

The MacDowell Colony

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MacDOWELL IN THE SCHOOLS BRINGS ARTS PROGRAM TO CONVAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

*MacDowell writer Adrian Nicole LeBlanc to lead classroom series
on her award-winning book, Random Family.*

For immediate release...November 9, 2009... On Friday, November 20th, The MacDowell Colony, the nation's leading artist residency program, is partnering with ConVal High School in Peterborough to offer a unique educational opportunity for more than 180 students. As part of the Colony's MacDowell in the Schools community outreach program — which brings MacDowell artists into classrooms in the Monadnock region to share their work and expertise — the upcoming event will feature writer and MacDowell Fellow Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, who will return to Peterborough to offer a daylong workshop on her award-winning nonfiction book, *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble and Coming of Age in the Bronx*.

A finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, LeBlanc spent 10 years writing *Random Family*, which chronicles the struggles of an impoverished inner-city family. Meticulously observed, it examines issues such as class, race, the prison system, and physical and sexual abuse by telling a true story of survival in urban America. This past summer, the book's publisher, Scribner, donated 175 copies of the book to ConVal, enabling teachers to work it into their curriculum. Since the school year began, teachers and students in multiple classrooms have been grappling with the book's subject matter.

"It is an extraordinary tale, and the reactions of students who are reading it are amazing," says Jill Lawler, a teacher with the ConVal English department and one of the organizers of the event. "They are flabbergasted to learn the details of the lives of people who don't live that far away from us, and they are devouring the reading and talking with their

families about it.” A *New York Times* best-seller, *Random Family* was recently named one of the 50 Books of Our Times “to read now” by *Newsweek* magazine.

LeBlanc — accompanied by two individuals prominently profiled in *Random Family*, “Mercedes” and “Cesar” — will meet and talk with groups of ConVal students throughout the day on the 20th. The daylong event will conclude with a large group assembly at which the author, her guests, and an editor who worked with LeBlanc on the book, Alice Truax, will make a brief presentation before taking questions from juniors and seniors in American Cultural Studies, Global Literature, Advanced Placement Language, and Advanced Placement Literature classes.

“This event will hopefully help students to make connections between experiences in the wider world and those closer to home, and to glean insights into our strengths as people as much as the damage done by our injustices. In sharing these stories, in reading and writing, I hope all of us involved will come to take a more complete accounting of how to make good use of our precious lives.”

The upcoming program at ConVal is one of more than 200 such offerings the Colony has initiated in area schools since it began its MacDowell in the Schools program in 1995. Over the past 14 years, MacDowell in the Schools has reached more than 3,000 students by bringing to area classrooms more than 150 accomplished artists in the fields of architecture, music composition, interdisciplinary and visual arts, film, theatre, and literature. MacDowell artists have worked with students at numerous local schools, including Mountain Shadows School, The Well School, The Meeting School, Peterborough Elementary, South Meadow, Conant High, High Mowing, The Walden School, St. Anselm’s College, and Franklin Pierce University.

ConVal English teacher Tim Clark, who recently introduced MacDowell writer Cecil Castellucci to his creative writing class, had this to say about the experience: “Cecil arrived in my classroom like an extremely small, extremely powerful hurricane. Within minutes, my students were fully engaged. As always, having a real artist in the classroom was better than anything else I could offer them.”

In addition to MacDowell’s mission of providing artists with Fellowships that include a private studio, room and board, and up to eight weeks of time to concentrate on their work, MacDowell seeks to broaden and deepen appreciate of the arts through its community programming. MacDowell in the Schools is one of three community programs

the Colony offers. The second, MacDowell Downtown — which began in 2002 — presents artists and their work to the local community through a series of free readings, screenings, concerts, and exhibits. The third, Medal Day, has honored an individual artist for his or her outstanding contributions to an artistic discipline every year since 1960. Medal Day festivities include an awards ceremony and open studio tours hosted by artists-in-residence, which are free and open to the public.

Situated on 450 acres of fields and woodland in New Hampshire, The MacDowell Colony welcomes more than 250 composers, writers, visual artists, theatre artists, architects, filmmakers, and interdisciplinary artists from the United States and abroad each year. In 1997, The MacDowell Colony was awarded the National Medal of Arts for “nurturing and inspiring many of this century’s finest artists.”

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