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Adventures In Creative Writing

The goal of Open Books' field trips is to excite and empower young people through writing. The free, 2-hour memoir and poetry workshops give students in 5th-8th grades a chance to better understand how writing is used in every job and in everyday life, to express themselves through memoir and poetry, and to feel someone cares about and is listening to what they have to say.

12 Tips For Open Books Field Trip Volunteers

1. You don't want to feel rushed or stressed before working with students, so try to budget time for CTA delays or to look for a parking spot. (FYI, metered street parking is available near Open Books but can be scarce. We recommend taking the El to the Chicago brown/purple line stop and walking two block north on Franklin to Institute Place.)
2. When a group arrives at Open Books for a field trip, greet students with lots of smiles and enthusiasm! Introduce yourself and shake hands as a sign of mutual respect. Tell the kids they are in for big fun, and please remind them to turn off and put away any radios, cell phones, or other distractions.
3. Please be a model of active listening. Follow along on printouts when a workshop leader or student is reading aloud. Quietly encourage students at your table to read with you if they seem distracted.
4. Be a model of active participation, too. If the workshop leader asks a question and no one responds after a few seconds, please raise your hand and answer. (Sometimes it just takes one brave volunteer to get the ball rolling!)

5. Some students will want to listen with their heads down. Please gently encourage members of your table to sit up and pay attention. Usually it just takes one (or two) friendly but firm requests to curb disrespectful behavior. (Other examples include talking while others are talking and scribbling on printouts or the table.)
6. If students are writing away on their own, let them be. You can quietly say, "Wow! You're writing so much! May I take a sneak peek over your shoulder while you keep going?"
7. If a student can't think of something to write about, ask some simple questions. (For example: "Is there anyone you love who has died? You could write what you remember about that person. . . . Has a friend or family member ever hurt your feelings or done something that made you very happy? . . . Can you remember a favorite teacher or a favorite holiday or birthday party?") After asking 2-3 specific questions, tell the student you'll check on some other kids and then come back to find out what he decided and to read his beginning.
8. If students have ideas but aren't sure how to start, look at the examples the workshop leader used. (For example: "I remember . . .," "It was a Thursday in October . . .," "The happiest / saddest / funniest day of my life was when . . .," or "It started as a normal day . . .")
9. In the very rare event that a student curses, is unacceptably rude, or refuses to participate after multiple encouragements, please go straight to the teacher or workshop leader. As a field trip volunteer, your job is to have fun with student writers, not argue with or discipline them.
10. Praise students' writing honestly and specifically. The same goes for offering constructive suggestions.
11. If a student is torn between writing about an emotional memory and a frivolous one, gently encourage the student to write about the deeper situation. While stories about egg fights and accidentally dropped underpants are fun and welcome, many students have serious concerns lurking beneath the surface and need someone to listen. Writing can be a way to let out and resolve emotions. (NOTE: If you are uncomfortable or feel ill-equipped to handle the topic a student chooses, please let the

workshop leader know so someone else can help. Remember, we want volunteers to have fun, too!)

12. Last but not least, a writer's work is never done! Students love to declare, "I'm done!" When you hear those words in a prose field trip, read the student's work and encourage her to add more details, elaborate using the 5 senses, expand on the meaning of the piece, add a conclusion about why she chose to write about the particular day, what she learned from it, etc. You can also have the student double check for punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and grammar.