ATA School Outreach

Presenting Translation & Interpreting Careers to Elementary School Students (by Alexandra Russell-Bitting)

Whether or not you have children of your own, giving a presentation about translation and interpreting careers to a school is an important outreach activity. Schools welcome participation by the adults in the community.

Such presentations help raise the industry’s profile, because both the students and their teachers will talk about the presentation to those around them, and older children might start to consider a career as a translator or interpreter.

And the best thing about this community service you provide is that it will be a lot of fun.

Two Guidelines to Follow:

To make sure your presentation goes as smoothly as possible, simply follow these two guidelines:

1. come prepared
2. use age-appropriate materials.

Being prepared means having a written list of talking points and all the materials you need to illustrate them. “Age-appropriate” means that both your points and the props you use are things the students can grasp, remember, and use.

A good way to do both is to coordinate your talk with the classroom teacher. First of all, you’ll need to know how much time you have with the class, usually roughly an hour, and what time to arrive. Second, you can find out what materials might already be available, such as maps. And third, you may be able to tie in your presentation to the curriculum. You can also check with the teacher about any questions as to age-appropriateness.

Following these two simple guidelines will help make sure that you don’t lose your audience.

Here are a few pointers about what to do.

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<th>Take Charge</th>
<th>Get a clear idea of what you’re going to talk about and how you’re going to talk about it.</th>
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<td>Decide in advance on a few key points you want to make and jot them down on a sheet of paper or note cards.</td>
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<td>Remember that the younger the audience, the shorter and simpler you want to keep your message.</td>
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<td>Start by briefly introducing yourself, mentioning how you happen to be visiting the school (“I’m Rachel’s mom” or “I live in the neighborhood”).</td>
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<td>Explain what language or languages you work with and where those languages are spoken. As you speak, you may want to write key words on the blackboard.</td>
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| Keep the Pace Moving | For younger children, you may want to just focus on awareness of a particular foreign language.  
| In the case of Spanish, for instance, you should provide some background on history and linguistics to explain where the language is spoken.  
| If the children come away with an understanding of the difference between “Spanish” and “Latin American,” you will have made a valuable contribution.  
| Be flexible enough to allow time for spontaneous questions and answers, but firm enough to move on if you think the conversation is veering dangerously off-topic.  
| Be polite but decisive, for example, by saying “Okay, let’s save the rest of the questions for later, because right now I’m going to talk to you about....”  
| While you don’t want the discussion to get too sidetracked, if the students seem to be responding well to a particular topic, don’t feel compelled to rush through it. However, if a point is only getting blank stares, do move on. |
| Involve the Students | Plan to let them ask questions, but feel free to question them as well throughout your talk.  
| Make sure to call on as many different students as possible, not just the talkative ones.  
| Sample openers could include: “How many of you speak another language at home?”  
| “Have any of you ever traveled to a country where they speak another language?”  
| When discussing your foreign language, ask the students to list the countries where it is spoken.  
| For younger students, have small jobs for them to help you with, like passing out materials, holding up maps, even just pressing “Play” on a CD player to play some music, for example. |
| Show and Tell | Bring lots of materials to share with the students, and try to include some they can keep. The more of their senses you can engage, the better. For example:  
| Maps: It’s hard to talk about language without mentioning geography. Check with the classroom teacher to see if he or she has any maps you could use (most classrooms have a world map, for instance). If you’re focusing on a particular country, you may want to bring your own map. Better yet, bring Xerox copies of the maps for students to keep.  
| Currency: Younger children especially may never have seen foreign money. You may want to put some sample bills in a clear folder and pass it around the class (or assign a student to walk it around). If you have enough small change, you could even let the children keep a coin.  
| Flyers, photographs, postcards, crafts, memorabilia: A flyer about your job or your employer for the students to keep will help them remember you and your talk. Photographs and other memorabilia, such as postcards and admission tickets, in an album or inside a protective cover can be passed around the classroom. Crafts the children can touch are an excellent idea; for instance, the sixth-graders in my son’s class enjoyed seeing and touching a hand-woven poncho from Peru.  
| Sample translations: Bring some very simple sample translations if possible of things the children may be familiar with. For instance, tell them their names in a foreign language; show them bilingual labels on Goya foods packaging; display children’s books that have been published in translation, like The Cat in the Hat (some might be available from your local library); or show them photographs of signs in foreign countries. My daughter got a kick out of a Mexican stop sign that read “ALTO.” |
Reinforce Your Message

- At the end of my presentation, I like to do a short, multiple-choice “pop-quiz” designed to be easy and fun while reinforcing the key points of the talk.
- A sample question might be “Which of the following countries is not Spanish-speaking? a) Mexico; b) Venezuela; c) Uruguay; or d) Mesopotamia.”
- After having the students trade papers to grade them (so the teacher doesn’t have to do it), I go over the questions out loud.
- Then I get to enjoy the gratifying sight of students shooting their hands up and waving eagerly.

Sample Outline

1. Introduction
   - Introduce self, indicating connection to school
   - Explain job as translator (languages, office, brief background)

2. Presentation on language and translation (example: Spanish)
   - Where is it spoken? Show on map(s)
   - What is life like for people who live in that country/those countries? Show photos and discuss the geography, climate, ethnic makeup, etc.; show currency; pass around crafts; sample food/drink.
   - What does the language look like? Show samples of foreign books, goods, photos of signs, etc.

3. Questions and answers
   - You will probably get lots of questions during your presentation. Make sure to call on the students who raise their hands first, in the order in which they raised them.
   - Allow a separate Q&A time anyway. The class teacher may want to ask you or the students some questions at this point. If there are no questions, go right to next activity.

4. “Pop-quiz”
   - Pass out and allow 5 minutes to do
   - Have children trade quizzes with their neighbors and correct out loud, calling on different students

Contact Information

American Translators Association
225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590
Alexandria, VA 22314

www.atanet.org