

## **Plan With Care by Tom McCabe**

With careful planning, a school residency is an educational and artistic experience for both the school and the artist. Here are some suggestions as you consider your next residency:

Know the school. Is it a place where you feel excited and challenged? How did you feel about the students, the teachers, the staff? Was there laughter in the teacher's room? Did you feel welcome... appreciated?

If you have not presented at the school yet, arrange for an initial experience; suggest that the school book you for some assembly programs, maybe even for an entire day. If they have no funding and you really want a residency, you may consider volunteering a visit. Beware! Entering into a residency with a school you are unfamiliar with is like taking out a wedding license before the first date; it may work but then again...

If you have a positive feeling, ask the school to form a planning committee; the committee must consist of at least one teacher, one parent and one administrator. You will need the support of all three groups. Challenge the committee develop a list of goals and objectives for the residency. In other words, "in the best of all possible worlds" what do they hope to get out of this residency? Then ask them to answer the following questions:

How many days for the residency? Over what time period?  
What facilities will be at your disposal? Classroom space, the gym, cafeteria, school yard, the library...  
How large will the core group be? What ages?  
How many classes in the entire school?  
What do they envision for a culminating experience?  
What is their budget?  
Is their possibility for housing, meals, etc.?

Have them send you the information. Assure them at the very outset that you will not take on the residency unless you are confident that you can fulfill their expectations. Study their wish list. Can you do what they desire? Does it interest and challenge you artistically? Is it realistic?

If you are confident, move ahead. If not, contact the school and suggest someone that you know who might better fit the bill or suggest that they contact their state arts council and request an artist roster.

If you move ahead, set up a meeting with the committee. Go the meeting armed with concrete suggestions, a basic day to day schedule and your financial and travel needs. During the meeting, you should establish either a "per day" cost or a total project cost. I find it best to establish a "per day cost and then generously throw in an evening workshop for parents and an after-school workshop for teachers. Remember that you want everyone in the school to benefit and participate. Now it is time to work out the logistics.

Some tips:

Do not over extend yourself. Ideally you should be performing or teaching for three hours out of the day. For the rest of the day, from morning announcements to the call for buses, you should be in the school. Set up in the school library where children can see you reading, writing and working and where teachers and children can seek you out for help or consultation.

Make sure that everyone in the school gets a chance to experience your work at least once. It would be even better if every child could experience you telling stories and attend a workshop. All of this will guide you in the creation of the schedule.

The last step is to work out a final artistic experience, a presentation during which families and the greater community can witness the results of the residency and have the benefit of seeing you in action. This may take many forms, a concert featuring the children, classroom displays, a lecture demonstration, video recordings... Teachers may be willing to help. Also, see if parents are willing to volunteer their time. Be both specific and realistic.

Residencies can be life-changing experiences for you, the school and the greater community, so long as you plan with care.

Tom McCabe performed his first school residency in 1982. He has performed in schools throughout the country and performed for more than a million children. If you have further questions, you can contact him at [TomMcCabe.Com](http://TomMcCabe.Com).