

Ask Roland Smith

WebQuest Description: You are in charge of arranging for the video interview with author Roland Smith when he visits our school. What questions will you ask?

Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum: English / Language Arts

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Introduction

Roland Smith, author of cool eco-adventure books like *Peak* and *Zach's Lie*, is coming to E. H. Greene School in March 2009. Our principal, Mr. Hackett, has come up with the terrific idea of having students interview Roland. And it gets even better – the interview will be videotaped and posted to the Author Visit section of the District's Blackboard site. And guess what? We want you to head up the project! Think Oprah for Sycamore-u-tube. Sounds like that chance you've been waiting for. You could become famous with this assignment!

Tasks

Here's what we need you and your partner to do before Roland arrives: Write a one minute introduction about Roland Smith and formulate a dozen deep, thoughtful, probing questions for the interview.

Process

I. Research Phase
To get ready for your interview session with author Roland Smith, the first thing you and your partner must do is get the background story by becoming thoroughly familiar with Roland's life and his works. Being an interviewer is a bit like being a detective. You will be looking for clues about Roland everywhere - on his website, in newspaper articles, in other interviews, and in biographical sketches. All of these can be found on the Internet. And don't forget to look inside Roland's books, themselves for clues. * From time to time in the webquest you will see an assignment you must complete. Write Notecards: We've heard that when Roland is researching a book, he writes down everything he's learned on notecards. Sounds like a good idea, so why don't you try this same approach. * You should gather at least 25 note cards, and as you follow this webquest, fill the cards with information about Roland. Meet Roland by watching a video: Roland talks about *Peak*. Did you learn some facts about Roland? Write them down on your cards. You may be able to use some of these facts to form good questions for the interview later. * Whenever you think, "Hey, I'd like to ask Roland Smith that," quick write down that question. Roland's Website: You are searching for all those tidbits that the other interviewers, like Babara Walters, may have overlooked. These are the details that show you are a dedicated professional. By reading the pages on Roland's website, you will discover information about the man: his life, his family, where he's traveled, what he's done, his special talents, his likes and his dislikes, and you will become acquainted with his books. Maybe you can even uncover information about some of his future projects. Go explore. * When it comes time for the interview, you will shine if you have read some of Roland Smith's books. It's sure to put him at ease if you can talk knowingly about his writing. Be sure to mention what you like best. Did you know that many authors say they get ideas for new books during their school author visits? Look around your classroom and gather up all the Roland Smith books you can find. Leaf through the books. Look for clues about the author by reading the book jacket flaps and the dedications. Think back over the visiting authors you've seen - Andrea Cheng, Ted and Betsy Lewin, Patricia Polacco, Douglas Florian. They all have shared similar advice: "Write about what you know." "Keep the story close to your heart." "Do what you feel passionate about." * Do you think Roland subscribes to these same ideas? Discuss this with your partner. Can you pick up clues from Roland's books about what's important to him? What do you notice about his characters, the settings, events, and locations in his books? Are there any common trends? * See if you can find five recurring themes from his books. Discuss them with your partner and write them down. They may help you write your interview questions. More Roland Smith resources: Roland's background ("From the Zoo to Kenya: My Journey as a Writer", written by Roland Smith); Tampa Bay newspaper article about Roland ("Inside the Writer's Mind"); In-depth biography (from Contemporary Authors); Liberty Tribune article ("Visiting Author Shares Secret"); Now you've finished the intensive research phase of your project. II. Write the Introduction: You are now an expert

about Roland Smith. Next you should write a brief (about one minute) introduction welcoming Roland. This should contain information that you have gathered in your research. When you write your introduction, consider your audience - your peers in the 5th and 6th grade. You want to grab their attention. Keep your introduction crisp and to the point. Mention just some highlights of Roland's life and his accomplishments (you can discuss these more in depth during your interview through the questions you ask). Try to say what is it about him and his books that make him a special author and why his books are worth reading. Here are two webpages with tips about how to write introductions: http://www.wittcom.com/how_to_introduce_a_speaker.htm Introducing a speaker. Toastmaster Club

- * Write your introduction, then practice reading it aloud.
- * Revise, Revise, Revise.
- * Make sure the intro is short, yet packed with interesting information for your listeners.
- * Practice reading your revised introduction aloud.

III. Craft your Questions for the Interview

For the interview, you will need to prepare at least 12 dynamite questions to ask Roland. Think about your goals and what you want to know. Always remember your audience of 5th and 6th grade students. What will they want to know? What questions can you ask Roland that will make kids want to read his books? Is there something that Roland can say in the interview that will inspire students or that might give them ideas about how they can improve their writing? How do you get him to talk about those things? Remember you only have so much time for the interview, so make each question count!

Here is some advice when it comes to formulating your interview questions.

- Good questions do not have obvious answers.
- Good questions are open-ended, which means that they can have a range of answers, they cannot be answered in just one way or with one word - yes or no.
- Good questions are always respectful and courteous of others' views.
- Don't ask authors to "explain" the endings of their books. Authors want readers to think and discuss these elements of their books.
- Good questions are unique. They draw the author out and make him think.
- Good questions might begin by comparing and contrasting two books or two characters.
- Good questions are framed and include some background research information. For instance if you want to ask Roland Smith how he was able to write so realistically about mountain climbing in Peak and whether he climbs himself, you might ask the question something like..... In Peak you describe so vividly the risks, the equipment, the skills that are needed to climb safely and the exhaustion the climbers feel. Have you yourself ever climbed Mt. Everest of another mountain - like perhaps Mt. St. Helens that is near your home? Realize that one question may lead to another. Be prepared to ask that follow-up question.
- During the interview - listen carefully to what Roland is saying. He may say something that raises another topic or makes you think of another question. There may be more to the story and you can find out, but only if you ask.
- In this link author David Schwartz writes about the sorts of questions, both good and bad, that he's been asked by students during his school visits: <http://inkrethink.blogspot.com/2008/04/questions-for-author.html>
- * Type your 12 questions into the class wiki.
- * Read the questions your classmates have written.

Evaluation

Category and Score	Beginning 1	Developing 2	Very Good 3	Exemplary 4	Score
Introduction	Poor introduction Not 1 minute in length. Few or no relevant facts included.	Fair introduction Some evidence of research. Few facts stated Little creativity	Good Introduction Good length Facts well chosen. Some creative ideas.	Excellent introduction Grabs audience attention Evidence of research - interesting details. Very creative.	%33.3
The twelve interview questions	Questions are generic in nature and do not link to research sources	Some questions show evidence of research + at least 6 questions submitted	Evidence that research and thought went into questions + at least 10 questions submitted	Quality questions Higher order level of thinking and research evident + A dozen or more questions	%33.3
Research value	Cursory results. Information from only one source included in assignment	Two sources consulted. Little integration of research into assignment + At least 10 completed notecards submitted.	Most sources consulted. Good integration of research into assignment + At least 18 notecards submitted.	All sources consulted. Research integrated well into assignment. + At least 25 notecards submitted.	%33.3
				Total Score	%100

Conclusion

Congratulations! You have become familiar with author Roland Smith and his books. Now when Roland arrives at E. H. Greene, in March, it will be a little like greeting an old friend, and you will have plenty to talk about. You have uncovered some interesting facts about Roland's life, and it will be fun to note as you read along in his books how he weaves

these pieces of information into the characters, the setting and the action of the stories. Do you think you can predict what Roland might write about next? Where his future books might take place? In the coming years check the library shelves and Roland's website to find out if you were right in your predictions. The Author Visit Committee is always interested in hearing student ideas. Can you suggest some author visit activities that we could do at Greene leading up the visit that would be fun for students and help everyone in the school to learn more about Roland and his books? Go to the Author Visit site on Blackboard and send the Author Visit Committee your ideas. As we count down the days until Roland arrives, read another one of his books. Which book will it be? You might be interested in doing a little more research about Roland in relation to some of his books. Roland's non-fiction Journey of the Red Wolf and his fictionalized novel Lobo, both center around wolves. Here Roland talks about his work protecting the endangered red wolf. <http://teacher.scholastic.com/wolves/roltran.htm> <http://teacher.scholastic.com/wolves/tguide.htm> You might be interested in visiting the Wolf exhibit at the Cincinnati Zoo <http://www.evostc.state.ak.us/History/index.cfm>; contains information on the Valdez and the site of the oil spill in Alaska. this site includes related science experiments <http://octopus.gma.org/surfing/human/savethebay.html>; for Our Nation's Capital Find out more about sites in D.C. <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/wash/sitelist.htm>; Peak panoramic view from the top of Mt. Everest <http://www.pbs.nova.org/mt-everest/>; Sasquatch takes place on Mt. St. Helen's volcano. <http://www.fs.fed.us/gpnmf/volcanocams/msh/>; The Captain's Dog relates Lewis and Clark's journey from the point of view of their Newfoundland dog. [http://www.lewis-clark.org/The-Captain's Dog](http://www.lewis-clark.org/The-Captain-s-Dog) received the Beacon of Freedom Award in 2003 recognizing it as an outstanding colonial times historical fiction book <http://www.wrl.org/BOFA/2003winner.html>

Teacher Page

This webquest is designed to help prepare students for an upcoming school author visit. We know that when students have read an author's books and are familiar with his/her life, then the author visit is more memorable, and it has the desired impact of encouraging reading, stimulating writing, sparking creativity and broadening horizons in our students. Through this webquest, in addition to researching the author's life and background, students will become more familiar with his books. Teachers should have on-hand in the classroom as many of Roland's books as possible in addition to the class collection. These extra books can be requested from the public library or checked out from the school library. Students are guided in how to research and record factual information. They synthesize their research by writing an introduction and use higher order thinking skills to make connections and formulate questions to ask the author during an interview. * Teachers should emphasize to students that in this Ask Roland Smith webquest, a * signals an important message or an assignment must be done. The target audience is 5th and 6th grade students. Minimal computer skills are required. Two or three class sessions will be needed to complete this project. A classroom wiki should be set-up to allow students to record their questions. In this way students will be able to read the questions of other students, too. Ultimately the class, as a whole, could distill their individual lists to 6 class questions that they would like to ask Mr. Smith. He might be able to answer these when he visits during the presentations, during the author-student lunch discussion sessions, or during the videotaped interview. If your school is unable to host the author in person, these questions could be e-mailed to the author. Teachers will decide whether students will work alone, in pairs or in small groups. If students work with others, they may think more deeply about some of the posed questions, and they will have the benefit of sharing their ideas and learning from each other. After the students have completed the webquest and have become familiar with the author's background and books, they could take turns role playing interviewer and author / interviewee to practice and reinforce what they have learned in this webquest and to strengthen their communication skills. It is a good idea for teachers to check-in with students as they work, to help guide students and to keep them on track with the webquest. By their interest in what the students are finding, teachers can build enthusiasm for the upcoming author visit. Teachers can specifically offer suggestions research skills and introduction and question writing. Finally, here are two resources that will help teachers work with students on developing good questioning skills. "How to Ask a Smart Question" "That's a Good Question"

Standards

Credits

Other