

How To Treat Your Author:

A Guide to Getting the Most from an Author Visit



Tamsyn Murray



Hi there,

You're reading this because you've booked (or are thinking about booking) a visit from children's author, Tamsyn Murray. That's me, in case you weren't sure. And perhaps you've never had an author visit before, or maybe you're a veteran (in which case, hurrah!) but either way, it's a good idea to read this guide to ensure you get the most out of my visit.

Author visits are the best way I know to get kids fired up about reading. I bet you're thinking, 'She would say that!' and of course you're right, I am mildly biased, but I also have seven years' experience of working in a primary school. And I know from observation that having an author talk to your pupils is like sprinkling fairy dust on their imaginations. They'll go away enthusiastic about reading, desperate to get writing and totally in love with stories. I can't take credit for that last bit – *all* children love stories. But trust me, you'll be reaping the rewards of a good author visit for months.

So read on and find out how to make the magic happen.



Who Am I?



I'm a children's author based in Hertfordshire. I write (usually) funny, engaging books for all age ranges, from picture books to teens. My books have been published in nine countries and sometimes get nominated for awards, although I've never actually managed to get one out of the building. I am a Visiting Lecturer at London City University, where I teach their Writing for Children course. As an author, I've visited many, many schools and festivals – it's one of the best parts of the job. I'm also Patron of Reading at two schools – my remit is to promote reading for pleasure.

I have two children, lots of pets (including more rabbits than *Watership Down*) and one husband.



Books

I have nine books available at the moment (more in the pipeline – publishing is a slooooooow business). They range from *Snug as a Bug*, a crazy counting and rhyming picture book romp, through my chapter book series, *Stunt Bunny* (aged 5-9) and my *Afterlife* series for teens (aged 11+). The *Completely Cassidy* series (for 8-12s) launched in March

2015 and is all about celebrating talent, whether it's something small or something big. Accidental Genius is part of the 2015 Summer Reading Challenge.

It's a good idea to get your pupils familiar with my books before I visit. You can find sample chapters of all my books (except *Snug as a Bug*, because it doesn't have any chapters) and lots of other fun things on my websites (tamsynmurray.co.uk or completelycassidy.co.uk) There's nothing more disheartening than facing a roomful of children who stare at you blankly when you ask if they know why you're there – much better if they have an idea of what you write and the more buzz you can build before a visit, the better for everyone.

And of course, it's a GREAT idea to give your pupils the chance to buy a book and get it personally signed by me as part of the visit.

Statistics show that children go back to a book that is special to them in some way time and again, and what could be more special than a book by an author they actually met, with their own name written in the front in glittery ink? Signings can be done as part of the day or by means of an after-school signing.

For this to happen, someone needs to supply the books – this generally is not me. I prefer to support bookshops by allowing them to sell books at my events and have several that I know well in my local area. When I'm outside my usual habitat, I am open to recommendations (if your school works with a bookshop already) or I can usually source one who can help. It also means that I can concentrate on talking to your pupils, rather than worrying about whether the books have been paid for. I will usually raise the subject of books as part of the booking arrangements, so do say if you have a bookseller in mind.

Below is a list of my books. I can supply letters to go home to parents with prices etc if needed. Please do ensure well in advance that parents are aware my books will be on sale, and remind them just prior to my visit – a signed book really does help make it a day your pupils will never forget.

Picture Books

Snug as a Bug (Simon and Schuster, £6.99)

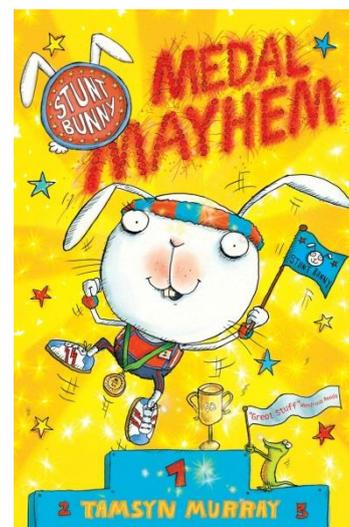
Chapter Books (5+)

Stunt Bunny: Showbiz Sensation (Simon and Schuster, £4.99)

Stunt Bunny: Tour Troubles (Simon and Schuster, £4.99)

Stunt Bunny: Rabbit Racer (Simon and Schuster, £4.99)

Stunt Bunny: Medal Mayhem (Simon and Schuster, £4.99)



Middle Grade (8-12)

The Next Big Thing (Fiction Express interactive ebook)

Completely Cassidy: Accidental Genius (Usborne, £5.99)

Completely Cassidy: Star Reporter (out July 2015, Usborne, £5.99)

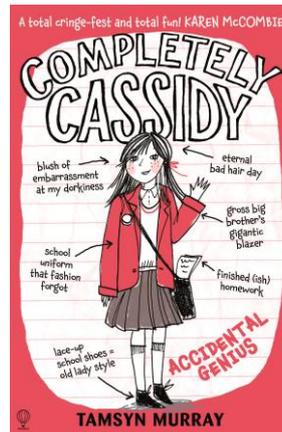


Teen books (11+)

My So-Called Afterlife (Piccadilly Press Ltd, £6.99)

My So-Called Haunting (Piccadilly Press Ltd, £6.99)

My So-Called Phantom Lovelife (Piccadilly Press Ltd, £6.99)



What My Visit Entails

Depending on your requirements, a visit will run from a half day to a full day or even several consecutive days. A half-day visit (three hours duration) will usually look something like this:

Primary schools

- A forty/fifty minute interactive assembly (suitable for Reception pupils upwards) with Q&A followed by a signing
- A ninety minute creative writing workshop with no more than thirty pupils (KS1 and up – pupils usually need a short break in the middle or their attention starts to wander)

OR

- Two x forty/fifty minute assemblies (ideal for large schools) with Q&A followed by signings



Secondary Schools

One hour-long assembly with Q&A followed by a signing

One hour-long creative writing workshop with no more than thirty pupils

OR

Two x one hour assemblies with Q&A followed by signings

Please note that I can do a maximum of two short events or one short and one long, in a half-day. I will need a break of around ten minutes between each (and time spent signing books is not a break – it's pretty tiring to spell names correctly and converse with pupils at the same time) and a cup of tea\glass of water is very welcome.



A full day visit (six hours duration including lunch) might look like this:

Primary Schools

- A forty/fifty minute interactive assembly (suitable for Reception pupils upwards) with Q&A followed by a signing

- Two x ninety minute creative writing workshops with no more than thirty pupils (KS1 and up – pupils usually need a short break in the middle or their attention starts to wander)

OR

- Two x forty/fifty minute assemblies (ideal for large schools) with Q&A followed by signings
- One ninety minute creative writing workshops with no more than thirty pupils (KS1 and up)

Secondary Schools

- One hour long assembly with Q&A followed by a signing
- Two x ninety minute creative writing workshop with no more than thirty pupils

OR

- Two x one hour assemblies with Q&A followed by signings
- One ninety minute creative writing workshops with no more than thirty pupils

Please note I can manage a maximum of three sessions in a full day visit and will need a break of at least ten minutes in between (see above). If you want me to work with more pupils than I have suggested above, you should book me for more than one day – consecutive days work best, booked well in advance. I am happy to sit in the staff room during lunch, although I'm often absorbed in catching up on email and tweeting about my visit, and a school dinner is **very** welcome – do check with each author when you arrange other visits, some of us prefer to go off site.

After school signings come as standard (obviously, this is only possible with full day or afternoon half day visits) and we can negotiate a short fifteen minute nursery reading if time allows – ask in advance about this, don't spring it on me at the last minute. Similarly, don't arrange for interviews with student journalists over lunch without asking me first. I need time to gather my thoughts and prepare for the next session.

Ensure you allow time for pupils to come in and out of the hall – a back-to-back schedule cuts into my performance time. And if you know a lot of parents have sent money to buy a book, let me know and I can tailor my event time to give more time for signing or we can organise pre-orders. The Stunt Bunny books in particular tend to be very popular (providing parents have had advance notice of my visit) and pupils often buy all four.



What do I need on the day?

For assemblies, I will make use of a projector and put a Powerpoint display up. This is critical for secondary schools and less important for primary schools, where I can easily cope without. I also need a table and, for primary schools, some space to work in at the front (it's an interactive assembly – some children will physically take part). For workshops, I need a flipchart and pens. Pupils will need pen\pencils and paper.



Charges

A half day visit currently costs £200 and a full day visit costs £400, plus travel costs and expenses. If you are a long way from Hertfordshire, I will add a cost of £100 to cover a hotel stay. Please note these rates are only valid until August 2015, when they will be increasing.

If you book two or more consecutive days, these are charged at £350.



Payment

I send through an invoice by PDF at least one week before an event, so that you can prepare a cheque to give me on the day – if you need more notice than this, let me know. I also accept payment by BACS (details on request), to reach my account by the day of the visit. Sadly, I have been let down in the past and therefore can only accept payment after the event in exceptional circumstances. I do rely on being paid to feed my children – I'm sure you understand.



CRB/DBS Clearance/Public Liability Insurance

I have enhanced CRB clearance but I don't carry it with me, because I do not expect to be left alone with children at any time. Please ask if you need my CRB number. I have Public Liability Insurance to the value of £10 million.



When to book

I usually only make one school visit per week, so my calendar books up quite quickly. To avoid disappointment, contact me well in advance of the date you have in mind. World Book Day is booked months in advance.



Cancellations

Sometimes these are unavoidable. I will always do my utmost to be there but if the worst should happen and you or I have to cancel, let's try to do so with as much notice as possible, and get a date for a rearranged visit in place when convenient. If you cancel my visit and I have booked train tickets and/or a hotel, you will need to reimburse me for these.



Checklist

Have you:

- Told staff I am coming? A blank look when I arrive doesn't get things off to a great start.
- Told pupils I am coming? Even worse when the children look at me blankly...
- Told parents I am coming? Remember, a signed book is the icing on the cake.
- Made provision for parking? A reserved visitor's space is much appreciated if possible.
- Downloaded sample chapters and (primary school age books only) activity sheets from my website and read through/worked on them in class?
- Contacted the local press? They're often keen to send someone to snap a picture, which means your school could end up in the paper.
- Arranged for someone to show me to classrooms etc when needed?
- Encouraged teachers to enjoy my sessions? I've had teachers catching up on their marking during an assembly and believe me, the children notice.
- Made provision to manage any challenging pupils? I am fairly entertaining but this is not the time to use me as bait in an ongoing battle to elicit good behaviour – 'If you don't behave, the lady will have to stop.' (This has happened)
- Arranged for payment to be made?

If you're not sure whether you'd like a visit, here are some comments from previous events:

"During our book week we had the luxury of a visit from Tamsyn. She enthralled the whole school during an assembly with tales of her rabbits and the inspiration behind her story. Using role play and children to help act out the saga Tamsyn really did put on an engaging assembly. During 2 workshops with year one the children began to create their own stories involving animals which they thoroughly enjoyed. They also enjoyed getting attention from Tamsyn and being able to write alongside a published author. The whole afternoon was easy to arrange, set up and run with Tamsyn being flexible to the school's needs. Tamsyn kindly stayed after school to sign books for children who had not yet pre-ordered them and the children love being able to get one final chance to chat with her as they purchased their Stunt Bunny collection. We look forward to having Tamsyn back to see us again!"

Wormley Primary School, Hertfordshire

"I booked Tamsyn Murray for an event as part of the Windsor Festival when I was working for The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead Libraries in 2011. Tamsyn was an excellent performer who provided an entertaining and informative talk that enthused the children and parents alike. She talked enthusiastically about her writing, how she became a writer, how she developed her ideas and included some hilarious role playing and audience participation. Tamsyn's books for younger children are extremely funny and Tamsyn has a fantastic sense of humour and is brilliant at getting her audience engaged and joining in. I am now an independent library consultant working for schools and wouldn't hesitate to book Tamsyn again when the right opportunity arises, she is excellent value for money and pupils will be inspired not only to read Tamsyn's books but to write their own!"

Lindsey Blake, Director - LibraryLive Ltd



Questions?

If anything isn't clear, drop me an email and ask. I often tailor my events to individual school needs so let me know if you have something in particular in mind. Let me know anything you think I need to know in plenty of time and I'll do my best to accommodate you.

I look forward to working with you.

tamsyn@tamsynmurray.co.uk

<http://tamsynmurray.co.uk>

<http://completelycassidy.co.uk>

