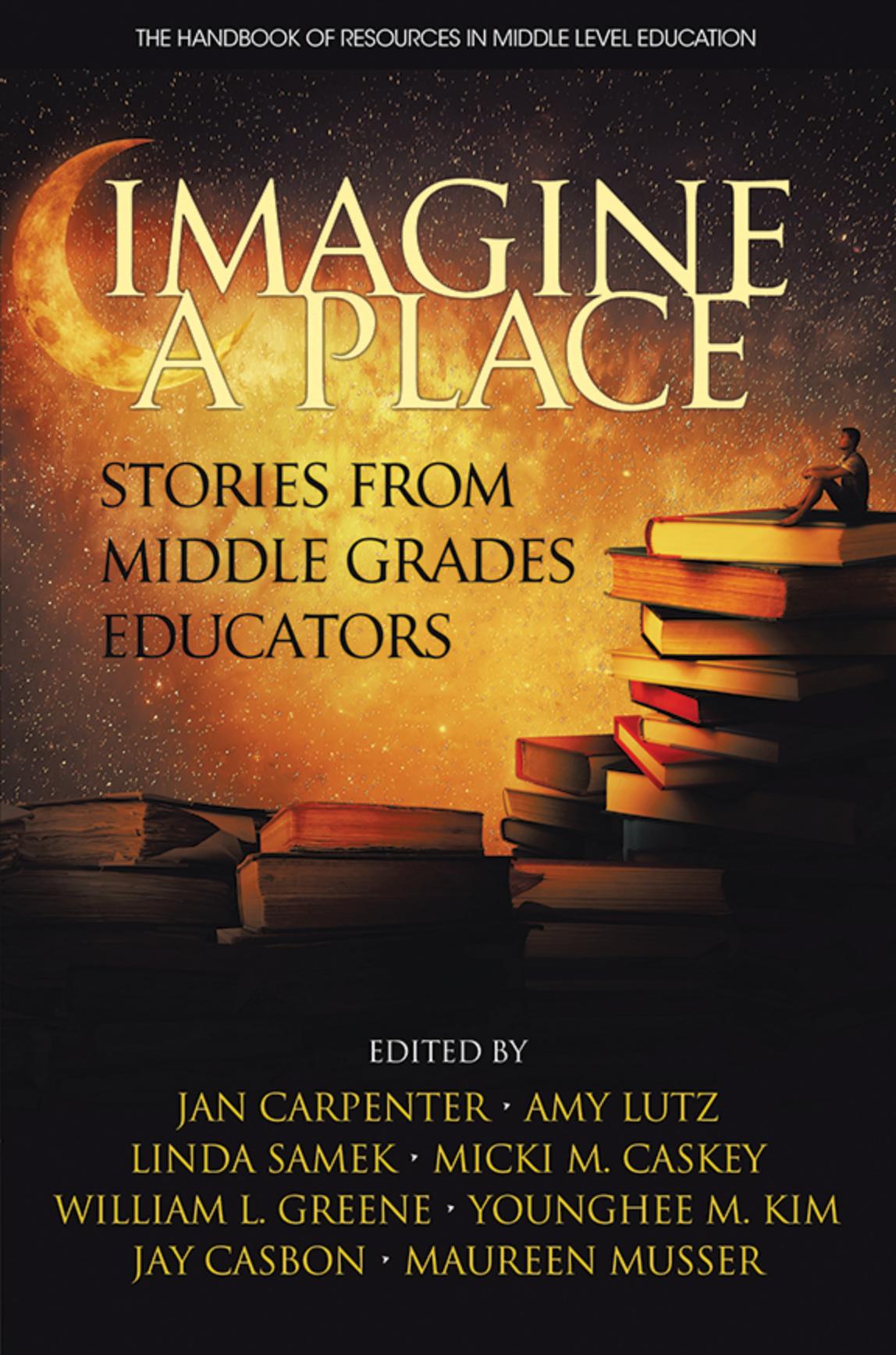


THE HANDBOOK OF RESOURCES IN MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION



IMAGINE A PLACE

STORIES FROM
MIDDLE GRADES
EDUCATORS

EDITED BY

JAN CARPENTER · AMY LUTZ
LINDA SAMEK · MICKI M. CASKEY
WILLIAM L. GREENE · YOUNGHEE M. KIM
JAY CASBON · MAUREEN MUSSER

Imagine a Place

A volume in
The Handbook of Resources in Middle Level Education
Micki M. Caskey and Steven B. Mertens, *Series Editors*

**THE HANDBOOK OF RESOURCES
IN MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION**

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Micki M. Caskey, William L. Greene, Younghee M. Kim,
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Imagine a Place

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CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Section I: Welcome to the “Imagine a Place” Classrooms	1
<i>Jay Casbon and Linda Samek</i>	
Section II: Stories of Joy, Meaning, and Deep Connection Through Curriculum and Instruction	11
<i>Jan Carpenter</i>	
1 It’s All About Relationships	15
<i>Michelle Bond Copelin</i>	
2 Mathography: A Tool For Fostering Mathematics Identity	23
<i>Kasi Allen and Kemble Schnell</i>	
3 Re-Imagining Our Identity: How a Sustainability Class Merges School, Community, and Environment	29
<i>Ryan King and Margaret Perrow</i>	
4 The Most Important Lesson	37
<i>Teresa Denney and Allison Eitzen</i>	
5 Going Out and Going Within	41
<i>Marcia Ososke</i>	

Discussion Questions	45
<i>Jan Carpenter</i>	
Section III: Stories of Relationships and Young Adolescent Development.....	51
<i>Micki M. Caskey</i>	
6 Mateo and the Field Guide Manual From Afghanistan	55
<i>Jennifer Robinson</i>	
7 So Much More than Teaching	63
<i>Katy Turpen</i>	
8 Is Luke Here Today?.....	67
<i>Michelle Schwartze</i>	
9 Conversations From the Middle	69
<i>Janolyn Jones King</i>	
10 The Starfish Effect: It Matters to This One.....	73
<i>Casey Gilewski</i>	
11 What It Takes to Win.....	77
<i>Lynette Elwyn</i>	
Discussion Questions	83
<i>Micki M. Caskey and Jan Carpenter</i>	
Section IV: Finding the Treasure in Challenging Situations— Stories of Students Who Remind Us Who We Are.....	87
<i>Younghee M. Kim and William L. Greene</i>	
12 Pieces of Work: Seeing Beyond Behavior	91
<i>George Roberts</i>	
13 A Vulnerable Stanza.....	97
<i>Bobbi Kidd</i>	
14 Humility From a Hubcap.....	101
<i>Rebecca A. Hendrix</i>	
15 Something About Those Eyes.....	109
<i>Jan Carpenter</i>	
16 On Being Ms. Lutz.....	113
<i>Amy Lutz</i>	

17	Finding Myself With Teen Writers	117
	<i>Mary Sawyer</i>	
18	All in a Day's Work	127
	<i>Gail Anderson</i>	
	Discussion Questions	131
	<i>Younghee M. Kim, William L. Greene, and Jan Carpenter</i>	
Section V: Exploring Stories—Recommendations and Resources		137
	<i>Micki M. Caskey</i>	
19	Writing Your Story	141
	<i>Karen Hamlin</i>	
20	An Exercise in Reflection for Teacher Candidates	153
	<i>Younghee M. Kim and William L. Greene</i>	
Bibliography of Online and Print Resources		157
	<i>Micki M. Caskey</i>	
About the Editors		163
About the Contributors		165

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PREFACE

Middle grades teachers have stories. This book, a natural outcome from years of research and experience in middle grades education by Musser, Caskey, Samek, Kim, Greene, Carpenter, and Casbon (2013), provides a venue for teachers to share their voices. From more than a decade of study, this research team found that teachers are committed to, and know, what is best for their students yet experience tension when trying to enact their vision within the current high stakes culture of standardization and accountability (Musser et al., 2013). The researchers determined that the choices teachers made to navigate the tensions fit into three themes: relationships, passion for authentic learning, and education built on strengths rather than deficits. Each thematic practice offers opportunity for engaged learners and impassioned teaching, yet teachers voiced challenges that constrained their ability to teach in ways that ignited creativity, relevance, and deep joy in their students.

The individual stories are examples of educators who fulfill their obligations while continuing to implement practices that they know will lead to deep learning across developmental domains and engaged students. These educators teach with the integrity and authenticity of their hearts. Despite the challenges before them, they continue to find fulfillment and deep joy by engaging students in holistic learning experiences. This research team believes that many more examples exist and that the power of stories told through teacher voice will offer hope, inspiration, and practical ideas for experienced educators struggling with tensions or for those entering the

field who need inspirational examples of the possible, creating a mosaic of hope and inspiration within an often tumultuous climate.

REFERENCES

- Musser, P. M., Caskey, M. M., Samek, L. L., Kim, Y. M., Greene, W. L., Carpenter, J. M., & Casbon, J. (2013). Imagine a place where teaching and learning are inspirational: A decade of collected wisdom from the field. *Middle School Journal*, 44(4), 6–13.

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Sometimes it is with great trepidation that we launch into the development of a new work. This one, however, seemed to ask to be written as we ruminated on our work together for more than a decade of listening to middle grades teachers share their classroom joys and grieve their classroom losses. This book of collected classroom stories is a tribute to those teachers.

The editors would like to acknowledge the willingness of the contributing teachers to open their classrooms, and sometimes their lives, to share their personal stories and the stories of their middle grades students in ways that lead us to inspired teaching and learning. Along with the contributing authors, we want to thank the myriad classroom teachers who have spoken to us, written to us, and made our studies engaging and useful. Thanks also go to our teacher educator colleagues who have come alongside and reviewed our work, those K–12 school administrators who encourage creativity, practicing teachers who see beyond standardized tests and scripted curriculum, and ultimately, all those middle grades students who keep us on our toes.

We originally came to this work by connecting through common interests fostered by the Oregon Middle Level Consortium (OMLC). We appreciate our OMLC colleagues who work tirelessly for the good of middle grades students. Over the years, we have added and lost members of our working group, colleagues who have retired from education or moved on to new adventures. Our deep gratitude goes to Michael Dalton and Marilyn Olson for their contributions to this work. We would also like to thank our institutional colleagues, deans, chairs, chief academic officers, and presidents who have supported our work and made space for us to be outside our assigned colleges and universities for a time.

xii ■ Acknowledgments

Many middle grades teachers have stories to tell—ones who could have contributed to this compilation of essays who we would encourage to speak, write, and live those stories for others to experience. Our middle grades students deserve to be supported, challenged, and taught by the best teachers we have to offer.

Finally, we would like to thank the series editors of the *Handbook of Resources in Middle Level Education* for allowing us to include this book of classroom teacher stories in the collection.

May you be inspired to support a middle grades student, thank a middle grades teacher, and love learning just a little more as you read the stories we have to share with you.