

Community Partner Role in a Birthday Books Project at a Title 1 School

Financial Support. Title I schools have many competing needs, so it's ideal if the community partner can fund the sponsored school's Birthday Books Project (BBP). A BBP needs about **\$2 per student per year, or \$4 for ease of ordering and a wider selection.** For example, a school with 300 students would need an annual budget of \$600 to \$1,200. You won't need it all in advance, but do make sure that it will be available as needed — about one-third by the summer before the project starts and the rest spread over the school year. Funds can come from your organization's budget or be raised by donations, silent auctions or other fundraising events (online or in person). Once you are confident about the finances, you'll be better able to reach out to the school.

Coordinating with the school. Good communication with the school is essential to project success, and it's best to have one person within your organization who will head the project from your end. Ideally, your coordinator can begin planning in early spring for a project to start the next fall. Begin outreach to the school with an email to the Principal, briefly describing your offer and linking to [The Birthday Books Project](#) website. Principals are busy, and your offer may sound too good to be true (i.e. may be mistaken for spam), so don't be afraid to follow up with a second email, a phone call, or even to stop by the school. Typically, once the offer is understood, principals are thrilled to accept and to work with a community partner to begin a BBP.

Next, send an email asking these questions, which will help your planning:

1. Are you a Title I school?
2. Do you, or will you, announce student birthdays daily (or at least weekly)?
3. Can you provide and maintain a bookcase or media cart in a place of your choice (such as the front office or media center), where Birthday Books will be displayed and birthday students can choose their book?
4. Can you designate a staff member to receive the book deliveries, put the books in the display area, and help the birthday students choose a book?
5. May we apply on your behalf to book giveaway programs we identify, with any books awarded to be shipped directly to your school?
6. How many students Pre-K to 5th grade do you serve?

If the school answers yes to Questions 1-5, you can confirm and move forward with the project. After that first exchange with the principal, most of your ongoing contact will be with the school staff member identified by the principal as the BBP Coordinator. An in-person visit, video call or phone call at the outset can help build bridges and answer any questions the coordinator may have. It can even be nice to offer to help set up the school's display if needed. The most important regular contact, however, will be simple emails to let the school's project coordinator know when shipments of books are coming, and to invite them to let you know anytime they are running low on books or have other needs or questions.

Ordering Books. Some schools like to order their own books, but most find it very helpful to have the community partner do so. Ordering can be done entirely online for delivery directly to the school, beginning the spring or early summer before the academic year in which the project begins. That way, books will be ready to begin giving as soon as the school year starts. 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!

Tip: If, before ordering, you'd like to see a reading sample of a book, try pulling up Amazon.com on a separate tab and search for that book by title. Often, they will have a "Look inside" feature you can use.

It's best, if possible, to order and supply to the school a number of books equal to at least one-fourth the student population *before the start of the school year.* After that, books should be re-ordered for delivery to the school every month or two, at about the rate they are given out. In late Spring, extra books should be ordered to give during the last week of school to students with summer birthdays.

With careful purchasing, you can get beautiful, new, hardcover books, with cover prices averaging \$10 to \$15 per book, for a fifth or even a tenth of that cost. We've listed your options in three categories: free, shipping cost only, and moderately priced (\$1 to \$3).

FREE BOOKS. With planning, you can get at least some of your books free—enough, at least, to reduce your average cost per book.

Toys for Tots Literacy Campaign [Literacy Program - Toys for Tots](#) gives millions of free new children’s books to Title I school each year. Applications usually open in early March and require quick action before supplies run out. The link as of March 2024 is at [Marine Toys for Tots](#) (When that link expires, check the ESEA website [eseanetwork.org](#), especially at this link: [News From Others | National Title I Association \(eseanetwork.org\)](#)). *Tip:* Toys for Tots chooses the books for you, and your one chance to influence the choice is through a special requests box on the application form. For example, you can request that, if possible, your school be sent hardcover books.) Fortunately, Toys for Tots allows you to choose how best to use the books, so if the books they send are not suitable for your Birthday Books project, you can use them in your media center, classrooms or in summer reading packets.

First Book [First Book: Equal Access to Quality Education for Kids in Need](#) actually has 4 ways to get terrific books, including these two ways for Title I schools to get some books completely free. Begin with a free signup on behalf of the school at [Become a First Book Member for Free \(fbmarketplace.org\)](#). (Use your email for contact but describe the school you are sponsoring. They’ll then send you occasional emails, including ones announcing book giveaways in your area, where you can go and carry away 100 or more beautiful free books for the school. You may also see Promo Codes in your email and/or on the Facebook sites [\(1\) Facebook](#) or [\(20+\) Facebook](#), which will give you credits or cost reductions on First Book’s already reduced prices — enough to make at least some of the books free.

BOOKS FOR THE COST OF SHIPPING ONLY (about 67 cents per book) can also reduce your average book cost.

First Book National Book Bank [Book Bank \(fbmarketplace.org\)](#) is a specific section on the First Book website, available only to members, which offers certain titles by the box for the cost of shipping only. Unfortunately, there is a limited selection, boxes give you 20 or more copies of the same title, and quality is uneven. So you’ll need to check often, use restraint, and only order the books you’re certain are right for your students. To try it out:

- Go to [Book Bank \(fbmarketplace.org\)](#) and, on left side of screen, under Shopping Options, click on Product Type, then Hardcover Books. (The shipping cost is the same per book whether hardcover or paper, and hardcover are so nice.) This will show you all the Book Bank current hardcover selections.
- Look for great books, using the suggestions on page 1. If nothing seems right the first time you check, wait and come back later. Sometimes you may find nothing you want to order, while other times you’ll discover a few terrific titles.

MODERATELY PRICED BOOKS (\$1 to \$3 per book) offer outstanding books, easily available at any time and in any quantity.

First Book Marketplace, the larger section of the First Book website, offers a truly wonderful, diverse and exciting selection of books. While some books may be out of your price range, there are plenty of great choices in the \$2 to \$4 range. A big advantage is that (unlike in the Book Bank section) you can choose how many of each title to buy. To get started:

- Go to [First Book Marketplace: Affordable Books for Educators \(fbmarketplace.org\)](#). If you hover over the Books tab, you’ll see their many collections, such as their wonderful Stories for All, their Picture Books, or their STEAM collection. Or, if you click on the Shop by Age tab, you can specify the reading levels of your students.
- Next, on the left side of screen, under Shopping Options, click on Product Type, then Hardcover Books.
- On the upper right, change the Sort By box from Recommended to Price, so you can see books priced lowest to highest.
- Look for great books within your price range. You’ll probably want to buy a few copies of each title chosen, so that more than one child can enjoy it. To qualify for free shipping, each order needs to be at least \$25.

Book Depot. This is a for-profit company with remaindered books, but includes many good titles under \$4 per book, plus shipping cost of about 30 cents per book. 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 select Price Asc, to see lowest priced books first.
- Look for great books, using the suggestions on page 1. There is a minimum order of \$100 plus shipping, but you can choose how many of each title to buy.

The School's Role in a Birthday Books Project with a community partner

Title I schools can have a Birthday Books Project (BBP) with or without a community partner to sponsor them.

This page describes the school's responsibilities when a community partner is funding and ordering the books.

(If your school does not have a community partner, go to [49c3a2_bfe4c838e0de4c1091c33ef588c6ac38.pdf \(birthdaybooks.org\)](https://www.birthdaybooks.org/49c3a2_bfe4c838e0de4c1091c33ef588c6ac38.pdf) for information on how to run a BBP on your own.)

A simple system can allow each child to choose a gift book on their birthday, in an organized manner that supports school learning goals. Schools can maximize program success by following these simple guidelines.

Designating a project coordinator. It's helpful to have one person who can 1) serve as the contact for communication with your community partner, 2) set up the BBP display area, 3) receive and put out new books as they are received, and, 4) most important, help students choose a book on their birthdays. Your project coordinator may be your media or literacy specialist, a family outreach staff member, or a front office staff member: whoever is most available and enthusiastic. Total time needed will be up to 3 hours to set up in the display area in advance, up to 5 hours over the year to maintain and restock the display area, and up to 1 hour per week to help students choose the birthday books.

Setting up the display area. A key element is a Birthday Books display area, which can be as small as a single bookcase dedicated to the project. 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. Ideally, the display should be completed and stocked with books *before* school starts in the fall.



At the bottom of this page is signage which you can print and post on the top of the display case. Some project coordinators add decoration to the area, but this is entirely optional.



Giving out the Birthday Books. When school starts in the fall, begin the daily habit of giving out books on birthdays. Most schools announce the birthdays of children on the morning announcements (including weekend birthdays on Fridays), and invite the birthday children to proceed immediately to the Birthday Books area to receive a book. Your school's BBP 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!



Happy Birthday