy of the author's book for door prize; digital camera; thank you card for author; white board markers and eraser.

Advanced Preparation:

1. Contact author via e-mail. (Our author was Cynthia Lord, whose first novel, **Rules**, was recently recognized by the American Library Association as a Newbery Honor Book for 2007.) Establish a specific date and time for the program.
2. Librarian prepares publicity and distributes throughout library and to media for pre-registration of participants. If program is being held several times (multiple sites), publicity fliers, handbills, and press releases can be designed with blank areas that can be personalized by each library presenting the program.
3. Determine if the program should be held for an established book discussion group (e.g., Page Turners Club with adults and children together, Teen Advisory Board) and/or promoted to additional students to join with a group for this one-time event.

4. Publicity should also be disbursed to support groups for families with children with special needs.
5. Review the author's web page (<http://cynthialord.com/materials.html>) for potential discussion questions and activities to use with students (see "For Teachers" on her web page for a complete Discussion Guide).
6. Ask the author to sign a bookplate than can put into a copy of their book as a door prize for the participants. (Cindy Lord donated an autographed copy of **Rules** to each site.)
7. Develop a list of read-alikes for upper elementary and teen readers, including some nonfiction titles on autism.
8. Send an e-mail reminder to the author one week before to confirm the program and determine what telephone number to call (in the event the author is traveling away from home).
9. Set up program room with technology needed, supplies for activities.

Procedure:

1. Gather students one hour (possibly 45-minutes) prior to the time of the call.
2. Have all students make a name tag or table tent. Post a display of draft pages of **Rules**.
3. Tally what titles the students have read of the author's books. Share some biographical information about the author.
4. Review the display of Cynthia Lord's writing process, timeline, drafts, etc.
5. Review characters' names and what role they played in the book (e.g., Catherine, David, Jason, Ryon, Kristi, Catherine's parents, Jason's mother, the speech therapist, etc.).
6. Have each student write down one or more questions they would like to ask the author about the featured title.
7. Transfer the students' questions to a whiteboard, combining any similar questions. Number the questions and put the student's name next to the question they will ask.
8. Prior to the call, have an activity the students can do (e.g., for **Rules**, write a new rule for David or a rule for siblings. Could also draw a communication icon of current slang or jargon that Jason could use.)
9. Discuss a few rules for interviewers (e.g., only one person talk at a time; do not interrupt the author when she is speaking; speak loudly and distinctly—enunciate your words; look at the phone as you are speaking to it; no side conversations, please).
10. After the telephone call is placed, each student uses the telephone handset to introduce themselves and ask their question (so the author can hear clearly). The author's reply is broadcast on the speaker phone so all participants can hear the answer.
11. Hold a door prize drawing from the participants' name tags for the book with the autographed book plate.
12. Take a photograph of the participants that will be printed and sent to the author with the thank you card. Suggestion: have participants be holding the books and the telephone handset, possibly staged in front of the library or by the library's sign.

13. Have the students all sign the thank you card.
14. Encourage students to borrow books from display of materials with related themes.
15. Mail the thank you card and photograph to the author.

Modifications: Students with disabilities may need to write down the question(s) they would like to ask the author. If the student has a communications disability, a typical student may need to ask the question for them on the telephone. Students with disabilities may need to be paired with a typical peer to complete any hands-on activity (e.g., drawing, writing). Selecting a title that is available on audiobook will make the program more accessible to students with visual or learning disabilities.

Evaluation: Gauge the enthusiasm of the group, their reaction during and after the telephone call, and the “products” they make (e.g., communication cards). Circulation of the author’s books and books with related themes. Display photos, activity items, and author books after the program to promote another similar program.

Other potential titles for discussion might include:

- ***Birdwing*** by Rafe Martin (based on the Grimm’s fairytale of the seven brothers turned into swans, the story explores the life of the seventh brother who, after the spell is broken, has one arm and one swan wing)
- ***Freaks*** by A. Klause (historical adventure novel of the life of sideshow “freaks”)

Program developed from “Author Chats: Long Distance and Low Cost Author Visits” presentation at the New York Library Association’s Youth Service Section’s spring conference 2006 by Patricia Lundquist (K-12 Librarian, Panama (NY) Central School) and Valle Blair (Children’s Librarian, James Prendergast Library, Jamestown NY).

Other avenues of publicity:

- Check if the local public broadcasting radio station has a regular program (or part of the schedule for “Reach Out Radio” for the visually impaired) could include reading a part of a chapter to promote the book.
- Libraries with storyline services may be able to read a portion of a chapter for their weekly offering.

file: author chat

final: 3/14/07