As humans, we are wired for story, for story “makes us human, not just metaphorically, but literally” (Cron, 2012, p.1). Lisa Cron’s work in studying the human brain and the power of story highlights how our physical and mental selves are wired to turn to story to teach us the ways of the world, to analyze and make sense of the events that impact us, and to navigate through the ways we define ourselves.

As teachers, we all have stories to tell. Amidst a complex, interwoven and politically charged national landscape, we middle school language arts teachers can use story to guide us in challenging, respecting, and growing the literacy skills and practices of the early adolescents who are just coming to know who they are as readers and writers. We work to fashion learning experiences that build communities of learners while recognizing that individual students all learn and progress at different rates and often through very different experiences.

We can use story to illustrate that middle school language arts teachers value process as much as product, understand the importance of failure in learning, and craft collaborative, responsive, often interdisciplinary methods for responding to student work. We can share our experiences in what makes middle level kids tick and seek out opportunities to learn together. We can highlight for others, through story, examples of our classrooms embracing workshop pedagogies and models that challenge students to ask difficult questions while learning how to be writers/poets/journalists/activists whose work lives in and influences the world outside of their classroom.

We also have missteps to share. We need to learn out loud with one another, make beautiful, glorious mistakes, share them, reflect, and then use what we’ve learned to fashion our next approach. We need to be real with ourselves and each other about what the ever-shifting district and state mandates, new sets of content standards, waves of assessments, and public perception means to our work.

Under our editorship of Voices from the Middle, we aim to provide you with a place to tell your stories. A journal FOR teachers BY teachers means that we hope you will come first to Voices, not only for professional development in dynamic English language arts content, an anchor of your work as a literacy professional, but also to hear the voices of other teachers who are sharing, reflecting, misstepping, reflecting again, and growing.

We are moving the journal forward in the next few years in ways that are responsive to your needs. We are designing themed issues that speak to the needs of today’s middle school teachers, the diversity of our students and schools, and the complexities of the culture of teaching (assessment, accountability, licensure). We are highlighting columns that speak to the many aspects of our work:

- YA Voices: Young adult authors, in their own voices and words, share what’s on their minds and in their hearts related to young adults and the power of YA novels.
- Collaborative Voices: Teachers and other literacy professionals will share ways that they are engaging in collaboration with the many stakeholders of a middle school and community, including one another.
Student Voices: Linda Rief crafts this column, writing alongside her middle school students, to show the beauty and possibilities that lie within the words our students use to make sense of their world.

New Voices: Chris Lehman introduces us to the new generation of teachers, highlighting the joys and challenges teaching brings within the first few years of a career.

Leading the Call: Each issue will bring words of wisdom from the voices we’ve followed over the years. Our leaders and gurus in middle level English language arts will share their thinking and perspectives related to the themes and topics that mean the most to you.

Additionally, apart from the traditional printed journal and the multimodal or web-delivered content we have planned, we look forward to creating opportunities that bring together many voices—our authors, readers, and other participants (i.e., YAL authors, administrators)—in real discussions across the topics and themes in our issues.

A journal for teachers, by teachers. Our brains are wired for your stories.

We are listening.

REFERENCE


Call for Voices from the Middle Cover Photos

Have you got an eye for a great photograph?

Voices from the Middle editors are looking for compelling digital images to feature on our four journal covers during each of our volume years. We are looking for color photos that highlight our classrooms, our students, and the unique and important work that we do as Middle Level teachers. **Images should align with the themes for each issue and deadlines are the same.**

Photos should be at least 300 DPI in either jpg or tiff formats. Published photos will be full color. Please do not submit previously published photos.

If you choose to include people in your submission, you are responsible for obtaining the necessary releases from all of the individuals depicted (and parent/guardians, where appropriate) and must be able to provide copies of those releases prior to publication. For more information contact voices@ncte.org.