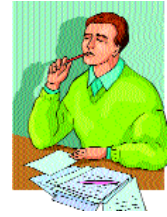




Kids Connect with Authors

by Karen Antikajian



Kids can make powerful connections with authors both through reading their books and learning about their lives and how they write. Learning that authors are ordinary people who spend a lot of time and effort on their writing is an excellent way to emphasize how important it is to revise a piece of writing until it is just right.

There are some excellent books on writing by authors that also write engaging picture and/or chapter books. One of my favorites is *From Pictures to Words* by Janet Stevens and another is a “how to” book by Patricia Reilley Giff called *Write Up a Storm with the Polk Street School*. Others are: *Self-Portrait: Trina Schart Hyman*; *Author - A True Story* by Helen Lester; *On the Bus with Joanna Cole* (about the Magic School Bus); and Jean Little’s *A Story of Jean*.

For the older students we have two by Beverly Cleary: *A Girl from Yamhill* and *My Own Two Feet* as well as two by Roald Dahl that are a little easier: *Boy* and *Going Solo*. Sid Fleischman has written *The Abracadabra Kid*; Gary Paulsen, *Guts*; Walter Dean Myers, *Bad Boy*; Jerry Spinelli, *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*; Lois Lowry, *Looking Back*; Betsy Byars, *The Moon and I*; Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, *How I Came to be a Writer*; and *Bill Peet, An Autobiography*. I know there are others that aren’t on my bookshelf. Learning how a favorite author started writing often convinces students that they can write, too.

When I taught at Buena Vista Spanish Immersion School in Eugene, each year we had an author spend a day at our school to talk about how they wrote their books. This was a powerful incentive for our students to improve their writing skills. Besides the author visit, I used books, video tapes, audio tapes and posters from book clubs to give my third graders information about many authors and illustrators. Author studies are great ways to investigate and compare author styles and writing techniques.

When students are impressed with an author or a particular book, they feel as though the author is a friend and often they want to write a letter to the author. Below is one of the letters from the book, *Dear Author* which contains letters that students have written to favorite authors. (From READ magazine.)

Dear Beverly Cleary,

I have always thought that books had to make you laugh or cry, but the book I am going to write to you about, the one that inspired me, is the book entitled *Strider*.

Now there are many things that inspired me, but I will start off with the boy named Leigh. He is just like me. I am thirteen years old and Leigh is fourteen. He runs track, as do I. But the most important similarity is that my parents are divorced, too. My father never visits, and Leigh’s dad rarely visits him; both dads always seem to be late on the support payments.

Another thing that affected me is the way you portrayed Leigh and his friend when they found the dog on the beach and they began to treat the dog like he was a child in a custody battle. They had to make up visitation rights on who would keep their dog at a certain house on a certain day, as well as who would get to walk him. All the other books I have read that are made for children of divorcing parents seem to

have a little bit of fiction, but the book *Strider* seemed true to life without any made-up things. The most lasting feeling was that there are other people out there with the same exact problems, but, of course, some are not as severe.

Why did I choose the book? At first, I chose it because it was short and I could do my assignment with little work. However, as the story went on, I found myself very interested, to the point that I could not put the book down. It made me feel relieved to find out that I was normal and not that different than anyone else in this situation.

I would also like to know some things about you. Do you enjoy living in California? Have you ever been married and divorced? Are you also a child from a divorced family? I seem to feel you are, because of your insight into this very common but disturbing fact of life. I would like to hear from you, if possible.

Brandon Chrostowski,14

