



## Leslie DiMaio

Columbia Falls Junior High  
Columbia Falls, MT

Leslie DiMaio is a Southern belle cheerleader turned mountain-life loving Montanan. She teaches kids to develop their reading identities, challenge their thinking, and read more than they ever thought possible. During the school day, she can be found conferring with seventh grade readers, cracking bad jokes with her students, and inspiring teens to find themselves in books, or to enter the doors of someone's else's experience within the lines on a page. In her classroom, you will find a wall of books, books on the tops of shelves, books lining the front whiteboard tray, books standing sentry on the back whiteboard tray, and books piled on her desk waiting to be read, shared, and loved. Books are everywhere. Books are accessible. Books are the focal point in room 125.

Leslie's first NCTE experience was 2017, and it was there she wrote down two titles that would forever change the trajectory of her teaching practice: *Book Love* by Penny Kittle and *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller. After devouring these texts, she knew her instruction was destined to shift. Big time. Centering much of her literacy instruction around choice reading while providing space and time to read has transformed the reading experience in her classes. But she needed more books. Receiving the Book Love Foundation grant kick started her classroom library into the robust reading resource it has become.

Leslie's book impact doesn't stop with her students. She cultivates a reading culture within her school and district by leading book studies on instructional practices. Teachers post their reading life outside their doors. Conversations about books can be heard in the hallways, outside at recess, and even in the bathroom. Reading is a culture in her school community.

She likes: rainy days to read, working out, the sound of deep belly laughter, dark chocolate, sunbathing, writing poetry, yoga, weight lifting, being challenged to do different things, clean sheets, realistic fiction, when kids find a book they love, hiking, skiing, dog walks, saunas, cold dips, dancing like nobody's watching, live music, mountains, the beach, the first day of school, swimming in as many lakes and rivers as possible.

She dislikes: litter, mean people, book banning, mud, fennel, apathy, yards that are mowed but not trimmed, wildfire season, rain in the winter when you are a skier, dirty fingernails, maggots, horror books, not being able to fall back asleep, finishing a good book and you are sad it is over, something touching your legs while swimming.

