



JANICE THOMPSON, AUTHOR

Speaking Venues

 0 Comments

There are lots of great speaking venues out there, but I want to talk about some of my favorites: schools, homeschool groups, colleges, libraries and historical groups.



SCHOOLS

Perhaps you've thought about speaking to school groups, but have wondered: "How can I make any money speaking to kids?" And, will children (and/or their parents) actually purchase my books? You can. . .and they will!

When I was marketing Hurricane, I sent out a press release to local Christian schools. The goal? First, to interest Texas history teachers in my book. Second, to garner speaking engagements. It worked! One of my first responses was from a seventh grade history teacher at a large Christian school. He invited me to speak not just to one, but two classes, which I did. The kids had a blast learning about the storm and I had a wonderful time sharing the information.

And here's how the book sales thing can work under such circumstances. . .if you have product to sell to students (or their parents), you put together a promo page to be sent home to the parents a few days ahead of time so that they can know in advance about your book and can send a check on the day of your visit. Then, for those children with checks in hand (and it's best if the teacher oversees this process) you can sign books.

Give bookmarks to those children who didn't bring money (so they have something useable and don't feel left out). On it, put all of the information about your book. That way, when they get home, they can say to mom and dad, "This really great lady (or man) came to our school today. I want to buy her/his book!" Perhaps the parents will visit your website and/or purchase from www.amazon.com, www.barnesandnoble.com or www.christianbook.com. It's also great fun to host an essay writing contest for the students. (Can you imagine?! A "real" author judging their writing contest? The kids will be thrilled!) An author friend of mine even posted some of the children's essays on her web/blogsite. Talk about fun!

If your book isn't appropriate for younger children, then consider not speaking about your book, itself, but about your journey as a writer. You will motivate the kids, for sure! And their parents will still (likely) be interested in your books, as long as they know in advance.

- ***Can you see yourself speaking to a room full of students?***
- ***What age group could benefit from your teaching?***
- ***Can you "slant" your book's topic(s) to meet a school's needs?***
- ***If not, what other writing-related topics might interest the children?***
- ***List some ideas here***
- ***Can you think of creative ideas to market your books to local parents of students?***

HOMESCHOOL GROUPS/EXPOS

I homeschooled my daughters for eleven years and was always looking for extra-curricular groups to put them in. Thankfully, the Houston area had/has several. So, years later (when my books started selling) I remembered to include homeschoolers when I sent out press releases. Here's how a typical homeschool signing goes: You arrive with books/promo materials in hand.

Speak to the kids (either about a topic related to your book or about how you became a writer). Then, (because the parents are usually there too), you spend some time promoting your various books. Even if your stories don't work for kids, the

parents will love purchasing from you. And (just a thought) put together a few simple writing lessons on CD, which you can sell for \$5 or \$10. That way the kids who want to learn to write can learn from you!

I should also add that I went together with a couple of other authors and rented a booth at a homeschool fair (a HUGE one). We talked to TONS of parents that weekend and I sold \$500 in books in a day and a half. Best of all, if you apply ahead of time, it's possible to garner a speaking gig at one of these events. Homeschoolers really love writers!

- ***Can you see yourself speaking to homeschoolers?***
- ***Can you "slant" your book's topic(s) to meet their particular needs?***
- ***What small "lessons" could you put together for the children (to be sold on CD)?***

COLLEGES

My local Junior College approached me a couple of years back. Each semester they offer CE (continuing education) courses for seniors (and/or people who just want to "catch a class here and there"). The topics were widely varied. I taught on creative writing ("Getting Creative About Being Creative") and "Writing for the Christian Market."

I was overwhelmed at the response. Several people signed up for the classes (which were two hours/week, one day/week, three weeks total). Man! I made a lot of new

friends and introduced many people (in all age groups) to the world of writing. I also sold a lot of books (some in the classroom and some later, over the Internet. If you have a local junior college, contact them and offer your services. You might not earn a paycheck, but you will certainly sell a few books and/or a few lessons. You might ask to speak to a specific English/Creative Writing professor, and just offer your services as a one-time guest speaker.

- ***Can you see yourself speaking to college students?***
- ***What topics could you choose?***
- ***Is there a college in your area?***
- ***What is the name/number of a professor you could contact?***

LIBRARIES

I did a teaching on creativity at a local library once and had a roomful of people! Though I couldn't sell books in the library, some of the folks followed me out to my car and purchased from me there.

HISTORICAL GROUPS

I've been privileged to speak at/to historical foundations about the Galveston hurricane, honing in on the parts relevant to our local history here in the Houston area. (Forgive me if I've already told this story, but it's a great one.) I'd been invited to speak to Houston's historical foundation (downtown Houston). They do a monthly luncheon for local business people and that month I was the invited guest. I received a \$200 stipend and spoke on the Galveston hurricane (specifically, how the

hurricane changed the makeup of south Texas).

Then, about a year later, I wrote a book set in Spring, Texas (a railroad town with an amazing railroad history). After informing the group of my second story (which wasn't even published yet), I received another invitation to speak. I went downtown, used a Power Point display to show photos of Old Town Spring (then and now), gave a fun quiz about the history of the railroad in Texas, then sold books after. (Again, I received a \$200 stipend.)

Then, (best of all), one of the ladies in attendance asked me to speak at her office (a lawfirm around the corner). She'd seen one of my brochures and found a topic that intrigued her. So, out of my historical group teaching, I received another invitation. Folks in historical groups LOVE photos, so Power Point is a great tool. Also, they love quizzes. In fact, they love almost anything about the history of that particular area.

Be warned, though! They might know more about the area's history than you do! I want to add one more story. . .my railroad book set in Old Town Spring (Spring Creek Brides) is a Steeple Hill historical, set to release next year. When I went to the tiny history museum in the town of Spring, I mentioned to the curator there that I had written a book and she got SO excited. It's likely they'll sell it in the museum. Also, she was so intrigued by my story that she invited me to speak to her local group. (Sometimes you just have to let people know what you're doing and they will offer an invitation to speak!)

- ***Can you see yourself speaking to a historical group?***
- ***Can you "slant" your topic to meet the needs of folks interested in history?***

- ***What do you know about your local area's history?***
- ***Can you put together a fun quiz about the history of that area (to tie in with your story)?***
- ***If not, can you think of some historical aspect of your story a historical group might find interesting?***

READING GROUPS (local and online)

When you set up your speaking gigs, be sure to include local reading clubs/groups, as well as online reading groups I was once invited to speak to a local reading club/group. The twelve members of the group were required to purchase my book and read it in advance. (That's really cool because I got to talk intelligently with them about my book!)

They invited me to dinner, gave me opportunity to share about the writing of my book, then asked me specific questions related to the story. (And boy oh boy! They had read my book thoroughly and had a ton of pointed questions for me!) Out of that evening's event came several more speaking engagements! Also, out of that event came the desire to put together discussion questions that other reading groups could use. (And yes, another local group read the book shortly thereafter, taking advantage of the questions on my site.)

- ***Can you see yourself speaking to a reading group?***
- ***Are you willing to answer "on the spot" questions about your book/project?***

- ***List some ideas for how you can target local groups.***
- ***Put together a list of discussion questions***

RETIREMENT GROUPS

I've had a particular fascination with retirement groups, almost from the beginning of my speaking career. They are wonderfully receptive and they're always looking for folks who are doing something different/unusual. I've spoken at a seniors Sunday School class, and a "golden years" group at our local Methodist church (with more than 150 in attendance).

I've also become something of a "favorite" at a local retirement neighborhood (not a traditional retirement community, but rather a group of folks 55+ who own their own homes and live in one neighborhood). They enjoyed me so much after I spoke the first time that they asked me back to emcee a big event for the 100 club. Cool, huh!

- ***Can you see yourself speaking to a retirement group?***
- ***What do you have in common with those in the 55+ group?***
- ***How could you target your local retirement communities and/or seniors groups?***
- ***Put together a plan of action for targeting your book/project to seniors.***

By JThompson

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