

Starting a new Birthday Books Project is surprisingly easy and affordable. A school can start and run its own project, or a community group (or even just one dedicated individual) can help make it happen. Just follow the simple steps below.

1

What You'll Need

A Birthday Books Project needs just a small budget, a modest but regular time investment, and an ordinary bookcase. Ideally, planning begins in spring or early summer, with the actual giving out of books to begin the following academic year.

- **Cost.** Title I schools can plan to spend \$1 per student per year or less, while non-Title I schools should budget about \$2.00 per child.

That's because there are some great low-cost options available to all schools, and some even lower cost options for Title I schools (see below).

Cost example: A Title I school with 300 students would need an annual budget of just \$300. You won't need it all in advance, but do make sure that the amount will be available through school funds, PTA funds, or local donations.

- **Time.** Total staff or volunteer time needed is also surprisingly modest: about 20 hours setup time in advance, then about 2 hours a week throughout the school year to order and pass out books. The school will need to identify a staff member to serve as the School Project Leader, such as the school's Family Engagement Coordinator, Literacy Specialist, or Media Center Specialist. Of course, many tasks can be delegated to volunteers or other staff members. In schools with active community partnerships, the School Project Leader may share responsibilities with a Community Project Leader.
- **A bookcase.** The final need is a simple bookcase, often placed in the media center or the front office, which can store the books and allow students to choose a favorite.

That's it! Any school that can commit to those three things can have a Birthday Books Project that celebrates and encourages every child in the school.

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Ordering and Displaying Books

Book ordering is typically done by the Project Leader(s), beginning in the spring or early summer, so that books will be ready when the school year starts. Ordering can be done entirely online for delivery directly to the school. Great sources are available, including some especially for Title I schools.

When ordering:

- Seek exciting, positive and diverse books.
- Consider the reading levels of the students who will receive them.
- Prioritize high-quality, hard-cover books, often available at no extra cost.
- Avoid books that are specific to one religion or holiday, books which feature weapons on the cover, or books which might be objectionable to some families.
- Above all, look for books that a child can enjoy and treasure!

If possible, a number of books equal to at least one-fourth the student population should be ordered and stocked before the start of the school year. After that, books should be re-ordered and re-stocked every month or two, at about the rate they are given out. In late Spring, extra books should be ordered and stocked for children with summer birthdays. Typically, gift books are given to the summer birthday children during the last week of school.

Affordable options for ANY school:

Book Depot. This is a for-profit company with remaindered books, but includes many good titles of \$.50 to \$2.00 per book, plus shipping cost of about \$.30 per book. There is a minimum order is \$100 plus shipping, but a big advantage is that you can choose how many of each title to buy, making a varied selection. Here is a step-by-step system that can help you find great books at great prices.

- Go to <https://www.bookdepot.com/> and create a free account.
- Top left, click on Browse, and then, under Categories, click on Children
- Left column, under Format, click on Hardcover, then click Apply below that entry
- Top right, click on box to view to see lowest priced books first
- Look for great books, using suggestions above. Again, revisiting often helps you find best options.

Maryland Book Bank [Home | themarylandbookbank \(mdbookbank.org\)](http://themarylandbookbank.org) offers free books, but you may need to pick them up at their warehouse in Baltimore, and quality is uneven. They get books by donation, often used and therefore unsuitable for Birthday Books— but they also sometimes get corporate or nonprofit donations of hundreds or even thousands of beautiful hardcover children's books. You can take up to 25 free books a month without a membership, or unlimited numbers with a \$45 annual membership.



Additional, even more affordable options for TITLE I schools only:

First Book National Book Bank (fbmarketplace.org). First Book has two sections, so if you're looking for bargains available only to Title I schools, be sure to go to the Book Bank at [Book Bank \(fbmarketplace.org\)](http://Book Bank (fbmarketplace.org)). Here you will find books that they'll send for free by the box, though with a cost of about \$.60 per book for shipping, to entities distributing free to Title I students. Unfortunately, quality is very uneven, so you'll need to check often, use restraint, and only order the best books. Here's a step-by-step system that may be helpful:

- Go to Book Bank (fbmarketplace.org) and create a free account. The questions you answer in signing up will identify you as representing a Title I school, and will also automatically enroll you for emails about free books and other special bargains.
- On left side of screen, click on Product Type, then Hardcover Books. (The shipping cost is the same per book whether hardcover or paper, and the hardcover are so much nicer.)
- On the bottom right of screen, click to
- Look for great books, using the suggestions on page 1. If there's nothing good the first time you check, wait and come back later. Sometimes you may find nothing you want to order; other times you'll discover 4 or 5 terrific titles.
- IMPORTANT NOTE: First Book sometimes offers giveaways, usually of \$25, which is enough to pay the full shipping cost of a box from the Book Bank, making it completely free. Watch your email for any notices from First Book about the giveaways, and also regularly check on the Facebook group Teachers on First Book Marketplace ([\(20+\) Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/20plusfacebook/)).

Toys for Tots Literacy Campaign gives up to one million free new children's books to Title I school for gifts to students, but their program is annual and won't re-open until January 2024. (Old link, may change: Marine Toys for Tots).

Reading is Fundamental has a Books for Ownership program which can be used by Title I schools (Books for Ownership | RIF.org). Although even their subsidized books are above the usual Birthday Books buying budget, they have many beautiful books, plus resources for fundraising, seminars, and corporate partnerships. Whether you buy from them or not, their site is worth checking out.

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Giving out Birthday Books



A simple system can allow each child to choose a gift book on their birthday, in an organized manner that supports school learning goals. A key element is a Birthday Books display area, which can be as small as a single bookcase or file cabinet. Most schools place that display in the school's Front Office or in their Media Center, depending upon where it is most convenient to pass out the books and keep them safe. Books should be displayed so that they can be easily seen by students as they make their gift choice, with books for older readers on the top shelf and for the youngest reader on the bottom shelf. At the bottom of this page is signage which you can print and post on the top of the display case.

When school starts in the fall, begin the daily habit of giving out a gift book to each child on their birthday. Commonly, schools announce the birthdays of children on the morning announcements (including weekend birthdays on Friday), and invite the birthday children to proceed immediately to the Birthday Books area to receive a book. Your School Project Leader will be responsible for this process, but may delegate specific tasks. For example, the person who reads the morning announcements may announce children's birthdays, the teachers of the named students can direct them to the Birthday Books area, and a Front Office or Media Center staff member can assist them in choosing a book.

Giving out the books is a special time for both the birthday students and the staff member who helps them select a book. Enjoy!

Questions? Concerns? Ideas? Send us an email at Director@birthdaybooks.org or call 240-320-2666.

Happy Birthday

From the Birthday Books Project (www.birthdaybooks.org)