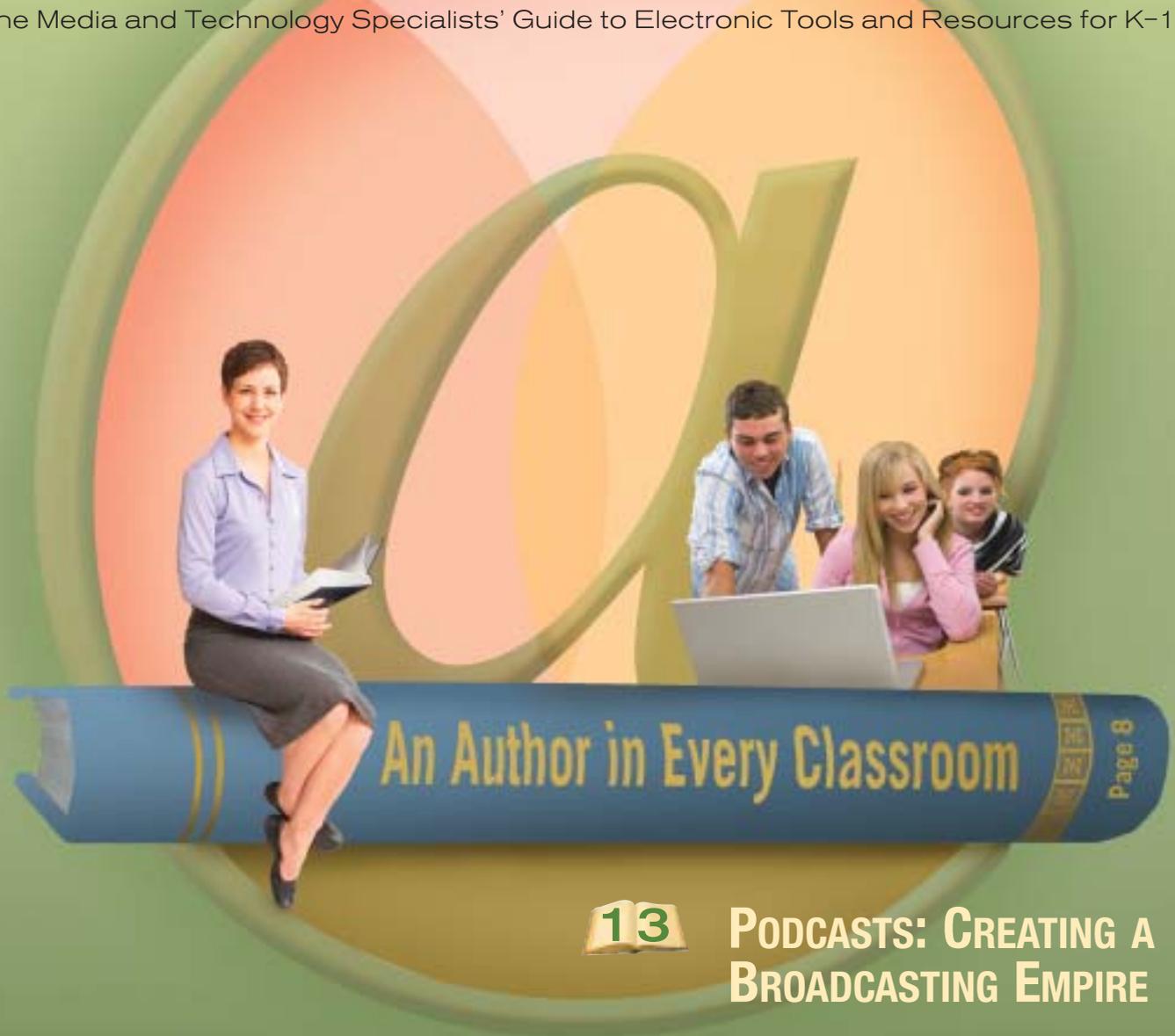


Keeping Safe in Cyberspace

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An Author in Every Classroom



by Nick Glass

Multimedia online technologies now offer an unprecedented ability to enable every student, teacher, and even every family to “meet” the authors of books they are reading.

Multimedia online technologies now offer an unprecedented ability to enable every student, teacher, and even every family to “meet” the authors of books they are reading. Just imagine the impact on student reading, writing, and enthusiasm for books if you do the following:

- Bring the author into the classroom the moment you teach their books.
- Have students learn tips directly from many professional writers and illustrators.
- Have authors virtually visit any K–12 classroom for all subject areas.

If you have ever seen an author speak or have hosted authors in your school, you have experienced the impact meeting an author has on a personal relationship to a book. It humanizes the book. It reveals the person and personality that created it. Are you able to think of the book in the same way after meeting the author and getting a glimpse into the person and the reasons the book was created? Probably not.

This article highlights specific ways you can replicate these personal connections to authors and illustrators by optimizing a variety of multimedia and online technologies. I will review specific types of virtual author programs, give examples you can freely experience, share how you can use them in your school, and guide you toward bringing an author into every classroom.

I conclude by sharing my personal motivation for this work: encouraging a specific plan for every school to regularly reinforce the human connection of reading by giving every child, educator, and family an equal opportunity to meet the author of the books they are reading.

BACKGROUND

For you to best understand the premise of this article, I’d like to share how and why I got involved with virtual author programs. As a bookseller at an independent children’s bookstore in Madison, Wis., I organized hundreds of author programs—in the store, in schools, in libraries, and even virtually—using

some of the technologies discussed in this article. I experienced first-hand how seeing and hearing an author inherently changes one's relationship with the book, for both the student and the educator. Coming out of an educational-policy background, I knew there could be a way to give everyone this opportunity. So, with a partner, I decided to take an unexpected entrepreneurial plunge and create a company, TeachingBooks.net, that would accomplish this.

TeachingBooks.net is all about enabling virtual author and book connections for everyone. I invite myself into the homes of some of the best, most-read authors and illustrators so that a virtual author program can be created to give everyone access to these authors at the reader's convenience.

Note that while some examples in this article are specifically from my efforts at TeachingBooks.net, every example I give is freely available to you. Most importantly, whether you use TeachingBooks or not, I'm hoping that this article encourages and promotes what I see as a paradigm shift among educators: that they realize the benefits of—and start enabling the use of—technology in the classroom so that every teacher, student, curriculum coordinator, and even family can meet the author of the book they are reading.

ONLINE AUTHOR RESOURCES

The following resources use archived, multimedia online materials to bring an author into the classroom.

Movies in Authors' Studios

There are video clips and edited movies on the Internet that show authors in their studios. These are made by authors, publishers, and other entities. TeachingBooks.net tries to make the most comprehensive virtual author programs we can imagine with some of the most-read, award-winning authors and

Meet Denise Fleming



Watching Caldecott Honoree Denise Fleming create her pulp-painting illustrations personalizes readers' connections to her books.
Copyright TeachingBooks.net

illustrators. We have movies, slideshows, written interviews, program guides, and links around the Web to help make these authors accessible to everyone in the educational stream (teachers, students, librarians, families—any readers). Here are some examples.

Meet Jack Gantos as he reveals his love of writing and passion for journaling. Besides talking about his *Rotten Ralph* and *Joey Pigza* books, he talks about teaching and writing for children.

- *Possible Best Practice:* Show this movie in any grade 4–12 class that teaches writing and journaling. Also use the movie of Gantos reading *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* as a book talk or book introduction.

- *Link:* <http://teachingbooks.net/jgantoss>

Meet Denise Fleming as she demonstrates her amazing pulp-painting technique and explains how she designs all facets of her books for young children.

- *Possible Best Practice:* Fine arts classes can now see this extraordinary illustrator creating a pulp-painting illustration. This method puts an illustrator and a book in the middle of the fine arts discussion.

- *Link:* <http://teachingbooks.net/dfleming>

Meet Toni Morrison as she explains to young people the relevance of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and why she wrote her Coretta Scott King Medal-winning title, *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*.

- *Possible Best Practice:* Middle and high school classes teaching history (and specifically the *Brown v. Board* decision) can now have Morrison explain to the students why this 1954 decision is relevant to them. Primary source materials fill the “further information” part of this online program.

- *Link:* <http://teachingbooks.net/tmorrison>



See and hear Jack Gantos talking about the importance of journaling while he shares how he creates his own journals.

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Meet Judy Blume as she shares insights into why she wrote *Double Fudge*. This movie, originally created by the author for her publisher, was put online for everyone.

- **Possible Best Practice:** Elementary school libraries and classrooms conducting Blume author studies can learn why she decided to write this long-awaited companion book 18 years after first introducing *Fudge* to students.
- **Link:** <http://judyblume.com/doublefudge-av.html>

Videos of Author Speeches

These are videotaped and archived Webcasts of authors giving speeches at universities, conferences, festivals, and elsewhere. Watching these at your own convenience almost replicates attending the talk in person. Now everyone has a chance to learn directly from these authors and gain personal glimpses into their lives and work.

Meet Bryan Collier as he speaks at the 2006 Library of Congress National Book Festival.

- **Possible Best Practice:** This video can be used for the professional development for art teachers. Collier is a collage illustrator and the reigning 2006 Coretta Scott King Medalist and Caldecott Honoree. Social studies classes will also value hearing how Collier illustrated *Rosa*, a book about Rosa Parks.
- **Link:** www.loc.gov/bookfest/authors/collier.html

Meet Katherine Paterson as she delivers her 1999 lecture, “The Invisible,” at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

- **Possible Best Practice:** Fans of Newbery Medalist Paterson (teachers, librarians, academics, and students) will enjoy watching this funny, thoughtful talk on writing for children. This can be used for author studies, for new teachers and librarians to learn directly from this influential writer, and for writing classes to gain insights directly from Paterson.
- **Link:** www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/authors/lecture/cz1999.asp

Audio Interviews with Authors

These audio interviews with authors and illustrators are produced and archived by radio stations, authors, and publishers. If you’ve ever listened to National Public Radio, for example, and heard just the end of an interview you thought would be useful for your colleagues or students in connecting to a book, consider using this collection of archived interviews to give everyone in your community the opportunity to learn directly from the book creator.

Meet J. K. Rowling as she talks to the National Press Club about writing her Harry Potter books.

- **Possible Best Practice:** Rowling is the author of the Harry Potter series. Students, teachers, and anyone who loves these books will enjoy and value hearing her talk about and read from her books.
- **Link:** www.npr.org/programs/npc/1999/991020.jkrowling.html

Meet Roald Dahl as he speaks in this 1988 British Broadcasting Corp. radio interview.

- **Possible Best Practice:** Writing classes can learn directly from this master writer how and why he always starts his stories with the protagonist in the worst possible situation. For students, this opportunity to garner tips directly from a professional writer is powerful. For everyone, it exemplifies that authors don’t need to be “alive” to enter a classroom virtually.
- **Link:** www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/audiointerviews/profilepages/dahlr1.shtml

Authors Reading Their Books

These audio and video excerpts of authors reading their books brings the rhythm, voice, and pace of a book to life. Some online readings are

excerpts of professional audiobook productions. Some readings are produced by publishers who ask authors to read, and others are made by entities such as TeachingBooks.net.

Meet Marilyn Nelson as she reads *A Wreath for Emmett Till*.

- **Possible Best Practice:** High school language arts, social studies, and history classes can now have poet and award-winning author Nelson read her entire evocative and haunting tribute to Emmett Till.
- **Link:** <http://teachingbooks.net/mnelson>

Meet Francisco Jiménez as he reads from *The Circuit*, in English and in Spanish.

- **Possible Best Practice:** Middle and high school social studies classes can watch a movie of Jiménez reading the first chapter of his award-winning book *The Circuit*, which is about his life as a migrant child. An additional excerpt of him reading the Spanish translation, *Cajas de cartón*, can be used in Spanish classes.
- **Link:** <http://teachingbooks.net/fjimenez>

Each of the examples in the Online Author Resources section uses archived, multimedia online materials to bring an author in the classroom. They do not allow for live interaction between student and the author.

LIVE VIRTUAL AUTHOR PROGRAMS

The following technologies can be used to bring authors into the classrooms via live virtual visits.

With the ease of new virtual communication tools (email, blogs, instant messaging, video conferencing, and so forth), communicating with authors can now occur in convenient, meaningful ways. Virtual exchanges between students and an author can be as brief as 30 minutes, or they can take place periodically throughout a full semester as a virtual author-in-residence. It is wonderful



English, language arts, and Spanish classes alike can watch author Francisco Jiménez reading from *Cajas de cartón* (*The Circuit*), his book about life as a migrant child.
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to see schools beginning to use these technologies to excite and connect readers and writers to authors and book creators.

Live virtual author programs take advance preparation. Teachers must set these up months in advance to get on an author's calendar. Frequently, honorariums will be involved, but these fees are typically much less than the expenses incurred by paying an author to travel to visit a school. Significant student preparation is also part of the key for a successful visit. Every student should have read the book (or books) by the author and have informed questions ready to ask. There are also powerful activities that can be done after the author's visit to reinforce the experience.

Phone Meeting

Putting authors on the phone with classrooms via a speakerphone has been practiced for years, and these connections remain quite powerful.

- **Possible Best Practice:** Arrange a set period of time with an author to be in his or her

office, and call them on a speakerphone so that students can hear and ask questions of the author.

Distance Learning Presentations

Authors can be present in one particular school's distance learning classroom and be beamed to hundreds of other locations on an existing distance learning education network.

- **Possible Best Practice:** Stage a professional development session for teachers at your schools and elsewhere, with a favorite and/or relevant author presenting to them. Arrange to archive the presentation so that students and educators who couldn't attend can watch this program later.

Email Author Residencies

Arrange a semester-long residency with a class, school, or even district, where the author spends 60 minutes each evening, at his or her own convenience, corresponding via

>

email with the class. Students can study the author's works, send a batch of questions for the first day, and then have follow-up email discussions throughout the week. Authors also can be paid to read drafts, comment on writing, and work virtually with students as professional writers-in-residence.

- **Possible Best Practice:** Writing classes can correspond with a professional author, enabling students to learn about the process and even have their own works critiqued by the author-in-residence. Email author residencies have endless possibilities for students to interact with authors.

Live Video Conferencing

Arrange a time with an author to be in his or her studio in front of the computer, and use a live video feed to meet and interact with the author.

- **Possible Best Practice:** Art classes can be live in the studio of an illustrator while he or she demonstrates the craft. Students can ask questions, show their own works for critique, and get to know an illustrator in a new, meaningful way.

Blog/Flickr/Wiki/Instant Messaging

You pick the technology and arrange to have time with an author in this online environment—interacting daily, weekly, or whenever you choose.

FINDING AUTHORS TO PARTICIPATE IN THESE PROGRAMS

Authors traditionally come to schools via arrangements with their publishers, their booking agents, or through direct communication. Because using this technology is still so new, I'd suggest you figure out which technique you want to

With the ease of new virtual communication tools (email, blogs, instant messaging, video conferencing, and so forth), communicating with authors can now occur in convenient, meaningful ways. Virtual exchanges between students and an author can be as brief as 30 minutes, or they can take place periodically throughout a full semester as a virtual author-in-residence.

try, and then ask the author, publisher, or agent if they are willing and interested.

Many authors have shared with me that they like these types of school interactions. They get to work with students, teachers, librarians, and families, yet they don't have to travel or even impact their day's work schedules. (For example, they only have to email for 1 hour per day for a month.)

You can find a collection of author booking agents to help you start this process at <http://teachingbooks.net/AuthorStudy>. A collection of thousands of authors' personal Web sites (where you can often find contact information) is located at <http://teachingbooks.net/AuthorWebsites>.

CONCLUSION

Imagine the impact on reading if the following practices were regularly implemented in your school. Each of these is completely feasible today!

- **Classrooms:** For 10 minutes each month, students hear the author of the book they are reading actually read aloud and share how the book was written.
- **Libraries:** For 20 minutes each month, libraries host a favorite author who shows the students the process for creating a book they've read.
- **Language Arts/Reading Classes:** For 5 minutes each

month, teachers introduce a book with a 3-minute, professionally performed audio clip, enabling students to aurally jump into the book to hear rhythm, pace, and voice.

- **Teachers:** For 10 minutes each semester, teachers could have an author or illustrator present his or her working process to a professional development meeting.
- **Families:** For 10 minutes each semester, families watch an author that the student is reading so that everyone can meet the author together, stimulating conversation about books.
- **Library, Reading, and Ed-Tech Communities:** In a K-12 school system, these communities could work together to bring books to life for all students, teachers, librarians, staff members, and families in the community.

If anyone has comments, best practices, and/or questions about virtual author programs, I'd like to hear them. Similarly, if anyone is interested in being involved in research to investigate the impact for meeting authors via technology, please contact me as well.

Nick Glass is the founder and principal of *TeachingBooks.net* (<http://teachingbooks.net>), an online collection of multimedia author and book resources. Contact him at nick@TeachingBooks.net. ■

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