

TOMMY DONBAVAND



Care and feeding of your children's author

(Or, making the best of your school visit)

SCREAM STREET

Email: events@tommydonbavand.com

Introduction

Hello and welcome to the information to read before a visit from children's author, **Tommy Donbavand**. You've received this document because you've either booked a visit by Tommy to your school; you're thinking of booking Tommy for an event; or you're such an outright fan that you'll read just about anything with his name on the front. Actually, the last one's a bit odd – so lets hope it's not that.

Over the next couple of pages, I'll tell you exactly how you can make the visit run as smoothly as possible – for your pupils, your staff and for me, too. I'll also include details of some of the worst events I've been booked to run and explain exactly what went wrong – although I'll be sure to change the names of those involved to protect the innocent...

So, click 'print', boil the kettle (mine's a tea, no sugar) and let's prepare for a day your pupils will never forget.

About Tommy Donbavand

Just so you have a little bit of background information – here's the official biography, as posted on my website at **www.tommydonbavand.com**



Tommy Donbavand was born in Liverpool, but doesn't know any of The Beatles. When he was 11, his parents moved to Lancashire and, because they didn't trust him to forward the post, he had to go with them.

After an early career as a clown called *Wobblebottom* (no, really!), he joined the cast of the West End musical, *Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story* where he played the Clearlake MC for a total of eight years, including stints on the UK tour and in Toronto, Canada.

Tommy then moved into the world of theatre production, where he wrote, directed and appeared in theatre tours such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Hey Diddle Diddle* and *Goldilocks & The Three Bears*.

As an author, Tommy's best-selling series of comedy horror novels, ***Scream Street***, is published by Walker Books in the UK, Candlewick Press in the USA and major foreign publishers in many territories around the world. He also wrote five titles in the *Too Ghoul For School* series, published by Egmont Press under their 2Heads imprint.

He has recently written three books for specialist publisher, Barrington Stoke: *Zombie!* (2009), *The Uniform* (2010) and *Wolf* (coming August 2011). His book of drama activities for teachers, *Making a Drama Out of a Crisis* (Network Continuum) was published in April 2009.

The activities in Tommy's non-fiction books such as *Boredom Busters* helped him to become a regular guest on radio stations around the UK. He also appeared several times on BBC Radio 2's *Steve Wright In The Afternoon* as the kids entertainment guy.

Tommy also writes for a number of magazines, such as the *Times Educational Supplement*, *Practical Professional Child Care*, *Creative Steps* and Scholastic's *Junior Education*. He was also one of the writers for the hit CBBC series, *Planet Cook* and pens tales from the island of Sodor for *Thomas & Friends* magazine.

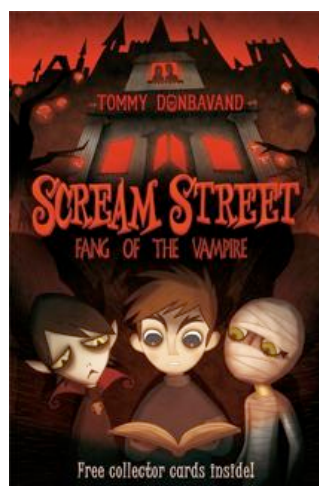
In addition to his writing and acting, Tommy also runs creative writing workshops in primary schools across the north of England, teaches writing to adults in the and organises storytelling courses for *SureStart*.

Tommy spent a year as the writer-in-residence at *Seven Stories*, the centre for children's books in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and is very proud to have recently been made the UK's first RIF Ambassador by Reading Is Fundamental (part of the National Literacy Trust), attached to a primary school in Middlesbrough.

Tommy writes full-time and lives in Lancashire with his family. He has started to see sleep as a waste of good writing time.

For more information –see my websites at www.tommydonbavand.com and www.screamstreet.co.uk

Tommy's books



As you will have read above, I wrote four books of boredom busting projects and five titles in Egmont's *Too Ghoul For School* series under their 2Heads imprint – however, it is my **Scream Street** series that your pupils are likely to know me for.

Scream Street is a best-selling series of comedy horror novels, aimed at 7 to 10 year olds (although I have a lot of readers aged 11 to 13, too). It tells the tale of reluctant werewolf, Luke Watson, and his friends: wannabe vampire, Resus Negative and Cleo Farr, an Egyptian Mummy. With help from Resus and Cleo,

Luke is on a quest to collect six powerful relics with which they can open a doorway and take his terrified parents away from life among the monsters, and zombies of **Scream Street**.

It may be a good idea to order copies of my **Scream Street** books for your pupils to buy prior to my visit. I always try to end the day with a book signing as it's not only a great way to get to meet your pupils individually, but research has shown that children keep and read signed copies of books for much longer than they do unsigned versions.

A lot of schools expect me to bring books with me to sell – but this just isn't practical. Aside from the sheer weight of boxes in the boot of my car, I would have to buy books in such huge quantities that I'd bankrupt myself! (No, authors don't get copies of their own books for free – we have to buy them, too!)

The best way to get books for your pupils is to either contact your local bookshop or supplier – or the independent bookshop I like to use: *Scotia Books* in Kilsyth, Scotland.

Scotia Books will deliver as many copies as you need to your school in advance of my visit on a *sale or return* basis – so you won't be stuck with any unsold copies after I've gone. Best of all, they'll arrange to collect any left over copies shortly after my visit. Plus, they'll do it all post and packing free if the order is over £50 (£5 each way if under £50).

I'm not on any sort of commission from *Scotia Books* – it's just a really useful way to get copies of my books so your pupils can buy them and have them signed. Once again, I would recommend arranging this in advance as there's nothing that slows down a signing more than children queuing up to pay for their books at the same time.

Scotia Books can be contacted on 01236 826041 or info@scotiaandchameleon.com



Ordering books

The books you'll want to order for your pupils are:

Scream Street 1: Fang of the Vampire, Walker Books, ISBN: 1406320609

Scream Street 2: Blood of the Witch, Walker Books, ISBN: 1406314250

Scream Street 3: Heart of the Mummy, Walker Books, ISBN: 1406314269

Scream Street 4: Flesh of the Zombie, Walker Books, ISBN: 1406314277

Scream Street 5: Skull of the Skeleton, Walker Books, ISBN: 1406314285

Scream Street 6: Claw of the Werewolf, Walker Books, ISBN: 1406314293

Scream Street 7: Invasion of the Normals, Walker Books, ISBN: 1406322393

Scream Street 8: Attack of the Trolls, Walker Books, ISBN: 1406319139

Zombie!, Barrington Stoke, ISBN: 978-1842997086

The Uniform, Barrington Stoke, ISBN: 978-1842998236

Coming October 2010...

Scream Street 9: Terror of the Nightwatchman, Walker Books, ISBN: 1406319147

Scream Street 10: Rampage of the Goblins, Walker Books, ISBN: 1406319163

The day itself

When you book me for a day's visit to your school, you book me for **three, one-hour sessions** – plus a book signing, however long that takes.

The one-hour sessions can be one of my creative writing workshops, where I can work with up to 60 pupils at a time, or my exciting and anarchic ***Vampires vs Werewolves Game Show***, which promotes the fun of reading in an action-packed, interactive manner.

Please don't take it upon yourself to split the day up into tiny chunks so that I get to work with everyone ("You're with year 4 for 15 minutes until break, then ten minutes with year 6 – and can you squeeze in a quick story telling session with reception?") If I can't get round everyone in school in a single day, you'll have to decide which pupils you'd like me to work with (remember – you can combine classes up a maximum of 60 pupils), or book me for a second day.

Pupils simply don't get a lot out of sessions much shorter than one-hour; I can't teach them anything about creative writing in 20 minutes. But that doesn't mean I'd like you to

give me a single class for the entire morning, either (it's been done, and it simply doesn't work!) My one-hour sessions have been fine-tuned so that pupils are excited by the content, but their attentions don't start to wander.

The sessions

The Write Stuff (one-hour, up to 60 pupils per session but better with 30)

Even scarier than the vampires and werewolves in my books is the prospect of facing a blank piece of paper when charged with the task of writing a short story – but I can easily rid your pupils of that fear, freeing their imaginations up and allowing them to invent tales packed with incredible settings, three-dimensional characters and non-stop action.

In **The Write Stuff** workshop, I take your pupils through the creation of the writers' most valuable tool – the story plan. With my help, students will:

- * Come up with a unique setting and learn how to describe it using all five senses
- * Invent rounded, personable characters that readers will want to root for
- * Devise a fast-paced plot through a simple, three-step exercise
- * Build the story action towards an explosive climax – perhaps with a twist at the end

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Idea Busting (one-hour, up to 60 pupils per session but better with 30)

My **Idea Busting** workshop is where I teach your pupils new and fun techniques they can use to come up with exciting story ideas. Using these techniques, pupils will:

- * Dig deeper than usual within their imaginations to create exceptional stories
- * Develop new tales by creating a new, three-dimensional character
- * Use the environment around them to think up plots that will really grip their readers

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Vampires vs Werewolves Game Show (one-hour, the entire school, although very young pupils can be scared by the noise as there is a lot of shouting and cheering involved)



Based around the relics in my *Scream Street* books, the ***Vampires vs Werewolves Game Show*** is fast-paced, action-packed and interactive. I split the audience into two teams and play a series of games guaranteed to get them excited about reading!

It's a noisy session – but is always loved by both pupils and staff alike!

Organizing the day

The most successful events are usually set up like this:

Morning – two, one-hour creative writing workshops – either ***Idea Busting*** or ***The Write Stuff*** – for up to 60 pupils per session.

Afternoon – one-hour ***Vampires vs Werewolves Game Show*** for the entire school, followed by book signing.

What do I need?

For ***The Write Stuff*** workshops, all I need is a whiteboard (interactive or steam-powered) or a flip-chart and pens, and your pupils will need a pencil and a couple of sheets of paper, or a workbook.

For ***Idea Busters***, I again need a whiteboard or flipchart - but this time, your pupils will need sheets of both A4 and A3 paper (if possible), and pens or pencils.

For the ***Vampires vs Werewolves Game Show***, I just need a table.

What does it all cost?

My fees are based on those recommended by the Society of Authors - £350 for a full day (three, one-hour sessions and book signing), plus travel expenses from and to my home in Lancashire.

If I'm traveling a long way from home, I will need to charge an additional £100 fee for overnight hotel accommodation the night before the event.

If you wish to book for more than one day, additional *consecutive* days can be booked at the reduced fee of £300, plus expenses.

Payment

Payment is to be made in advance of the day to secure the booking – either by cheque (payable to Tommy Donbavand) or BACS (details upon request). Please do NOT wait until I ask for payment at the school office to tell me that you can't pay me, or that cheques have to be sent from the local education authority, and that takes six weeks (I've had both situations). If you have to make special arrangements to pay me, please do so prior to my visit. This may sound picky, but it's part of how I make my living and support my family. Unpleasant surprises regarding payment are very unwelcome.

When to book

My calendar books up very quickly, so please allow as much time as possible before your desired date when contacting me. Calling to ask if I can "come in next Tuesday as it's our book week and we've been meaning to contact you for ages" will lead to a disappointing response.

Cancellations

I've only ever had to cancel a school visit at short notice once – when I woke up suffering from flu and could barely get out of bed, let alone teach creative writing with close

to no voice! Thankfully, the school understood and we rescheduled the event for the following week.

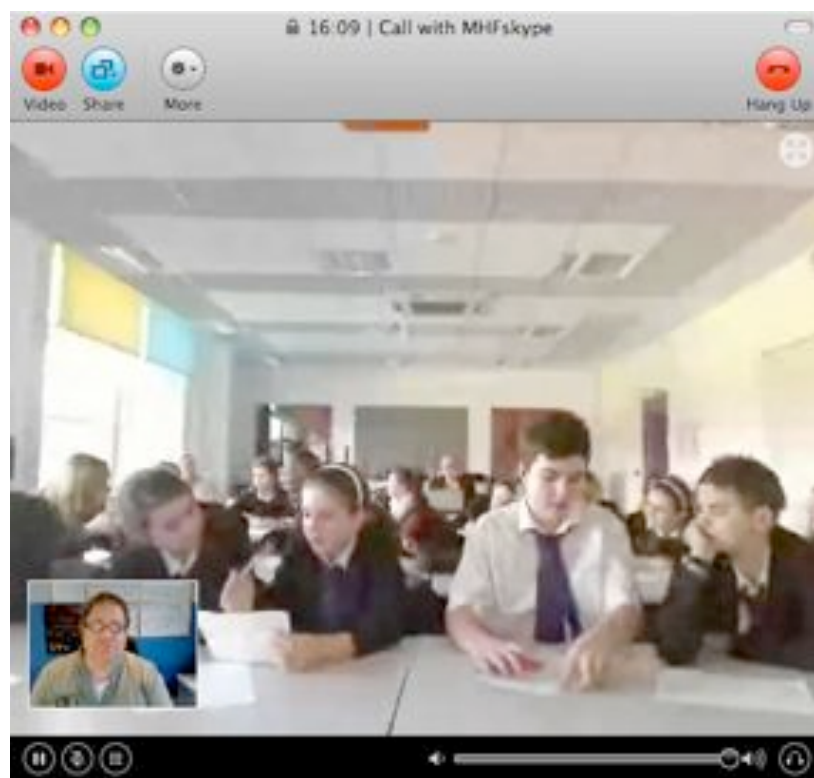
If you or I have to cancel an event, let's agree to try and give as much notice as possible – although I do appreciate that last minute problems can occur.

Virtual Author Visits

For schools that are difficult to reach, or where travel costs or distance would prohibit an author visit, I can run the creative writing workshops above over the Internet via **Skype**.

You would need a computer running **Skype** and a webcam, and would have to check that the software is or can be unblocked for us in your school. Unfortunately, some education authorities issue a blanket ban on any form of Internet communication software - something which I cannot fix at my end.

The costs of running one or more sessions via **Skype** depends on a number of factors and are always calculated on a case by case basis. If you would like to discuss arranging an author visit in this way, please email me at events@tommydonbavand.com



Hints and tips to ensure a successful visit

These are the little details I've picked up through experience that really help the day to be a rousing success (with corresponding nightmares!)

*** Please tell your staff – especially the person at reception – that I'm coming into school.** Seriously, there's nothing worse than being eyed suspiciously as a solitary man walking across a playground full of children at 8.40am. I have enhanced CRB clearance and can provide evidence of this prior to the event – but I'd rather not have to explain what I'm doing on school property to the receptionist first thing in the morning!

*** Please tell your pupils that I'm coming into school.** I'm used, as I'm sure you are, to being faced with a sea of blank faces – but there's an easy way around this. Plus – pupils who know I'm coming in will often read my books in advance, which isn't a bad thing.

*** In fact, why not make a big deal of my visit to pupils and staff alike?** You can read excerpts from my books to your pupils, get them to explore my info-packed websites, and even email me lists of the questions they'd like me to answer when I arrive. The more you can excite your pupils about my visit, the more they'll get out of it.

*** Don't forget to contact local press and media.** In my experience, they jump at the chance of a story about an author visiting a local school, and we'll both get plenty of publicity as a result of the day!

*** If there's a parking problem – please let me know in advance.** If possible, I'd like to park on school grounds – but I know that's not always an option. I'm happy to park on the road, near to the school – but please do tell me if there are restrictions nearby so I'm not driving round for an hour or more looking for a suitable space!

*** Please don't leave me sitting in reception for 45 minutes after I've arrived.** Might sound a bit picky, this one – but I need a little set up time before the first workshop starts (and, if I've driven a long way, a visit to the loo would be nice!) If I'm still sitting in reception, looking at my watch as the starting time for the first workshop passes, the day's not going to go well.

*** I'm more than happy to sit in the staff room between sessions, but please (as above) tell staff who I am!** I've nothing against being confused for a supply teacher, but it's not nice

to be confronted with a demand to know why I'm in the staff room. Plus (and this is directed to one particular school in the north east), when you find out I'm an author – please don't ask if I write "findy out" or "madey up" books, then sigh loudly when you realize you haven't heard of me before...

*** If possible, I'd like a short break between sessions.** Even if it's just enough time to nip to the toilet. I've had teachers complain that I'm late into their class because sessions have been scheduled to end and start at the same minute – and remember, I don't know my way around your school!

*** Order copies of my books for your pupils to buy in advance.** Your pupils will want to buy copies of my books and have them signed on the day – even the children you don't expect to be interested (in fact, often *especially* those children!) Grab them while they're enthusiastic about meeting an author and get them reading!

*** If I'm coming into your class, please don't use the time to catch up on some marking.** I know you're busy – I really do – but it doesn't give your pupils the impression that what I'm teaching them is important if you aren't paying attention. Plus – you might even enjoy what I have to say!

*** Please don't whisper to me that you "hope Ben's taken his anger medication this morning" just before the workshop begins.** Enough said.

*** Some schools are kind enough to offer me lunch, but I prefer to nip out.** It's nothing personal – I just like a break and often need to make a few phone calls during lunch hour.

*** Please ensure you settle the invoice in advance of my visit.** See the section on payment and fees. It is a condition of the booking that payment is made before the day itself. This helps me to avoid last minute cancellations. I won't break my end of the bargain, and I'd prefer it if you didn't, either.

*** If you want me to work with nursery or reception – please arrange this with me in advance.** My books are squarely aimed at Key Stage Two pupils, so they are the children I usually work with. I can work with younger pupils, but the sessions will be shorter (usually 30 minutes) and I need to know in advance of my visit.

Testimonials

If you're still wondering whether you should make that booking, here's what some of the teachers and pupils I've already worked with have had to say:

The workshop was a fantastic way to inspire the children's story writing. It was invaluable for the children to see the processes a real author uses to create stories. We all had great fun!

Mrs Holland, West End First School

I enjoyed the lesson, so I am sending you a thank you letter. Your teaching was great. I really enjoyed learning how to write stories.

Aaron, West End First School

Tommy worked with my year six class of 34 mixed ability children on a writing project in connection with *Seven Stories*. Before the project, my class were, on the whole, fairly positive about writing, although some were less than enthusiastic. After the project however, they were ALL really enthusiastic about writing and saw themselves as authors in their own right! Tommy managed to fire up their imaginations and created genuine enthusiasm. His interaction with the children was excellent, holding them in the palm of his hand during the workshops, and culminating in a final celebration of the whole project.

Barbara Brown, St Matthew's School, South Tyneside

You are mint! I saw you today at my school Meadowdale Middle school and I really cant wait to read your books!

Lauren, Meadowdale Middle School

Thank YOU! I have had so much positive feedback about you from parents and from staff - you really did connect with the children and really helped to make the day something special. We really look forward to seeing you in October!

Clive Bulmer, Sunderland High School Juniors

I'm Bronte, I was in the audience today at Oxford. I really enjoyed meeting you and I really would like to read your books now. I hope to be a writer one day like you. I am 8. I can't wait for your other books to come out in July. Its really exciting.

Bronte, Oxford Literary Festival

You came into our school earlier this term and what an impact you made on my students! My group of 11 EBD students were captivated by your enthusiastic and funny approach to reading and writing. They were even more impressed that the actual author was standing in front of them! The way you involved the students was fantastic and their attention was held for probably the longest I have seen for a while.

Some students, who previously didn't read much outside school, have been enthralled by the Scream Street series of books. So much so that we bought the remaining three books for each of the children in class as a Christmas present. They now can't wait for the next Scream Street installment!

Austin Fry, North Liverpool Academy

Any questions – please email

I am very flexible and will do my best to work around your requirements. I just ask that you don't spring anything on me at the last minute ("The class you're supposed to be working with has gone swimming, so you'll have to come back tomorrow *(at no extra fee)* to see them." No. No, I won't.)

If you have any questions or queries, please don't hesitate to email me on ***events@tommydonbavand.com***

I prefer contact via email as I'm often away from home for several days at a time running events, and email is something I can always pick up and deal with while away from my desk.

I look forward to visiting your school!

Tommy Donbavand

**** See over for your final checklist for the day ****

Final checklist

The big day is fast approaching, so make sure you've remembered to:

- * Promote my visit within the school, whipping the pupils into a frenzy about reading!

- * Order enough copies of my **Scream Street** books to go around – and sold them prior to big day. You don't want to slow the signing up by counting out fistfuls of change!

- * Send a letter home to parents, telling them about my visit – they may want to come in and get their own books signed!

- * Put the kettle on (tea with no sugar, remember)!

- * Contact local press and media – they love a good local story and your pupils could end up with their picture in the 'paper!

- * Arrange for payment to be made before the day of the event!

- * Check to see if you have a red carpet in storage somewhere (only kidding – or am I?)

www.tommydonbavand.com

www.screamstreet.co.uk