

Dear librarians and teachers,

Thank you so much for your interest in hosting me at your school. Here are some answers to the questions I get asked most frequently about my school visits. Thorough descriptions of my workshops are listed at my website (www.pollyholyokey.com) in the school visit section. After you've read through **all** of this information, please do feel free to email me at neptuneproject1@aol.com with your questions. If you do not hear back from me within two days, please also contact me at pbholyokey@gmail.com.

How many students will you teach at a time?

With good staff back up I can handle 200- 300 in the assembly presentations. I really appreciate having teachers spread out around the room. I'm fine with them doing their own work as I talk (I used to have lots of papers to grade, too), but I would prefer they step out of the room if they need to talk with another staff member. I can also give the assembly to one grade at a time, and then more students in a grade get to ask me questions.

In my writing workshops, the students will have a better quality experience if I only teach 40-60 kiddos at a time. I can and have worked with groups as large as 125 with lots of staff back up, but when we let the numbers creep up, students have a smaller chance of my calling on them, and it can be intimidating for them to have to read their writing out to a large group of their peers. Some schools with large grades have resorted to taping my writing workshops for the students who can't attend, and I'm fine with that. "Let's Get Specific and Let's Get Creative," works particularly well for fourth and seventh graders preparing for their state writing assessments. It also helps if the teachers tell the kids in advance that **THEY WILL RECEIVE A DAY GRADE** for their writing exercise with me. Ideally the students doing the writing workshops should see the assembly first. It makes them realize I truly am a writer and they are getting to do a workshop with a real author. Even if you can't schedule the assembly first, please do let the writing workshop grade see the assembly. It will get them jazzed up about writing!

In general I find that librarians seem really pleased with the days I give my assembly presentation to one, two or three grades at once and then teach workshops to smaller groups.

How much time will you need?

I need at least 45 minutes to give my assembly presentations and still have a 5-10 minute question and answer period at the end. My writing workshops likewise take 45 minutes. If you wish me to sign books right after I teach or present, then you should schedule my assembly or workshop for an hour, and we'll use the last 15 minutes to get the students' books signed.

What equipment will you need?

For my assembly presentations, I will need a projector, screen, computer and microphone (the mic is necessary if I'm addressing 50 students or more – I don't have a big voice and a mic can help with crowd control). For writing workshops with more than thirty students, I like to have a microphone so everyone

can hear shy students read their work aloud. Please note: students will need to bring something to write with and on if they are doing a writing workshop with me – I do make them write!

Also please note: I do need about 10-15 minutes to set up at some point before my main assembly presentation, “The Secrets to Becoming a Better Writer.” I usually bring signs and some of my old scuba gear along, and it takes me a little while to spread it all out. I’m fine with doing this before the school day starts as long as my gear won’t get in the way of anyone. This assembly is really fun, educational and interactive, and the kids will see pictures of my manuscript while it was being revised, which the language arts teachers always love.

What is the best way to schedule your time at my school?

Every school is different, and my days are always a little different.

Local half day visit at one school: I can usually teach three presentations and sign books. It works well to have me give my assembly presentation All About Dolphins to your K-2 students or The Secrets to Becoming a Better Writer to 3-6 and then break your fourth graders into two sections for my writing workshop Let’s Get Specific, Let’s Get Creative. At a middle school, I can give The Secrets to Becoming a Better Writer to grades 6-8 and teach writing workshops to your 7th graders. I can stay and have lunch with students who are really keen about books or writing, but please do ask them to come with some questions to ask me as we eat. I only do half day visits at schools within a 30 minute drive of my home in Plano, TX.

Full day visit: I can usually give at least 5 presentations with some signing times scheduled in as well, and I’m happy to have lunch with students who are really keen about writing and books. If you have lots of books for me to sign, please give me a heads up in advance, and I’ll try to arrive at your school early and get a running start on them. Or I can give six presentations without having lunch with students.

Half-day visit when I’m travelling between 2 schools:

We can usually squeeze in three presentations and signing time at both schools if we schedule carefully. I often end up eating in the car in the parking lot of my second school (I can’t relax until I know I’m on time and on site for my afternoon visit). I usually come early before my first school’s day begins to sign books and set up, then I give my presentations and maybe do a short signing in the middle of the morning, and after hit the road for my afternoon school. I will stay after at my second school to get all the books signed. Obviously it really helps if the two librarians hosting me on a given day work out the scheduling between them.

What programs are best for what age student?

My All About Dolphins assembly is perfect for grades K-2, and The Secrets to Becoming a Better Writer assembly works best for grades 3-8. My writing workshop, Let’s Get Specific, Let’s Get Creative works well for grades 3-8. My more in-depth writing workshops like Great Beginnings and Developing Vivid Characters work well for grades 5-8 in smaller groups.

How can we order your book for our students?

You have several options. You can order through your own book supplier, or you can order through Disney/Hyperion's which is Hachette. Their customer service number is: 800-759-0190. Your local independent bookseller might be thrilled to provide books for you, or the school bookseller at your local Barnes and Noble. I do have a sample book order form on my website that you are welcome to download and modify. I do understand that some students just can't afford to buy books. At some schools I'll sign 10 books, and at others I'll sign 300. Please send those **book order forms home at least a month before my visit** so you have plenty of time to collect those forms/payment and get the books ordered before my visit.

How do you prefer for us to schedule your book signing time?

I prefer to do whatever works for you. I do understand arranging an author visit is ton of work for the hosting librarian/PTA organizer! It is more exciting and meaningful for the students to be present as I sign their books. But sometimes that's just impossible to arrange, particularly at a larger school. I'm also fine with signing books that have book order forms with the students' names on them. If I am doing a live signing, having sticky notes in the books with the proper spelling of the students' first names can really speed up the process. I can come earlier in the day to sign books, possibly stay a little later (unless I have a plane to catch) or sign with the kids in the middle of the day. Some librarians schedule the signing and book sales time right after I've given my assembly or workshop. So, for example, instead of leaving 45 minutes for the assembly, they schedule it for an hour, and I spend the last fifteen minutes signing books.

PLEASE READ THIS!!! What are the best ways to prepare my school for your visit?

I can't stress this enough... preparing your school for my visit makes ALL THE DIFFERENCE in terms of the students' interest and excitement. There are a variety of things you can do to get your community psyched for an author visit. The first is to make sure you book talk *The Neptune Project* to your students before I come. There's a link to a book trailer and lots of cool pictures of sea creatures in Nere's Gallery on my website. Second, if your budget allows, buy copies of *The Neptune Project* and give them to the ELA teachers to read to their classes. Actually having read at least a part of a book an author wrote makes the students MUCH more interested in that author's visit. Thirdly, ask the art classes to make some sea themed posters a few weeks before my visit and post them around the school. Signs are a simple, cost effective way to build interest.

What should we feed the author?

I keep telling librarians I'm happy to eat a school lunch and librarians keep telling me that's NOT a good idea for a variety of reasons. So, if I'm going to be eating lunch at your school, I'm really easy about food. I like it. A turkey sandwich on whole wheat or white w. lettuce/tomato/mayo, or a chicken salad sandwich or a roast beef sandwich works great. I usually bring my own bottle of water and keep refilling that throughout the day.

I hope this helps. I'm an experienced teacher, and I've visited over 300 schools now. I'm very grateful to some wonderful, experienced librarians who showed me how to schedule and arrange terrific author visits. I see myself just as much as an educator as I do a writer, and that's why I'm happy and willing to really *teach* students during my visits. I am very much looking forward to my visit at your school!

Best to all,

PBH