



Promoting literacy among disadvantaged children one book and author at a time

March 15, 2016

Greetings, friends of An Open Book Foundation!

As you saw in last month's newsletter, An Open Book devotes a great deal of time, thought, and energy to selecting and preparing the books we distribute to young readers at our school visits. While owning their own books encourages children to read more for pleasure (which, in turn, creates stronger readers), a critical component of our school visits is the meaningful interaction between student and author. Read on to learn more about the logistics of An Open Book **Author/Illustrator Events!**

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**Where Do You Find an Author?**

An Open Book has the pleasure and privilege of working with an incredible array of talented authors and illustrators. While many of these guests are old friends from having spent years in the industry, new volunteer authors and illustrators are introduced to us by their colleagues, publicists, and word of mouth. Our website offers an [author/illustrator interest form](#) to reach out to us, and we are never shy about contacting an author or illustrator who we feel would offer a high-interest program to local students. Authors and illustrators waive all speaking fees for AOB events, a generous affirmation of their commitment to helping improve the literacy and lives of students throughout the DC area.

**Fundraising Spotlight**

AOB is grateful for the continued support of our donors. This month, we would like to extend a special thanks to....

**Sunday Afternoon Bookclub**

The members of the Sunday Afternoon Bookclub generously supported the purchase of Carole Boston Weatherford's book *Gordon Parks* for 30 second graders, their classroom, and the library at Malcolm X Elementary School last year. An Open Book created special

**We Do Our Homework**

When an author or illustrator volunteers for an AOB visit, AOB tailors that event specifically to them. Of course, that means scheduling an event around the author's availability, but many more behind-the-scenes details factor into planning a successful AOB event.



First and foremost, we consider the book. In February, a new title by Winifred Conkling about female scientists brought us to an [AP Physics class](#) and Girls Coding Club. Next month, we are bringing Katy Kelly to an elementary school on Capitol Hill, where her books are

set. We might take into account a school's art or music program, [their garden](#), an area's concentration of first-generation immigrants from a particular country, or a potential thematic connection to the readers' academic curriculum. Matching readers and good-fit schools with AOB visitors takes work, but it ensures a receptive, engaged audience for our authors and illustrators!

## Back to School

Once an AOB visit has been scheduled, we order books for the students and generate an agenda for the event. While we cannot offer travel or hotel stipends, we do our best to drive our authors to their AOB visits (and anywhere they would like to afterwards)! Our event plans take into account travel time, transitions between classes in the case of multiple presentations, and shorter attention spans when we visit younger readers.

School librarians and classroom teachers are quick to help us with A/V or equipment needs, which helps to expedite on-site preparations. Sometimes the hardest part about setting up a school event is getting all the new books there! (See last month's newsletter for more on the 9,000 books we distributed last year alone.)

Generally, we arrange for small groups of students to meet with an author, as the lower reader-to-writer ratio deepens the impact of that interaction in both directions. Over the course of multiple presentations, however, an author may meet with as many as 140 students or, in some rare cases, an entire school during an assembly!

## During an Event

There is no set formula for our events, which means an author might have a different experience visiting with us for one event than they will for the next. We love the variety! All told, AOB staff plan and attend more than 100 events each year. During every AOB event, we introduce the visiting author, provide background or context to students for new subject matter in the book, and generally support the authors, illustrators, and students throughout the visit.

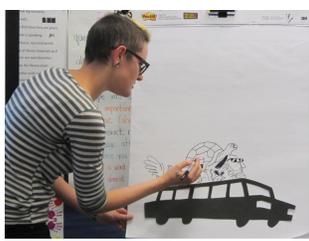


Once a visit is underway, an author might talk with the students about the inspiration for their story, the research supporting it, the writing or editing process (like Andrea Pinkney [sharing her notebooks](#) at Charles Hart Middle School, above), or any host of other book-related topics. For older students, we might arrange for a longer visit to allow for a hands-on writing workshop.

nameplates commemorating the Bookclub's contribution, one of which was placed inside each new text. Below left is a photo of Jamey Christoph, the book's illustrator, drawing with students at the event. Thank you again for your generosity, Sunday Afternoon Bookclub readers!

If your book group is interested in sponsoring an AOB event, please just [let us know!](#)





Illustrators often create artwork on a large pad of paper, such as Eleanor Davis's limousine riders based on suggestions from students at Thomson Elementary School

(at left), or they might sketch on a whiteboard, as did Chris Myers when he visited Savoy Elementary.

Multimedia artists may demonstrate for students how digital resources can be used to generate spectacular artwork in picture books. Some illustrators demonstrate all of these techniques in one presentation!

Many times, an illustrator's visit includes time spent creating art with the students, such as the [recycled dream catchers](#) students at St. Francis International School crafted with Elizabeth Zunon, or the stars and Maxes Ed Vere helped first graders sketch at Truesdell Education Campus. Illustrator Jamey Christoph took his work down the students' level at Malcolm X Elementary (at right).



### Signing Off

We end each AOB presentation with an opportunity for each student to have his new book autographed by the author or illustrator. This personal interaction leaves a lasting

impression on the students. It also offers quieter children a chance to speak directly to the visitor. Plus, it is just plain awesome to have your book autographed!



Feedback from AOB authors is overwhelmingly positive. The events offer a meaningful interaction with readers as well as a glimpse at the pure joy that a new book can bring a child. Because the students love our

events, teachers and administrators clamor for AOB's quick return. We are grateful for the warm reception AOB receives both from authors/illustrators and at school visits.

Next month we will explore what happens **after an AOB visit**. In the meantime, we hope the end of winter finds you healthy and happy, with a good read of your own in hand.

Sincerely,

Dara La Porte, Co-Founder and Executive Director  
An Open Book Foundation

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