

“Signature” Author Visit Description
By Victoria J. Coe

My “signature” sessions are workshop-style and are best suited to a contained classroom or library setting where I can show a powerpoint presentation. It’s fine to combine classes of the same grade into one room. And it also works to use the gym, cafeteria, or auditorium, as long as I can navigate through the kids to call on them and interact with everyone – not just the ones in front or on the aisles!

Grades K-2

I offer a 30 minute workshop-style session for each grade, best suited to a contained classroom or library but can also be in another contained space. These half hour presentations are less rigorous than the hour-long sessions outlined below and can also be modified “on the fly” as I make sure the kids are engaged.

First, I get the students thinking and sharing about ways that dogs and humans are the same and different. I show them a series of objects and ask how and why a dog might think of them differently from the way humans do. We dialogue about each photo. (They don’t realize this, but I’m teaching them to shift their perspective.)

Next, we imagine ourselves as dogs. We jump up, pant, beg, and wag our tails (to get our wiggles out).

Finally, I ask them to combine their experience with the objects we looked at from a dog’s POV with their imagining themselves as dogs. I show them pictures of several different places a dog might visit, along with questions about what they would do, smell, hear, and see at this place. I leave them with a prompt to draw or write their own story about a dog’s visit to a new place. They take these back to their classrooms, excited to express their creativity.

I always allow time for Q&A.

Grades 3-6

My hour-long presentation for grades 3-5 or 3-6 is curriculum-based (POV & inference) and totally interactive. We jump right in and do three activities together. They all need to bring a writer’s notebook or pad of paper with a pencil.

The first is called "Shifting your perspective." I show the students a series of four photos and we dialogue about what each thing is from both a human's POV and a dog's POV. Then they do a quick 1-2 sentence writing activity about one of those things from a dog's POV. At the end I ask for volunteers to share what they wrote.

The second is a guided meditation where I invite the students to use their imaginations as I guide them through a 3-4 minute scene as a dog going for a walk. When they open their eyes I ask them to share their observations with a partner. Then I ask the whole class: What was it like to be a dog?

Then we're ready for the third activity which is ALWAYS a big hit. I put up a list of places on the screen and ask them to choose one place and write a paragraph about that place as if they were a dog visiting that place for the very first time. I give them tips as they get started and I walk around the room to help those who might need it. That takes about five minutes.

Next, I ask for a volunteer to come up and read what they wrote. The rest of us listen for details in the student's writing that will enable us to guess or INFER what the place was. The students always go bananas for this activity. I have done it probably a hundred times and it's always the same! I keep asking for volunteers to come up and read until we've exhausted the list of places on the screen.

I jump right into Q&A and continue until the hour is up. I try to allow at least 10 minutes for Q&A but 15 is ideal.