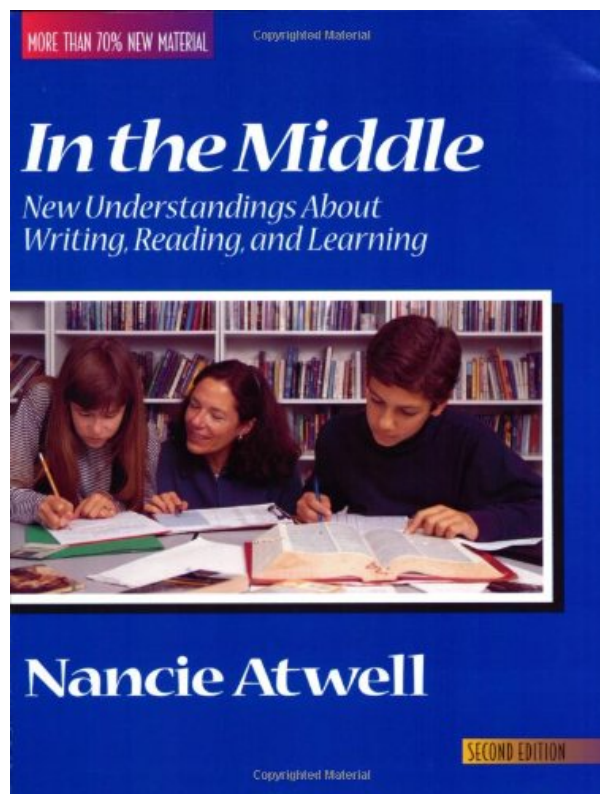


IN THE MIDDLE: NEW UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT WRITING, READING, AND LEARNING BY NANCIE ATWELL



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Recommended by the Ontario Ministry of Education

Grades 6-10

When first published in 1987, this seminal work was widely hailed for its honest examination of how teachers teach, how students learn, and the gap that lies in between. In depicting her own classroom struggles, Nancie Atwell shook our orthodox assumptions about skill-and-drill-based curriculums and became a pioneer of responsive teaching. Now, in the long awaited second edition, Atwell reflects on the next ten years of her experience, rethinks and clarifies old methods, and demonstrates new, more effective approaches.

The second edition still urges educators to "come out from behind their own big desks" to turn classrooms into workshops where students and teachers create curriculums together. But it also advocates a more activist role for teachers. Atwell writes, "I'm no longer willing to withhold suggestions and directions from my kids when I can help them solve a problem, do something they've never done before, produce stunning writing, and ultimately become more independent of me."

More than 70 percent of the material is new, with six brand-new chapters on genres, evaluation, and the teacher as writer. There are also lists of several hundred minilessons, and scripts and examples for teaching them; new expectations and rules for writing and reading workshops; ideas for teaching conventions; new systems for record keeping; lists of essential books for students and teachers; and forms for keeping track of individual spelling, skills, proofreading, homework, writing, and reading.

The second edition of *In the Middle* is written in the same engaging style as its predecessor. It reads like a story—one that readers will be pleased to learn has no end. As Atwell muses, "I know my students and I will continue to learn and be changed. I am resigned—happily—to be always beginning for the rest of my life as a teacher."

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- Used Book in Good Condition

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20 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Not just for middle school!

By Caryn

This year, for the first time, I am using many of Atwell's ideas in my English classroom, and it is working a hundred times better than I had ever dreamed! Most specifically, I have patterned my writing instruction for my students, grades 6-10, after her writing workshop. Kids who hated writing before now cheer when they know it's a Wednesday or Friday--our writing days. My students are writing more than they ever did, and they enjoy it. I also love it, because their writing is suddenly interesting and full of life.

Although this book makes a terrific handbook, be prepared to make some changes for your own classroom. As Atwell says, these are the methods that work for her in her specific situation. I have made up other forms and other guidelines that fit my school's curriculum and makeup. For example, I do the workshop two days per week. I also have specific types of writing required for the student portfolios, then they may work within those limits. I found this helpful so my students would try a variety of writing, and also fit the district curriculum requirements. Still, the premise, in both theory and practice, is extremely helpful and inspiring. Read the book, then adapt it to your own class.

As for the reading section, I do some reading workshop, but it is not quite as successful. The weekly literary letters are quite cumbersome, for example. The theory is still interesting, and may work better for other classes.

21 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

Fantastic teaching strategies given by Nancie Atwell

By Cynthia L. Crews

I very much enjoyed Nancie Atwell's book. Nancy's style of writing allows for easy reading. She presents many useful strategies for teaching reading and writing at the middle school and high school levels (the use of journals to discuss literature). Nancie joins the aspects of reading and writing in the English program to create an almost no-fail system to teaching literature. Great emphasis is placed on the idea that the more students are exposed to reading, writing, and literature, the more appreciative of literature they will become. Students will gain a sort of respect for literature if they are exposed to a steady, constant stream of reading.

One aspect I really did enjoy in Nancy's book were her anecdotes and stories of her own experiences about learning and becoming a teacher. These stories gave a "real flavor" to the book. Nancy's book wasn't about presenting teachers with boring, mechanical information on how to teach reading and writing. Her book presented real strategies for real teachers and real students.

48 of 51 people found the following review helpful.

Nancie Atwell Introduces the Reading and Writing Workshop

By Robert W. Dunkin

Atwell introduces her teaching experiences with chapters about how to teach writing and reading to the fragile adolescent age groups. In the following chapters she describes, in detail, her procedure of the "writing and reading workshop" for teaching in her classroom. She goes into great detail about how she prepares herself before the students ever come to class, what she does in the first week of school and how she introduces the workshop technique to her students, her use of minilessons, how she responds to students' writing and how she values and evaluates the students' writing. This book is very thorough in its descriptions of how to teach the workshop style of reading and writing. Atwell walks the reader through every step to make this technique successful. She gives many examples of dialogue she, as a teacher, has had with students showing the reader how she handled particular situations that had come up. It leaves no question unanswered. I believe this book is very helpful to teachers who wish to teach this method. Atwell captures her audience by using real stories

and references to experts in this field who have studied this technique for years. Although this is a very involved technique and some beginners may feel overwhelmed by the detail, I highly recommend it.

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