

LESSON PLAN 47 : SKYPE AN AUTHOR

Objective: Learn more about books by talking with their writers

Age range: 9-15

What would it be like to have an author visit your classroom? Just imagine JK Rowling popping in for a chat! Normally, of course, it's just not going to be possible. Even if people could find the time, they might live on the other side of the world.

MEET THE 'SKYPE AN AUTHOR NETWORK'

A new service has the potential to change all this – and sounds like a great way to motivate your class and run lessons they'll remember. The 'Skype An Author Network' aims to provide teachers with "a way to connect authors, books, and young readers through virtual visits". Through the network, you can bring an author into your classroom simply by making a call on Skype.

YOU WILL NEED

Computer, webcam/microphone/speakers, Internet access, and Skype software and account.

DEVELOPING SKILLS

Communication, literacy, reading, interviewing, presentation, computing.

METHOD



1. Visit the 'Skype An Author Network' website at <http://skypeanauthor.wetpaint.com/>
2. Check out the authors available – their names appear in alphabetical order on the scrolling navigation at the top left of the homepage. Here you will find information about the person, including available times, costs (if applicable) and other requirements.





WHAT IS SKYPE?

This is a software program that allows users to make free voice and video calls across the Internet.

How can you use it?

Download the program from www.skype.com. It comes with a set-up guide, so it's easy to install and sign up. Choose a Skype name that people will use to call you, and then make a test call to check everything works (it's automated, so you don't actually talk to anyone).

Making a Skype call

Search for people to call by name, email address or location. The 'Send contacts' feature also allows you to share your details. To call someone, simply double-click on their Skype name and you'll hear it dial. You can set calls to be video or just audio.

3. The service promotes two types of visit:
 - ▶ **Meet the Author** – no charge for 10 to 15 minutes
 - ▶ **In-Depth** – Time and fee determined by each author
4. It's up to you to identify and contact the authors to set up a virtual visit via Skype. So, once you know who you want, send them an email introducing yourself and your class.
5. Preparing for a virtual visit – a few tips:
 - ✓ plan well in advance;
 - ✓ make sure you are familiar with Skype (see panel)
 - ✓ familiarise your students with the author's work;
 - ✓ have them prepare questions in advance (to make best use of your short time);
 - ✓ if you plan to use a video connection, perhaps dress as a favorite character or prepare a banner; and
 - ✓ if you have an interactive whiteboard, why not project them onto the big screen.
6. Check out this English teacher's account of a virtual visit from children's book author Laurie Halse Anderson – <http://kmessner.livejournal.com/91520.html>
- Or watch this short documentary on a class's Skype session with author and artist Mike Artell – <http://su.pr/85GgaX>
7. Make the call.

