

# Starting a new Birthday Books Project at a Title I elementary school

is surprisingly easy and affordable. Just follow the simple steps below. If, after reading, you have questions, feel free to contact us. (Contact info at end of document.)

**NOTE: This guide is for schools starting a project *without* a community partner.** If your school plans to start a BBP *with* a Community Partner, please see our guide for *Schools (working with a Community Partner)*, linked on our website [HERE](#).

1

**What You'll Need.** Ideally, schools should begin planning the year before the academic year the program is to begin. Plan on:



- Cost: about \$2 per student per year.** For example, a school with 300 students would need an annual budget of just \$600. You won't need it all in advance, but do make sure that it will be available through school funds, PTA funds, or donations.
- Staffing:** The school will need to identify a staff member to serve as the Birthday Books Project Leader, such as the school's Family Engagement Coordinator, Literacy Specialist, or Media Center Specialist. Total time needed for the Project is **about 20 hours in advance** to order books and set up, **then about 2 hours a week** throughout the school year to order and pass out books. Of course, many tasks can be delegated to other staff members or to trusted volunteers.
- A bookcase or media cart.** The final need is a simple bookcase or filing cabinet, often placed in the media center or the front office, which can store the books and allow students to choose a favorite. Decoration is lovely although optional.

Any school that can commit to those three things — a \$2 per student budget, a staff member to order and give out books, and a bookcase to display the books — can have a Birthday Books Project that celebrates and encourages every student.

2

**Ordering Books.** Your school's Project Leader can begin ordering books 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. Ordering can be done entirely online for delivery directly to the school. Great sources are available, including some especially for Title I schools, all within your school's \$2 per book average budget. Full, step-by-step details on book ordering are on the next page (in the pink box).

3

**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. 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 for the top of the display case. Ideally, the display should be completed and stocked with books *before* school starts in the fall.

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 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!



**Practical note:** Students with a birthday during the summer, winter and spring breaks are absolutely included! Plan to give out those Birthday Books to the students during the week before the break begins. Since that end-of-year giveaway for summer birthdays involves a large number of students, it's wise to plan ahead. In early April, do a rough count of how many additional books you'll need to finish the school year and have enough for the summer birthdays. Then you can order the books in mid-April for receipt by mid-May.

**Questions? Concerns? Ideas? Send us an email at [Director@birthdaybooks.org](mailto:Director@birthdaybooks.org) or call 240-320-2666.**

## A Simple, Step-by-Step Guide to Ordering Great Books—within Budget!

**How many books will be needed when.** Most schools don't have storage space for a full year's books all at once, so it's wise to make several orders over the year. This will also allow you to keep choices fresh and new. For example, you could order:

- A number of books equal to about 30% of the school's student body in the summer before the project begins;
- Books equal to about 10% of the school's student body in October, December, February and March; and
- In early May '26, books equal to about 30% of the school's student body (to give for summer birthdays).

You can have the books shipped directly to the school, with attention to the staff member who is heading up the project.

**Choosing great books.** When ordering:

- Seek books which are fun, exciting, and positive.
- Look to include a wide variety of cultures, including those that reflect the students in your school.
- 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 or fighting on the cover, or books which might cause controversy or be objectionable to some families.
- Above all, look for books that a child can enjoy and treasure!

**Where to order great books at affordable prices.** There are lots of places to get great children's books, but we at the BBP rely most heavily on these two resources due to their unusual affordability. (Please note we get NO benefit from your use of them, nor do you get a discount because you're hosting a BBP. They just offer excellent choices at startlingly low prices.) They are:

- **Book Depot** is a for-profit company with remaindered books, but includes many great titles in the \$1 to \$2 per book range, plus a shipping cost of about 30 cents per book. Because of its combination of affordability and quality, you'll probably use it for your first and last big orders, and maybe some of the bimonthly orders, too. To get started, go to <https://www.bookdepot.com/> and create a free account, using your own email address. This lets you choose from their full catalog, which is arranged by categories in clickable menus. To help you get started, here are a few of the most useful links.
  - [Children's hardcover books](#) (mostly picture books). (Use link or click on Browse, then Categories, then Children. Then, in the left column, under Format, click on Hardcover, then Apply. To see lowest priced books first, use box at top right to select Price Asc.)
  - [Early chapter books](#) (may be soft or hardcover). (Use link or click on Browse, then Categories, then Children. Then, in left column, under Format, click on Tweens Fiction, then Apply. To see lowest priced books first, use box at top right to select Price Asc.)
  - [Children's graphic novels](#) (may be soft or hardcover). (Use link or click on Browse, then Categories, then Children. Then under Format, click on Comics and Graphic Novels, then Apply. To see lowest priced books first, use box at top right to select Price Asc.)
- **First Book** is a nonprofit devoted to bringing high quality, wonderfully diverse books to Title I schools and their students. While most of their prices are well above \$2 per book, they do offer some giveaways and specials. With persistence, you can sometimes find a few of their wonderful books for free or for the cost of shipping only — perhaps freeing up your budget to buy some of their other books a bit above your usual price point. First Book thus offers a great way to supplement your regular orders with extra quality and variety. To get started:
  - Go to the [Become a Member](#) page and create a free account. Use your email for contact but, when they ask about the school you serve, describe the school you are sponsoring.
  - New members typically get their first \$25 in books free. Also, watch your email for occasional promo codes and gift coupons. The Facebook page "Teachers on First Book Marketplace" also sometimes offers promo codes and gift coupons.
  - There are two major sections to shopping on the First Book website. The [Marketplace](#) is the one with higher prices but the most exciting selections. They have wonderful collections to explore, such as [Stories for All](#), [STEAM](#), [Picture Books](#), and [\\$3 and Under](#).
  - The [Book Bank](#) is the bargain bin, so use it carefully. It offers boxes of books for the cost of shipping only, but many aren't the fun, festive choices suitable for a birthday present. Also, you get 20 or more copies of the same book, decreasing selection options. Still, there's always the chance of finding a title so fun and affordable it's worth getting a box and using it over time.

*Tip:* If, before ordering a title from any source, you'd like to see a reading sample of a book, there's an easy way to do it. Pull up Amazon.com on a separate tab, search for that book by title, and look for a "Look inside" feature you can use.



**That's really all that is needed to give the students at your school an exciting array of beautiful children's books as birthday choices!**

Happy Birthday

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