

JEF CZEKAJ AUTHOR VISITS



"With videos, live drawing, and tons of audience participation, Jef's visit felt more like a rock concert than an author reading. My students were inspired by his drawings and empowered to make their own."

-Aaron Bennett, Fayerweather Street School, Cambridge, MA

Why have Jef visit your school or library?

I'm glad you asked:

1. My visits are **dynamic** and **interactive**. They involve **music**, **video**, **drawing**, and, of course, **reading**. Teachers tell me that my visits feel more like **rock concerts** than "presentations".
2. Meeting the creator of a book creates a **powerful connection between students and books**, a connection that will last in the classroom long after my visit.
3. Books and other forms of media are usually presented to young people without any explanation as to how the books were made or who made them. A goal of my visit is to **demystify the creative process** and to show students that **they have the power to create their own books and media**.
4. **It's fun** (both for me and the students)!

Contact Jef for an author visit today!: jef@czekaj.com

THE PRESENTATIONS



In addition to being a writer and illustrator, I am also a musician. As the DJ of a hip-hop group, I use the skills I've learned as a musician and performer to combine music and video, along with traditional reading and drawing, to create **attention-grabbing, interactive presentations** that appeal to even the "coolest" kids.

I have several presentations, but each can be customized to meet the specific needs of your students. Two for younger children (K-2nd) entitled **WHAT IS HIP HOP?** and **CATS ONLY!**, and two for grades 3-6, entitled **FROM BRAIN TO BOOK** and **WHAT THE HECK DO AN YOU DO ALL DAY?**, which demystifies the life of an artist. Of course, since every group of kids is different, every presentation I do turns out differently. Generally, each visit includes a reading of a book or two, a short presentation, and, if desired, a short activity. I'm also happy to autograph kids books.

CATS ONLY! (grades K-2nd) (app. 30 minutes)

The good news: Jef is here to read his book, **Cat Secrets**. The bad news: this book is only for cats. Luckily, Jef has a cat costume and, if the students are willing to pretend that they are also cats, we can read the book.

This presentation consists of two interactive readings: **Cat Secrets** and one other book (usually either **Hip and Hop**, **Don't Stop** or **Yes, Yes, Yaul**).

After the readings, I talk about what inspires my books (in the case of **Cat Secrets**, my cat, Tucker) and how I transform things that happen in real life into fiction.

WHAT IS HIP HOP? (grades K-2nd) (app. 30 minutes)

WHAT IS HIP HOP? uses music and video as well as traditional reading and writing to introduce kids to the creative process and to show them the similarities between music and storytelling.

It begins with a short funny video that attempts to answer the question "What is Hip Hop?" with cartoons, music videos, and news clips.

Following that is a discussion about hip hop. I emphasize that the 4 elements of hip hop culture (breakdancing, rapping, DJing and graffiti) closely resemble subjects studied in school (dance, poetry, music, and art). The connection between rap and poetry is highlighted.

That leads to a reading of HIP AND HOP, DON'T STOP! Since the book is about a rabbit and a turtle who humorously rap, I've created a hip hop soundtrack to the reading. Thus, the reading more closely resembles a performance than it does a traditional "reading".

Following that is a brief discussion about the creative process, with an emphasis on the similarities between my process and the process that even young kids are taught in school. If there's time, we can do a short drawing activity.

FROM BRAIN TO BOOK (grades 3-6)

(app. 45 minutes)

The presentation begins with a reading of HIP AND HOP, DON'T STOP! As with the younger grades, this reading involves music and rapping and more closely resembles a "performance" than it does a traditional reading. For the older grades (5th and 6th), I enlist help from the audience to perform the raps from the book.

Following that is a humorous talk (using Powerpoint slides and a video to keep their attention) that follows my creative process from brainstorming through to final publication. In particular, it follows the evolution of one specific page from HIP AND HOP, DON'T STOP! from idea, to sketchbook, to rough drafts, to final art. I emphasize the similarities between my art supplies and the kids' (pencils, notebooks, pens, etc), and how my process mirrors the process that kids typically follow in creating stories in the classroom. I bring actual sketches, final art, and tools used to give the kids a concrete picture of the creative process.

Once again, if there is time (and if the teachers are interested) we can do a short interactive art activity.

WHAT THE HECK DO YOU DO ALL DAY? (grades 3-6)

(app. 45 minutes)

Books and other forms of media are presented to young people without any explanation as to how the books were made or who made them. Likewise, the stereotypical idea of "an artist" is of an inaccessible intellectual who sits in his room and draws pretty pictures all day. The reality, of course, is much messier (and much more fun).

This presentation demystifies both the creative process and what it's like to be a "professional" artist. I trace my own personal history, from a young boy who liked to tell stories to a published author. I also answer the most common questions I am asked including: How do I come up with my ideas? How is a book made? and Where do you get your ideas?

This presentation teaches students that they don't have to wait until they are adults to make art and tell stories. They have the tools right now to make art, and the gap between themselves and "professionals" might not be as big as they think.

SAMPLE ART ACTIVITES

Depending on time constraints and the individual teachers' desires, I like to do an art activity with the kids. They are usually structured like games and emphasize elements of storytelling techniques, and can be customized to reflect what you are working on with the kids. Here are some examples:

INSTANT CHARACTERS: Students choose two index cards from a box. One index card has an adjective written on it (e.g. angry, cute, hungry, etc.) and the other has an animal or creature written on it (e.g. squirrel, whale, ghost, monster). The students are give 5 minutes to draw the character using whatever style and materials they choose.

After 5 minutes, the students hold up their drawings and the others have to guess what the drawing is.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE: Once again students choose an index card from a box. These index cards have different, funny perspectives or points of view on them (e.g. ants view, x-ray, funhouse mirror). The class chooses a well-know story or fairy tale (e.g. **Little Red Riding Hood**) and each student is given 5-10 minutes to draw a scene from the story in the perspective they have chosen. We then share our drawings.



THE DETAILS

Suggested Audience:

- Grades K-6 (though I'm certainly open to other age groups)
- Maximum number of presentations per day: 3-4

Honorarium: \$1000 per day plus expenses within a 2-hour drive from Boston, \$1300 per day plus expenses elsewhere.

Equipment needs:

- A video projector that can be hooked up to a MacBook Pro
- some sort of appropriately-sized soundsystem that can have an Ipod plugged into it
- an easel with paper and markers
- a small table
- if I'm going to lead the students in an art activity (see below), they will need appropriate art supplies. Generally, paper, pencils, and crayons or markers is all we need, but we can certainly use something fancier if you'd like.

Room requirements: a room that can be darkened so that everyone can see the screen; seating arranged so that everyone can see the screen.

Schedule: Please allow 30 minutes for the initial set-up, and 15 minutes between sessions.

Preparation: Student groups should be familiar with my books.

Travel: Transportation should be arranged to and from the airport, hotel, and schools.

Food: I'm a vegetarian!

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<http://www.czekaj.com>

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