

Mother Earth gets help from authors, students

by Lynda Exley

Students learn their efforts can make a difference; teachers are given an easy, enjoyable way to improve children's literacy skills; authors contribute cash for the cause; Mother Earth benefits – and everyone wins with Authors for Earth Day (A4ED).

Powered by volunteers, A4ED is an international coalition of more than 100 esteemed children's authors and illustrators who combined forces to support kids, education and conservation through school visits and presentations.



Author Patricia Newman at her A4ED school visit.

How it works

Educators visit AuthorsForEarthDay.org and select an author or illustrator for a school visit. Each author/illustrator has agreed to do at least one A4ED school visit per year and to donate between 30 and 100 percent of their speaking fee to a nonprofit conservation organization, as determined by a student vote.

The author/illustrator provides a list of five "nominees" to their host school prior to the visit. The students research those organizations so they can make educated choices at polling time. Then, they campaign for their favorite charity before holding a school-wide or classroom vote.

"When we tallied up the votes and announced which group would be receiving the donation ... deafening cheers went up," says Bruce Hale after his A4ED event. "That's why I did this event, to get the kids engaged in protecting the planet."

A4ED doesn't make a dime. There is no exchange of monies through Authors for Earth Day. The school pays the author, and the author makes the donation. This allows the school to fund the visit through their



normal process, and gives the author the tax deduction – a small but helpful benefit for their generosity.

Along with the donation, the author sends a letter to the conservation organization, explaining the A4ED voting process, putting emphasis on the fact that kids chose the group above others.

"We encourage you to take a peek at the successes of our participants, and then browse our wonderful list of available authors and illustrators," says Brooke Bessesen, the program's founder. "Everyone on the available list is traditionally published and a professional speaker in schools."

Funding school visits

Yes, there is a cost to the school. Participating illustrators and authors charge their customary fees, but remember, they are donating a large portion of that to the student's chosen charity. The A4ED website offers some great funding suggestions to help schools.

"Finding the money may be easier than you think," agrees Bessesen. "Author visits are, by nature, literacy events designed to inspire students to higher levels of reading and writing. Because professional author programs support key common core standards, a school has several potential sources of funding."

Those options include:

- District funds: Many school author visits are paid for by district funds.
- PTA/PTO: Parent-teacher associations may budget for an author visit. Or, they may facilitate a campaign like a bake sale to raise the funds.
- Title 1 monies: Schools working with disadvantaged and at-risk students may be eligible for special funding.
- Grants: Educators may apply for literacy grants, like SCBWI's Amber Brown Fund Grant and the AASL Innovative Reading Grant. Also check School Grants, American Library Association, International Reading Association and Grant Alert.

See A4ED, Page 23

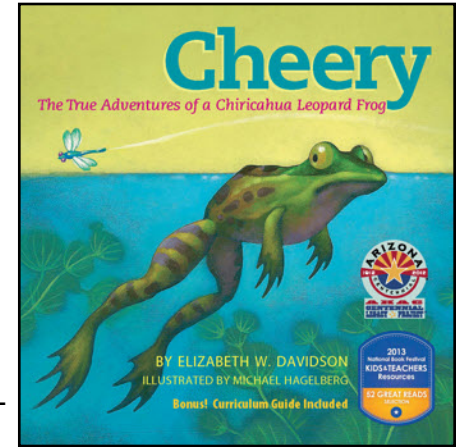
CBC recognizes three books

Cheery: The True Adventures of a Chiricahua Leopard Frog, by Elizabeth W. Davidson, Ph.D.; *Burton the Kind Scarecrow* and *Burton Helps Dixie Duck*, both by V.A. Boeholt, are all featured on the Children's Book Council's "Silver & Gold: Friends New & Old" list.

This seasonal showcase features books about friendship, about making new friends, keeping and/or losing friends, unconventional friendships and more.

"It is such an honor to have our books listed in the company of Macmillan, Penguin, and Disney publishing groups," says Linda F. Radke, president of Five Star Publications, Inc, which published the three recently honored titles under its Little Five Star label.

For more information or to see the complete list of books recognized by CBC, visit cbcbooks.org/cbc-book-lists/silver-gold-friends-new-old.



A4ED from Page 22

- Community sponsors: Service clubs like Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Friends of the Library, etc. may donate funds to pay for an author visit. Local businesses are sometimes willing to help fund a special school event. These partnerships are great opportunities for organizations and companies to connect with their community in a meaningful way.

"Do it for the kids!," urges Bessesen. "Once you find out how it works, you will see that an A4ED author visit makes a powerful educational impact."

A4ED allows young readers to direct a substantial contribution to conservation, based on democratic principles. The program inspires children toward higher levels of reading and writing. Classrooms are given an opportunity to discuss the natural world and the importance of protecting resources to ensure a sustainable future. And, A4ED helps teachers meet critical standards of education in a fresh, engaging way.

Where A4ED began

The idea for Authors for Earth Day emerged on April 22, 2008 after Bessesen, a naturalist and children's book author/illustrator, celebrated her first Earth Day school visit at Encanto Elementary in Phoenix, Ariz.

"I was looking for a meaningful way to observe Earth Day with young readers," says Bessesen. "So I planned to donate my speaking fee to a conservation organization. Then I got thinking ... what if the students voted to determine the donation recipient? I was excited to empower kids to find their 'voice' as writers and as voters, and to use that voice to help care for our blue planet."

The teachers and kids made posters and wore Earth Day pins and T-shirts. Based on the student vote, Bessesen donated her then fee of \$700 to the winning organization, the Humane Society of the United States, and everyone cheered when the voting results were announced.

"The organization was so thrilled by the uniqueness of the contribution that they even sent library materials to the school to thank students and staff for their support," says Bessesen.

Driving home from that rewarding event, Bessesen considered the possibility of expanding the concept to an annual multi-author event. So she built the A4ED infrastructure and resources for a team. A4ED just went year-round this month.

Visit AuthorsForEarthDay.org for more information on participating as a school or author.



Brooke Bessesen presents her A4ED check.