

# The Virtual Author Visit with Bruce Hale

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It's an idea whose time has come: conducting author visits online. Of course, nothing can replace meeting face-to-face, but if you're dealing with a budget shortfall or a pandemic, why not try a Virtual Author Visit?

If planned as carefully as an in-person visit is usually planned, this can be an effective way to give your students the benefits of a conventional author visit — improved motivation for reading and writing, a personal connection with the author, and so forth — at a fraction of the cost.

Thanks to a webcam and the right app, your students will be able to virtually meet and talk with me, ask questions, and learn about my books and the writing life.

Of course, this visit will still require planning and preparation on the part of each class involved. Ideally, all the students should have read at least one of my books, and kids would need to plan the questions they'd want to ask me, to make best use of our time together.

Still with me? Let's start by answering some of the more common questions you might have.

## **What equipment do I need for the virtual visit?**

- Zoom, Skype, or Google Meet
- A computer connected with the Internet (preferably via high-speed modem)
- Web camera and microphone

If you've got the technical know-how, it would be nice to project the computer's video display onto a large screen with a data projector or smartboard. This will enable more students to participate in the session.

## **How do I use a web camera?**

These days, most computers have one built in. Or you could use a simple Logitech camera that clips onto your computer screen and plugs into the USB port. It's as simple as that. You can use any web camera that's compatible with

your computer. No extra software is needed. As long as you've selected your audio and video inputs and outputs in Zoom Preferences, you're good to go.

### **How can I be sure this will work?**

I will test the transmission with you a day or two before the visit, so that we can make sure the set-up works properly. We can talk over the presentation requirements and make sure that everything runs smoothly.

On the day of the visit, I'll call a little bit early, to ensure that the connection works.

### **What happens if we have trouble connecting?**

Sometimes, no matter how well we prepare, technical gremlins rear their ugly little heads. If that happens, I will reschedule my Virtual Author Visit for another time, preferably within a week of the attempted visit.

No matter what, you *will* get the visit you pay for.

## **BEFORE THE VISIT...**

Preparation is the key to a Virtual Author Visit that gets kids fired up about books and reading. Here's what you can do to ensure a successful experience:

**1. Read at least one of my books to the kids** who will be participating. This is crucial to their having a satisfying experience. If they don't know the books, they won't care about virtually meeting the author.

If they can read or be exposed to more than one of my books, so much the better.

**2. Have the students visit my website, [www.brucehale.com](http://www.brucehale.com)** There, they'll find some fun handouts (on the Author Visit Resource Material page), information on my life and books, and directions on how to write a story (under Fun Stuff).

Encourage the kids to try their hand at drawing Chet Gecko (from the how-to handout), or use the activities on the Chet Gecko Teachers Guide, downloadable from the Chet Gecko page under the Fun Stuff menu.

**3. Help the students come up with questions** they'd like to ask me. You may need to guide them to devise questions about the writing process, rather than "How much money do you make?" and "How old are you?"

If you like, you may send me some of the questions in advance, but that's not necessary.

**4. Pre-select the kids who will ask me a question** during the visit — at least a dozen students. I'll answer more questions if we have time for it, but a dozen is good to start with. I'll let a school coordinator call on the kids during Q&A.

**5. If you have the time and energy, go for the gold!** Try one of or more of these student engagement activities:

- **Illustrated metaphors** — ask each student to pick his or her favorite Chet Gecko simile or metaphor (“as full of poison as a cobra’s toothbrush,” “shorter than an ant’s suspenders,” etc.) and illustrate it.

- **Joke contest** — The Chet Gecko books are full of old (often bad) jokes. Encourage the kids to write down their own favorite joke on a bookmark. For inspiration, check out Natalie Attired’s Bad Joke Page at:

<https://brucehale.com/natalies-bad-joke-book/>

- **Design a villain** — The Chet Gecko and Underwhere books are packed with colorful villains. Encourage the kids to create a WANTED poster for their own villain, based on the classic FBI wanted posters, with short descriptions and a drawing.

## **ORDERING BOOKS:**

An author visit represents an excellent opportunity to get kids excited about reading. And the best way to take positive advantage of that excitement is to provide autographed books for the students while they're still fired up — on the day of the event.

You can obtain the books from your nearby bookstore, from my East Coast author representative (ask me for contact info) or directly from the publishers. Ideally, the books should be ordered at least two weeks before the visit to ensure that they'll be on-hand that day.

You'll find a downloadable list of my books on the Virtual Author Visit page of my website.

If given enough advance notice, I can send sheets of autographed stickers that kids can paste into their books.

Here's the best way to handle book orders:

1. Read the books to the kids;
2. At least 4 weeks before the virtual visit, pass out order forms for students to take home;
3. Collect the order forms and money;
4. At least 2 1/2 weeks before the visit, place the book orders with either your local bookstore or the books' publishers;
5. At the same time, send me a count of total books ordered, so I'll know how many autograph stickers to sign.

## **THE VIRTUAL VISIT**

### **Format:**

I'll start by doing a presentation of about 20 minutes, talking about my life and how I went from being a reluctant reader to a well-published author. Then I'll do a storytelling from one of my books. The bulk of the questions will come after the storytelling. I'll wrap things up with a cartooning demonstration.

When it's time for the kids to ask their questions, be sure they stand close enough to the mike and camera so that I can see and hear them clearly.

### **Group size:**

The number of students is limited only by their ability to see the screen. In general, I believe that Virtual Author Visits will be more effective for single grade levels or groups of up to 150. And of course, if you're on Zoom, there's a 100-computer limit for logging on.

### **Length and Grade Levels:**

45 minutes for Grades 2-6  
35 minutes for Grades K-1

### **Cost:**

Normally, it costs \$2,100 when I visit schools outside my home state of California. However, the Virtual Author Visit costs only:

\$500 for one session

Payments should be made before the visit, via PayPal on my website's ordering page. If you're unable to use PayPal for any reason, please send a check made out to Story Power Communications to:

Bruce Hale

Story Power Communications  
P.O. Box 91835  
Santa Barbara, CA 93190

**Ready to schedule your Virtual Author Visit?** Contact me by phone between 9-5 Pacific Time at: 805-563-7337. Or send an e-mail to:

[writerguy@brucehale.com](mailto:writerguy@brucehale.com)

I look forward to hearing from you soon!