

from the Author's Point-of-View

Three days in the life of a visiting author

Last year, I did a grand total of 75 presentations. The highlight was in April when I did a whirlwind three days in northern Ontario.

I flew into Dryden on a 14-seater airplane on Monday night. On Tuesday morning I drove my rental car to Vermilion Bay and did five back-to-back presentations at Lillian Berg public school. Lillian Berg has only 72 students, so half of the students from Eagle River school were bussed in to participate (about 25 children). I did a storytelling session with JK-2, a writing workshop with the grade 3/4s, storytelling with the 3/4s, readings/presentations with the 5/6s and 7/8s. They even adjusted recess so that I could fit in more time with the children.

This was a dream school. Even the youngest students were passionate about books. Neither of these schools had ever had an author visit before, so I felt like a celebrity.

On Wednesday, I drove to a public school that was very different from Lillian Berg. The teachers were fantastic, and the students were friendly and polite, but the library technician told me that half of their 82 students were foster children. These children got intensive and loving care from their teachers and the library technician and this was very apparent. There was a huge range of abilities and the staff was expert in modifying for the variety of needs. It was something to watch.

The principal was keen for me to do writing workshops in addition to presentations. The morning was for the little ones, and the afternoon was for grades 5-8. Initially, the principal had thought that the Ks would not get

to sit in on any of the presentations because her students are not able to sit long, but I told her I would try to work them in somehow.

I did a quick presentation with the more capable students from grades 1 to 4. I told them about my own struggles with reading when I was young, and then started them on their writing workshop. Their skill level was, on average, much lower than most students their age. Instead of writing with gusto, most wrote only a few sentences. Some could not write at all, so I asked them to draw pictures of their story.

There were several students with huge potential. We were finished early, so I asked one of the teachers to gather the kindergarten students and the struggling 1-4s. Once all 50 of these students were in the library, I did a storytelling session with my picture book, *Silver Threads*. I was thrilled to see that even the youngest students paid attention. When I was finished, a little girl put up her hand. "That was magical," she said.

In the afternoon, I had about 30 grades 5-8 students. As soon as everyone settled in, one boy shouted, "I hate books and I hate reading." I asked how many others felt the same way and half a dozen hands went up. When I asked them why, they said because books were boring. I used that as a launch into my own reading difficulties and how I used to feel the same way. Then I asked how many people saw pictures in their head when they read, and of course the students who didn't like reading couldn't see pictures. So I asked if they would mind if I read them a scene that had some vomiting in it, and of course it was those six boys who wanted to

