

CCFC's GUIDE TO COMMERCIAL-FREE SCHOOL BOOK FAIRS¹

Why Hold a Book Fair?



Book fairs are time-honored vehicles for schools to raise money, promote literacy, and introduce students and their families to books they may not otherwise encounter. School communities like holding book fairs because they can:

- ◆ Raise funds for a school in a manner consistent with its educational mission.
- ◆ Promote literacy.
- ◆ Enrich classroom and library book collections.
- ◆ Provide books to students—including the opportunity to purchase books for those who may not have the funds to buy them.

At the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, we've found increasing interest among parents and educators in preventing their book fairs from becoming yet another commercial intrusion in children's lives.



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Why a Commercial-Free Book Fair?

- ◆ Because selling videos and products other than books detracts from one of the primary purposes of a book fair—to promote reading!
- ◆ Schools should provide an alternative for children who are already inundated with marketing for media-linked products.
- ◆ Commercial-free book fairs are a great way to support local business.
- ◆ Shouldn't schools be commercial-free?

A Commercial-Free Book Fair provides students and families with the opportunity to focus on purchasing books that introduce them to new worlds and ideas without being distracted by characters and narratives they have seen on a screen. By holding book fairs that sell media-linked toys, videos and paraphernalia, schools are actually promoting media programs and encouraging children to watch them—even as we know that heavy television viewing is linked to children doing less well academically.²



Videos, toys and products other than books detracts from one of the primary purposes of a book fair—to promote reading!

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood has received numerous complaints from parents about products other than books being sold at school book fairs, including DVDs, video games, posters, and key chains.



We gave our son \$5 in an envelope with a note to the teacher that we wanted him to choose a good reading book. However, he came home with a Batman drawing book and three 13" flexible pencils.

I don't think we can necessarily expect a seven-year-old to make the right choices, nor can we expect teachers to monitor children's choices in keeping with their parents' wishes. I think a better option is to ensure that a book fair is about encouraging reading and education, and is not an opportunity for an outside commercial company to sell products to children. ~ Caroline, Brooklyn, NY



"I don't think we can... expect a seven year old to make the right choices."

Parents also express concern about the increased presence of media tie-ins marketed to children by corporations such as Disney and Viacom, which owns Nickelodeon. Approximately 35-40% of the books sold at a typical event may be linked to a movie, television show or video game.

Kids are drawn to what is familiar and to what is most visually prominent, so they gravitate to the glitzy, colorful superhero covers. . . [Media tie-ins] weren't created by an author with a universal story to tell. They were created by a marketer who has a product to sell and he dreams up an appealing character to sell his product to kids. ~ Rob Williams, Co-President, Action Coalition for Media Education and school board member, Waitsfield, Vermont. The Waitsfield Elementary School holds a commercial-free book fair.³

How to Hold a Commercial Free Book Fair

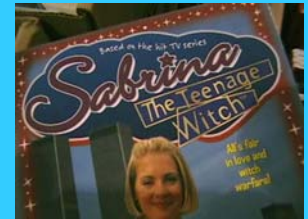
You don't have to choose between raising money and conducting a book fair that steers clear of media and commercial tie-ins. Numerous independent book stores and book-fair companies throughout the country are willing to meet the unique needs of each school community. While independent businesses may not be able to match the percentage of profits offered by a large corporation, many offer a significant return in either cash or books.

Best of all, a Commercial-Free Book Fair allows schools to introduce their students to new books without exposing them to marketing for other products or undermining parents who wish to limit their children's exposure to screen media.

Media Tie-ins Aren't Necessary

Reports from parents and educators who have held Commercial-Free Book Fairs belie the myth that media tie-ins and non-book items are necessary to get children excited about reading:

What a thrill it was to see 4-year-old kindergartners and 13-year-old middle schoolers hit our school lobby this week and show real excitement that it was time for the book fair. With books provided by the locally-owned Porter Square Books, we demonstrated that, given the chance, K-8 kids will embrace the opportunity to look at – and even buy! – all manner of books, from bilingual versions of Puss in Boots to classics and recent titles from major Young Adult authors like Walter Dean Myers. With virtually no media tie-ins to the books, and no free key chains promoting television characters, our school's Fall Book Fair fulfilled our wish that such school activities can support curriculum and equity while also limiting cross-promotional opportunities for major corporations. ~ Jeff Melnick, Cambridge, MA



Photos by James Valastro

“Kids are drawn to what is familiar and to what is most visually prominent... [Media Tie-ins] ... were created by a marketer that has a product to sell... to kids.”

From Commercialized to Commercial-Free

Remember that you're upset about the commercialism, not at the people who've been working so hard on previous book fairs.

Change is never easy. When you suggest a Commercial-Free Book Fair, or changing book fair providers, you may face some resistance from those who have been working for years with a particular book



provider. Parents who have initiated commercial-free fairs find that diplomacy helps. As one parent said, "Remember that you're upset about the commercialism, not at the people who've been working so hard on previous book fairs."

Thinking Outside the Box: Using Donated Books

One school in Minneapolis found a creative and fun way to get low-cost books to children:

"Families donated books to the school and volunteers sorted all the donated books. Books were set up by category — kids' books in one room and adult books in another. Books were priced fifty cents for a child's book or a paperback, and one dollar for an adult hardcover.

Dinner was served. A bluegrass band played. A local children's author spoke to the kids about the process of publishing a book.

This is one of the best events at our school. It's crowded. Families eat together surrounded by books. Everyone comes home with a sackful of new things to read. The school makes a little money. The books that don't sell are donated elsewhere.

It's recycling. And it's a simple way to stop putting more money into the children's marketing machine."

- Lisa Ray, Minneapolis, MN

¹ Special thanks to Rebecca Weiker for her help with research and drafting this guide.

² P.L. Donahue, R.J. Finnegan, A.D. Lutkus, N.L. Allen, and J.R. Campbell. (2001). *The Nation's Report Card: Fourth-Grade Reading 2000*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, NCES 2001-499, pg. 14.

³ Barbara F. Meltz (November 20, 2006). Taking the Consumerism out of School Book Fairs. *Boston Globe*. Available at <http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/pressreleases/commercialfreebookfair.htm>

Finding a Book Fair Provider for a Commercial-Free Book Fair

"It felt great to be able to support my school library and a local, independent bookstore at the same time!" ~ Leora Tec, Lexington, MA

Not all book fair providers work the same way. Make sure you know how your book fair provider operates. Some issues to consider:

- ◆ Some provide a set list of books. Ask if books can be added or deleted.
- ◆ If media-linked books are included, ask if they can be replaced by other books.
- ◆ Request that products other than books (toys, games, bookmarks, posters, etc.) be excluded.
- ◆ Ask what percentage of the profits will go to your school. What are the options for taking your profits (books, cash, discounts)? Most book fairs give back a percentage of their profits based on the total amount of revenue. Some give a larger percentage to first-time customers. Most fairs require a minimum total sales figure for receiving a percentage.



Your bookseller may not be aware of the concept of a Commercial-Free Book Fair. You may have to explain it. But parents report that many independent booksellers are happy to customize a book fair for your school.

The following is a list by region of book sellers that support book fairs. It is by no means complete. If none of the providers listed serve your area, contact your local independent bookstore which may be able to accommodate your needs. For a list of independent bookstores in your state and city, go to the American Booksellers Website Directory at www.bookweb.org/members/

National

Barefoot Books is a national bookseller which sells books regionally through its stallholders, many of whom hold in-store or in-school book fairs. To locate a stallholder in your area, visit: http://www.barefoot-books.com/us/site/pages/815_generic.php.

Northeast

Name: Apple Valley Book Fairs
Type of Fair: In-School
Address: 121 Main Street, Winthrop, ME 04364
Phone: 207-377-3967
Website: www.ctel.net/~applebooks/accounts.htm#book%20fairs

Name: Banbury Cross Children's Bookshop
Type of Fair: In-School
Address: 162 R. Main Street, Wenham, MA 01984
Geographic Area: Boston Area and north of Boston
Phone: 978-468-4040
Website: www.banburybooks.com

Name: Bank Street Books
Type of Fair: In-Store
Address: 610 W. 112 Street, New York, NY 10025
Phone: 212-678-1654
Website: www.bankstreetbooks.com

Name: Book Ends
Type of Fair: In-School
Address: 559 Main Street, Winchester, MA 01890
Geographic Area: Boston Area
Phone: 781-935-3339
Website: www.bookendswinchester.com

Name: Booktenders' Secret Garden
Type of Fair: In-School
Address: 20 B Donaldson Street, Doylestown, PA 18901
Geographic Area: Bucks & Eastern Montgomery Counties, PA
Phone: 215-348-7160
Contact: [Ellen Mager \(ellensbooks@aol.com\)](mailto:Ellen Mager (ellensbooks@aol.com))

Name: Eight Cousins
Type of Fair: In-School
Address: 189 Main Street, Falmouth, MA, 02540
Geographic Area: Cape Cod Area
Phone: 508-548-5548
Website: www.eightcousins.com/NASApp/store/IndexJsp

Name: Merritt Books
Type of Fair: In-School
Address: 57 Front Street, Box 918, Millbrook, NY 12545
Geographic Area: Mid Hudson Valley (NY) and parts of CT
Phone: 845-677-5857
Website: www.merrittbooks.com

Name: Porter Square Books
 Type of Fair: In-School
 Address: 25 White Street, Cambridge, MA 02140
 Phone: (617) 491-2220
 Website: www.portersquarebooks.com

Name: Storybook Cove
 Type of Fair: In-School and In-Store
 Address: 2053 Washington Street. Hanover, MA 02339
 Geographic Area: Half-hour driving radius of Hanover, MA
 Phone: 781-871-7801
 Website: www.storybookcove.com

Name: Village Square Booksellers
 Type of Fair: In-School and In-Store
 Address: 32 The Square, PO 245, Bellows Falls, VT 05101
 Phone: 802-463-9404
 Website: www.villagesquarebooks.com

Name: Wellesley Booksmith
 Type of Fair: In-Store
 Address: 82 Central Street, Wellesley, MA 02482
 Geographic Area: Boston & Metro West
 Phone: 781-431-1160
 Website: www.wellesleybooksmith.com

Southeast

Name: Bedford Falls Book Fairs
 Type of Fair: In-School
 Address: 339 W. Tremont Avenue, Charlotte, NC
 Geographic Area: Portions of North and South Carolina, Georgia and Virginia
 Phone: 866-567-2609
 Website: www.bedfordfallsusa.com

Name: The Book Rack
 Type of Fair: In-School
 Address: 55 E Padonia Road, Timonium, MD 21093
 Geographic Area: Baltimore City, Baltimore County and surrounding area
 Phone: 800-933-1023
 Email: TBR55@AOL.COM

Name: Southeastern Book Fairs
 Type of Fair: In-School
 Address: 7148 Cross County Road, North Charleston, SC 29418
 Geographic Area: South Carolina, parts of Georgia
 Phone: 1-877-266-5759
 Website: www.southeasternbookfairs.com

Midwest

Name: The Bookworm
Type of Fair: In-School and In-Store
Address: 8702 Pacific Street, Omaha, NE 68114
Phone Number: 402-392-2877
Website: www.bookwormomaha.com

Name: Butterfly Books
Type of Fair: In-School and In-Store
Address: 118 North Broadway, DePere, WI 54115
Geographic Area: NE Wisconsin
Phone Number: 920-339-1133
Website: www.butterflybooks.com

Name: Personalized Book Fairs
Type of Fair: In-School and Internet
Address: Plainfield, IL
Geographic Area: Illinois, northern Indiana, southern Wisconsin, and parts of Missouri
Phone Number: 800-755-5460
Website: www.personalizedbookfairs.com

Name: Reading Reptile
Type of Fair: In-School and In-Store
Address: 328 W. 63 Street, Kansas City, MO 64113
Geographic Area: Greater Kansas City, MO, and Johnson County, KS
Phone: 816-753-0441
Website: www.readingreptile.com

Name: Selections Bookfairs Inc.
Type of Fair: In-School
Geographic Area: Central Ohio
Address: 3558 N. High Street, Columbus, OH 43214
Phone Number: 614-262-0189
Website: www.selectionsbooks.com

Name: Wild Rumpus Bookshop
Type of Fair: In-Store
Address: 2720 West 43rd Street, Minneapolis, MN 55410
Phone Number: 612-920-5005
Website: www.wildrumpusbooks.com

Name: Wonderland Books and Toys, Inc.
Type of Fair: In-School and In-Store
Address: N. Alpine Road, Rockford, IL 61107
Geographic Area: Rockford, IL and surrounding area
Phone Number: 815-394-1633
Email: wonderlandbooks@sbcglobal.net

West

- Name: Dragon's Book Bazaar, LLC
 Type of Fair: In-School
 Address: 10255 Ralph Court, Boise, Idaho 83709
 Phone: 208-602-4828
 Website: www.DragonsBookBazaar.com
- Name: Hicklebee's
 Type of Fair: In-School and In-Store
 Address: 1378 Lincoln Avenue, San Jose, CA 95125
 Phone: 408-292-8880
 Website: hicklebees.booksense.com/NASApp/store/IndexJsp
- Name: Linden Tree Children's Recordings and Books
 Type of Fair: In-School and In-Store
 Address: 170 State Street, Los Altos, CA 94022
 Geographic Area: San Francisco Bay Area
 Phone: 650-949-3390
 Website: www.lindentreebooks.com
- Name: Mrs. Nelson's Book Fair Co.
 Type of Fair: In-School
 Address: 1650 W. Orange Grove Avenue, Pomona, CA 91768
 Phone: 909-865-8550
 Website: www.mrsnelsons.com

Southwest

- Name: Blue Willow Bookshop
 Type of Fair: In-Store
 Address: 14532 Memorial Drive, Houston, TX 77079
 Phone Number: 281-497-8675
 Website: www.bluewillowbookshop.com
- Name: Southwest Books
 Type of Fair: In-School
 Geographic Areas: Houston and Dallas areas
 Phone Number: 800-444-1228 (Houston); 214-357-9656 (Dallas)



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