Get Involved with NCTE!

Last month’s National Council of Teachers of English convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, brings back wonderful memories of the first couple of conventions I attended. At my first convention, I was mesmerized. Nationally known speakers, the exhibit hall, the educators sharing their successful classroom approaches, the leading young adult authors . . . did I mention the exhibit hall? It was fascinating, and I was a pack rat. I brought back bags of materials—lesson plans and handouts from presentations, freebies from the exhibit hall, and a mind bursting with enthusiasm for getting back into my middle school classroom.

The second year, I carefully mapped out my schedule for the convention. I had a plan for making the most of my time there; I listed the workshops and presentations I wanted to attend and when it would be most advantageous to go to the exhibit hall. It was a master schedule to end all master schedules.

But I had another plan, as well. Instead of just being in awe of all those folks involved at the NCTE convention, I decided to be part of it. I didn’t want to be on the outside of all that excitement. As it turns out, my approach could have been a little more polished . . . and probably more effective. Whenever possible, I would walk up to speakers, attendees, and movers and shakers, and introduce myself. I’d stick out my hand and say something like this: “Hi, I’m Lori Goodson. I teach language arts, and I’d really like to be involved with NCTE.”

While my form might not have been the greatest, it did get me involved in NCTE—eventually at a level I never thought possible. I’ve been able to be a part of an organization that I truly believe is doing great things for our profession. Although some areas of education have left me frustrated, I continually find encouragement in the work that is being done through NCTE.

But of course, there’s plenty more to be done, and every NCTE member can find a way to be involved. You’re more than welcome to mimic my hand-shaking approach, or you can find other ways to connect with the group. First and foremost, bookmark our Web address: http://www.ncte.org/middle. There, you’ll find specific information just for middle school teachers, including options for becoming more involved at the national level.

Among the roles just waiting for you:
* Nominate a colleague for one of our Middle Level awards, such as the Richard W. Halle Award and the Edwin A. Hoey Award, both of which honor middle level educators. We want to be able to honor the best in our profession, so we need your input.
* Read through the Call for Manuscripts for Voices from the Middle. Now is the time to share your knowledge with your colleagues. See what topics they’re offering for upcoming issues and submit an article. For those considering submitting an article for the first time, just do it! Those articles you find so valuable in our journal are from educators like yourself. Just like the title of our Middle Level Section journal states, we want your voice represented, as well.
* Consider submitting a session for next November’s NCTE convention to be held in Boston, Massachusetts. Now’s the time to review the sessions you attended and determine just what you have to offer your colleagues. The deadline is approaching; pair up with a colleague or submit your own presentation proposal. Either way, other middle level language arts teachers are looking for successful ideas in the classroom, and, as your mom always taught you, it’s nice to share.
* Look at the leadership roles we have, and consider nominating yourself. Among those: Middle Level Steering Committee and the Middle Level Nominating Committee.
* Consider being involved in the Middle Level Luncheon, the Middle Level Get-together, and/or the Middle Level Mosaic. All three of these events continue to gain momentum, so we’re always looking for more people to become involved.
* Still unsure that you want to dive in with the organization? Then dip your toes into the resources we have available—specifically for teachers of middle level students. Let your colleagues from across the nation help you create engaging and effective lesson plans to help your students achieve.

Right now is the time to leap into action at some level with NCTE. With last month’s convention fresh in your mind, take this time to renew your commitment to the profession and check out all the possibilities awaiting you. Contact information is available on our website. You’re also more than welcome to attend next year’s convention and talk to any of the Middle Level Steering Committee members. And don’t forget to introduce yourself. I’d be more than happy to shake your hand.