

VEGAS VALLEY BOOK FESTIVAL 15: EMLA Feedback

How was your school visit?	How do thinkÂ school visits could be improved?	What did you think of your festival panel(s) and book signing(s)?	How did you thinkÂ the festival could be improved?	How was our communication about the event? Any suggestions?	Would you recommend this trip/festival to fellow EMLA's?	Any other comments? Suggestions?
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<p><p>I loved my school visit, and I actually ended up volunteering to stay all day and to do two extra classes, for a total of four. The kids were wonderful and so appreciative, as were some of the teachers. For me this was the best part of the festival. However, the school was VERY disorganized. Events started 20 minutes late (for a 50 minute presentation); I didn't have the grades I was told would be there; groups of students wandered in and then were sent away again. I was amazed at the chaos. I'm an experienced teacher, so I feel that I did OK with it, but it was far from ideal. And the seemingly very appreciative librarian had</p>	<p><p>1) In schools like the one I visited (Orr Middle School) in very poor areas, where the level of literacy is not high, I think small group presentations will work the best. That's what I will suggest when I do such visits in the future. 2) I think visits should be arranged much further in advance, so that the schools at least have time to have a couple of the authors' books available in the school library on the day of the visit. 3) And I do think they should be told that distributing the book order form is part of the deal. If they don't think parents will buy books, they should at least distribute the form to teachers. 4) Could the school visits be announced to the media ahead of time so that the authors could get a little publicity by having</p>	<p><p>It was fun to talk with my fellow panelists, but all the audiences I saw were very small. I only signed three books. Others seemed to be doing about the same.</p></p>	<p><p>1) Have panels and signings indoors, so heat isn't such a negative factor. 2) Do much more publicity, maybe in wealthier suburban areas, to draw a bigger crowd of book buying people into the city for the festival. 3) Put all the kids books sales and kids books events in the same area of the festival. 4) Try to capture the energy of by far the biggest kids event--the long lines of kids posing with Thomas the Tank engine--and get those people involved with books somehow. Do some picture book readings right next to Thomas? For our "princess" panel--it would have been clever to pair the panel with the booth where they were making princessy headdresses. (It was far away.)</p>	<p><p>You were great. I especially appreciated the consolidated information at the end.</p></p>	<p><p>Not unless they live on the west coast or within driving distance.</p></p>	<p><p>I loved being with my fellow EMLAS and Kirsten and I loved visiting the school. But it just didn't make financial sense for me. I thought I should do it for the publicity, but the publicity was extremely limited. I mean, you never know what will come of something. Perhaps that teacher will buy 40 copies of Black Radishes for her class again in years to come, etc, etc. But I'd have promoted sales of my books much more by buying \$840 dollars worth of books myself and</p>
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<p><p>Fabulous. First-rate. I was treated like royalty and the kids were amazing. I loved every minute of it.</p> <p>Bob Miller Middle had excellent tech, too.</p></p>	<p><p>I would encourage kids to read books before the visit. Also have book purchases more readily available ahead of time. That part was not smooth.</p></p>	<p><p>The panels were terrific, the signings...meh.</p></p>	<p><p>We talked about trying to find a way to bring more kids to the festival. First of all the venue was charming - and inadequate. The noise in the tents was horrendous and it was hard to hear anyone. There were almost no teens there, which was a shame, and was partly (I think) due to the layout.</p> <p>I think the successful model for this kind of thing is the Texas Book Festival, which busses in students.</p></p>	<p><p>Maybe we could do some tweet-ups? A Facebook event? An Instagram thing? Another social media deal? Something to get kids excited?</p></p>	<p><p>Yes.</p></p>	<p><p>I LOVED being with Kirsten and my fellow EMLAs and Kirsten did a fantastic job keeping us all taken-care-of.</p></p>
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<p><p>This went great! Kids were friendly and the librarian was super engaged, though perhaps not quite as organized as some of the others I've heard of. A great experience all around.</p></p>	<p><p>Mine felt a bit last-minute, and particularly with the book orders, which were gotten out at the very last minute and so were a bit lackluster. Not the end of the world by any means, and overall the visit was very positive.</p></p>	<p><p>The panels were great, though the YA-MG programming was visibly in the slower end of the fair, and definitely weren't nearly as packed as the other events that people could just wander into. The book signing following also felt a bit irrelevant--it was very helpful for those who had just attended the panel, many of which bought books (THANKS TO KIRSTEN who bodily moved our copies over to the nearby bookseller; later panelists didn't even find their books there and so lost any such potential sales). But outside of that, there wasn't any particular</p>	<p><p>As above, I would just say if there is a way to draw more visibility to the MG/YA section, as was done with the PB section, that would be really cool. I got the sense that this was new territory for them, and I imagine it will continue to streamline, but having done both the PB and novel threads, I felt the difference in enthusiasm and body of attendees between them. (Also, walking back by some of the other performance tents--eg. the poetry one--it was jam-packed! It was also right next to the Thomas signing line, so I think location is a huge factor in getting the word out, so if there's anything that can be done to make it more intuitive, that would be awesome.)</p><p>(For example, the</p>	<p><p>Communication was seriously out of this world. Kirsten, you were incredible--not only in advance of the event, sending time and place emails, coordinating school visits, providing maps, but also keeping us all corralled and organized during the weekend, coordinating meals, etc. Could not have been better, seriously! A+++</p></p>	<p><p>Yes, absolutely! As mentioned above, the visibility on the novel side felt perhaps less significant than on the PB side, but to me it felt definitely worthwhile, and also like an event that could continue to be shaped to be even stronger and more valuable as time goes on.</p></p>	<p><p>I think I've baked them all in above! Fingers crossed it will work out again as I would certainly LOVE to go back.</p><p>(Also: I REALLY loved doing the little kids' story time tent and hope that will work out to do again. Would be great if we could get a few more EMLA folks in there too--the young ones were SUCH an enthusiastic audience, and I'd love to see us get more of a foothold in there.)</p><p>(Would it be worth doing some younger kids' activity tables as</p>
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<p><p>My school visit was exceptionally well-coordinated and smooth. My librarian was easy to communicate with, timely picking me up, and very excited to have me there. There were no tech snafus. The teachers were all excited too, and communicated the specialness and awesomeness of an author visit to the kids. I learned later that there so much interest among the teachers in having kids come to my talks that some had to be turned away just because there wasn't space and time. The kids themselves were interested and tuned in. They participated in the writing exercise I had for them and asked great questions that ranged</p>	<p><p>Honestly, mine went so well that I can't think of a way to make it better. I would like to see more coordination between the festival and the schools, because as excited as the kids were to see me, they didn't seem aware that I was there in conjunction with the book festival. Perhaps this is because they are kids and forget things, but there seems to be a missed opportunity in connecting the kids to more authors and book culture in general.</p></p>	<p><p>My panel was in the afternoon and well-attended, but I felt that the people who presented in the morning got the shaft, as their audiences were smaller. The book signing across from the presentation tent was a good idea, as it kept people in the general YA/MG vicinity and encouraged them to stay to hear the next panel.</p></p>	<p><p>* No idling ambulance near our presentation area. This was offputting for presenters and attendees alike, and gave the impression that we were an afterthought.
 * Better signage. The panel names were on sandwich boards in front of the tents, but it was a list of all panels all day, so people walking by had to stop and squint if they wanted to know what was happening. A nice big sign to draw the eye would perhaps encourage passers-by to stop and listen in.
 * Better coordination with schools. At minimum, a flyer home to indicate we'd be in town. But I'd love to see some sort of incentive to get the kids to the festival, like a passport. Each author would be given a little stamp or</p>	<p><p>Communication was excellent. I appreciated the periodic updates as they became available before the festival, and I loved having everyone's email addresses so I could arrange informal get-togethers once I got to the hotel.</p></p>	<p><p>I would. I don't think I'd vacation in Vegas, but I would try to come to the festival again because these kids especially need authors to visit. They live in a place of skewed, messed-up priorities and extreme divides in modes of living, and they need hope that there's something else out there for them if they don't like it where they are.</p></p>	<p><p>Overall this was a very positive experience. One thing that did strike me was that a lot of the kids at the school visit said their parents didn't like them going downtown, so I think the venue worked against us in this case. I almost think we'd do better if there was a "teen author carnival"-style event held at one of the larger schools, where we could use the auditorium and/or classrooms and/or playing fields so the experience was a little more kid-friendly. More parking, too. That's</p>
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<p><p>My school visit went pretty well. It did seem like the school was fitting me in in a hurry. We had a little problem with some of the media in the powerpoint not switching well from PC to Mac, but it was a very minor glitch and went fine. The time frame worked well for the age group and the kids ended with loads of good questions. My host librarian was nice, but a bit frenzied.</p> <p><p>The kids did ask if my books would be available, but they had not given out the order form, so I mentioned that they would be in the library (I donated a few copies to the school).</p></p>	<p><p>I think with a little more communication, we could have ironed everything out better. Initially, the librarian opted to text me instead of email. So once I got her to email, it was a little bit better. I did give her the order forms provided by Kirsten, and the librarian even asked me if they should handle the book orders by check or cash, but then they didn't end up giving them out.</p> <p><p>It is always a much better visit if the group has at least read the book aloud, especially with a large group, because it provides context, but they were unable to do so, and informed me that they didn't have a copy of the book in their library so couldn't put it on display or anything. I sent them books</p>	<p><p>I absolutely loved the panelists and the content they provided. I was underwhelmed by the amount of people in the audience and wonder if it was a time of day situation, especially for the first one. But I do think the audience liked it, and they had some great questions.</p> <p><p>Funke was the volunteer in charge of our tent and keeping us on time, putting our signs out etc, and she was wonderful.</p> <p><p>The book signings felt disorganized. Instead of listing where people would be, by name, the brochure just said signings would be happening. I tried to help an attendee locate</p>	<p><p>It's hard to fit so much in and make it clear where everything would be. I think, somehow, the signing locations and book sale could have been improved, and I wonder if panels could be pushed to later in the day, or something?</p> <p><p>Another complication was that the noise level was something to contend with in YA tent 2. First, I think it was the generator, and then it was the planes flying over, but I don't think there is a lot you can do about that.</p></p>	<p><p>The communication from Curious City was top notch. I don't think it could have been better!</p></p>	<p><p>Hrm, I don't know. I think it was great connecting with other writers, and that made it worth it for me--just seeing other VCFAers and EMLAers and chatting writing was great. But the festival itself, and the panels felt a little under attended for the lengthy travel. I guess it would depend on how close the EMLAer had to travel to get there. If they were closer by, that might be worth it. But from New England....I don't know.</p></p>	<p><p>Kirsten rocked the organization. I didn't have a single worry as soon as I set foot on the ground. I felt like the communication before and during the event was fantastic.</p> <p><p>The group dinner was wonderful!</p> <p><p>Meeting my panelists and chatting writing was a highlight!</p></p>
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<p><p>It went well, thanks to an engaged librarian with a lot of energy. Since I write YA, I don't normally do school visits, but I found this experience rewarding and am glad it was part of the book festival package.</p></p>	<p><p>Hmm, it's hard to say. On the one hand, I think bringing in more students who are super serious about writing would've provided them with some inspiration. However, the kids who are struggling with writing (as many of my audience was) probably benefited in other ways from hearing an author speak. Knowing in advance who would be in attendance would've helped.</p><p>One thing that also would've helped is if either of my books had been read/discussed in any of the English classes beforehand. That would've led to deeper Q&A while I was there. Also, I'm pretty sure nothing was distributed regarding book sales--which I understand given the low-income demographics.</p></p>	<p><p>The panels were wonderful and the festival was very well organized. Three cheers for the moderators! The only thing missing was a substantial audience.</p></p>	<p><p>Better advertising to build attendance. Perhaps a bigger-name children's author or two? Or raffles? They need to hire Curious City to help them figure out their PR. :)</p></p>	<p><p>Your communication to us was phenomenal.</p></p>	<p><p>Yes. ROI is measured in many things other than book sales (e.g., connecting with students, teachers, and other authors), and on those fronts, this trip delivered.</p></p>
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<p><p>It was outstanding. My kids were from the Soft Skills Class and the Criminal Justice. They hadn't read my book but they had explored my website and were well prepared. I had corresponded with the teacher before I got there and was clear on what presentation they wanted. When I got there, every student came up and shook my hand. All of them jumped in with both hands and went for it in the writing prompts, both writing and sharing. It was a great visit.</p></p>	<p><p>I'm not sure. What with schools being swamped by Common Core and testing, it's hard to imagine that our visits would be anything but an adjunct event in the current climate.</p></p>	<p><p>My panels were great. Loved the topics. The moderators were well prepared. The signings went well, though attendance was very low.</p></p>	<p><p>There's a bit of disconnect between the school visits and the festival. In theory, school visits should generate attendance at the festival but no effort was made by the school to publicize the festival or get students to the event. We discussed ways to incentivize the students' attendance. e.g. A book passport, which when initialed by six authors, entitles student to a free book or something like that. But really, busses would help a lot. Also, in Texas, the book festivals here work because librarians want them to work. I wonder how involved the librarians are in the VVBF. <p>And finally, the noise level at the festival was insane: between the generators and the</p>	<p><p>I think the communication about this event was great. <p>I think I could have done more communicating with the school and the librarian. I don't know, maybe sent a free book ahead of time, maybe promoted the festival or some interface with parents...I don't know. Book festivals work in Texas because libraries benefit from them so librarians really support them. I don't have the sense that a lot of librarians went to the festival or really supported it...you know?</p></p>	<p><p>I would recommend any chance to be ambassadors of our books to the general public. And of course it's a bonus to hang with the Gango's.</p></p>	<p><p>It was a splendid event. Really. So well organized. So well thought out. I would do it again. I would go as a moderator. I think that raising the profile of our books is important. <p>Instead of having an EMLA dinner on Friday night (which I loved) I might consider a gathering with all the writers at the festival the night before just as a community building event. It could be at a bar with hors doeuvres. People could pay for their own drinks. EMLA could provide a little food.</p></p>
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<p>Amazing. The kids were so excited and receptive and asked great questions.
<p>We had some setup issues. Though I asked ahead of time about a projector, when I got there they had nothing even close to ready! In the end we had to go ahead without it, but it worked out okay. I learned some lessons about what to bring with me next time, as well as how to be flexible and improvise!</p>

<p>Maybe a little more communication on both ends about expectations and setup requirements.</p>

<p>I thought the panel went well. We had a decent turnout and an excellent moderator (Janet). The signing...well, I sold three books that I know of, all to other EMLA authors. :)</p>

<p>Most of the action was taking place on the other side of the festival. Foot traffic through our area was sparse. The green room was nicely done and a welcome break from the heat. Maybe they could have bookselling spots in several places?</p>

<p>Excellent</p>

<p>Yes</p>

<p>Is there any way to add a few more opportunities to sell books? Maybe some kind of bookstore event? Our school was so poor, there just wasn't any way for the kids or their families to afford new books, which I totally understand and if I had it to do over again I'd do it just the same and would be just as thrilled! But then I only sold a few copies at the festival that I know of. From an experience perspective I absolutely loved it. From a promotional perspective I'm not sure it had much impact.

<p><p>Wonderful! Librarian really worked hard to prepare the students and the room. She even stood in the hotel casino lobby holding a sign that read HOW NOT TO BE POPULAR so that I could find her. That takes dedication.</p> <p><p>Very well organized and lots of fun. The students had terrific questions, too.</p></p>	<p><p>No ideas here. Mine went very smoothly.</p></p>	<p><p>So much fun! Fantastic moderators and panelists. Great questions from the crowd. Lots of good food and drink. Our point person/den mother, Kirsten Cappy, kept us up-to-date on all things. Everyone was in a happy mood.</p> <p><p>I loved the different topics and mix of genres. Most of the authors knew each other which added to the convivial atmosphere.</p> <p><p>Thank you thank you thank you for having cold bottles of water handy. Seems trivial, but after doing events where my throat got dry and voice failed from so much talking, I will never</p>	<p><p>Being outdoors there were issues with noise. If someone's microphone at a nearby event was very loud (and if he was shouting) it distracted. There was also an emergency vehicle parked right next to our tent that had its motor running. I'm sure that might be protocol in case of emergencies, but it really interfered with our hearing. Some of the attendees were confused as to where to find books and get them signed. Some of the volunteers seemed confused as to that, too.</p></p> <p><p>There was plenty of coffee, but not enough half and half. Those of us who take cream were out of luck. Just a small thing.</p></p>	<p><p>Perfect. The author (me) could have probably been quicker with responding to some questions. I will have a talk with that author.</p></p>	<p><p>Yes. And I would love to return -- even if just to moderate. Please. My husband has four (4!!!) books coming out next year so perhaps he could be a featured author and we could share a hotel room. As long as it doesn't go up against Texas Book Festival, we would really love to be considered for VVBF 2016, too.</p></p>	<p><p>Love my souvenir T-shirt.</p></p>
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<p>School? I thought that was a casino club. Huh. No wonder the lighting was all wrong and they yelled at me about the cigar smoke.</p><p>They oughta work for me. I'll learn 'em. <p>Also, there's no booze there. What's up with that?</p><p>Those author types are sassy. I like sassy.</p><p>Zip lines. And booze.</p><p>You came through loud and clear.</p><p>Yes. But bring booze.</p><p>Booze. Who doesn't love booze? You sassy types oughta hang out in Vegas more. You class up da joint. Especially that feisty redhead with the nice dresses.</p>

<p><p>I really enjoyed my school visit! The teachers and librarian were very welcoming. I spoke to all of the fifth graders, and then to all of the fourth graders, and then ran a workshop with one group of fifth graders (36 or 37 of them--class size in Las Vegas is large, apparently). We read Emily Dickinson together and wrote "recipe poems"; the students produced some really lovely poetry. The workshop was probably my favorite part of the day, but I also enjoyed the presentations to the larger groups. I thought the school visit went very well.</p></p>	<p><p>The auditorium had poor acoustics, so it was hard to hear the students' questions. I'm not sure how that could be fixed, short of a second microphone the students could use.
The school was on the last day of its Book Fair. In a perfect universe, the visitor's book would be available in the book fair, and the book fair wouldn't be ending until after the visit--but universes are rarely perfect!
I quickly understood that since this was a low-income school, the visit was all about the WONDERFUL KIDS, and not about selling my books. :)</p></p>	<p><p>I loved the people on my panel, and I think we did a good job, overall. :) The very small audience gained a few people as we talked, and we were lucky to have a couple of people willing to ask questions.</p><p>That said, I'm not sure any of us sold a book to anyone who wasn't on a panel or another EMLA person! See improvement suggestions below!</p></p>	<p><p>1. If there's a big-name kick-off panel elsewhere, DO NOT schedule a bunch of smaller-name panels at the same time. I don't know how many people showed up for Jon Scieszka et al., but NOBODY was at our panel at first (then a small handful later). The Scieszka panel was even billed as a kind of keynote: "Children's Lit: Stories Guaranteed to Make You a Genius, a Prankster and Maybe a Prankster Genius." Who is going to be left to come to a competing morning panel elsewhere on spooky books? That just seems like bad scheduling.
2. It was very loud! So loud that it was hard to hear what people were saying. Obviously nothing can be done about the constant helicopters, but the</p>	<p><p>Excellent. You guys are the best. You are wonderful. I had SUCH a lovely time, even if books were not sold!</p></p>	<p><p>YES--but, like the retreat, it depends on your motives for attending. If what one most wants to do is Sell Books, well, then this event is not yet the ideal venue (though I think it could get better). If you want to be inspired, hang out with amazing writers, see somewhere very different from home, and spend time with some wonderful kids, then YES.</p></p>	<p><p>Thank you so much, Kirsten, for EVERYTHING you did to make this happen! I would love to do more group events!!!! I think it's a fabulous idea! THANK YOU!</p></p>
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<p><p>Fantastic! I visited Lies Middle School at the invitation of librarian Margaret Bursit. I spoke to two classes of eighth graders--a total of about 80 students. My goals were a) to engage them in our common love/need for stories ("Who here is a writer?" A few hands go up. "Who here likes a good story?" All hands go up.) b). to share my own journey as a writer using PowerPoint images and stories about when I met Kurt Vonnegut and Scott O'Dell; c) to read a few pages of DIRT BIKES, DRONES and d) to share a few universals: whether you want to be a writer, dancer, doctor, engineer, etc., embracing these 3 P's is essential: Practice. Patience. Perseverance.</p>	<p><p>The first class seemed highly engaged--lots of raised hands, good answers, and interest. The second class was much quieter. Not sure that anything needs to be changed in the futureâ€”because even quiet students can be engaged. On the other hand, with a bit more prep and forward knowledge on my part, I might have tailored my remarks to the second class differently.</p></p>	<p><p>The panels were well organized but too sparsely attended. Erin Moulton asked thoughtful questions to both panels I was on. All panelists had an innate sense of Democracyâ€”spreadin g the time for answers equitably. No grandstanders. Just writers excited to share their journey. In contrast, the book signingsâ€”at least, for meâ€”were a disappointment. I think I signed a total of four booksâ€”and three of those were for friends.</p></p>	<p><p>Itâ€™s hard for me to gauge the overall success of the festival, because lots of people attended. Yet a small fraction of the total seemed to make its way to the childrenâ€™s/YA tents. We were a tad in the hinterlandsâ€”not only geographically but also in terms of publicity/marketing, or so it seemed. I would have liked to see more emphasis in directing the crowds our wayâ€”and more people in the audience.</p></p>	<p><p>All communications from Kirsten were clear, concise, and informative. (Plus, often hilarious.) Kirsten did a great job as both scout and leader. At all stages, she was there to help us get around or convene. Itâ€™s easy to have fun in Vegasâ€”but itâ€™s even easier with Kirsten at the helm.</p></p>	<p><p>Yes, highly. We achieve several goals at an event like this--we spread the good news about our books; we hone our public speaking skills; and we continue to bond as an EMLA family. Plus, we have lots of fun. So, my answer is Yes! Yes! Yes!</p></p>	<p><p>Thanks again, Kirsten!</p><p>Thank you, Erin, for the lovely dinner!</p></p>
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