

# CCFC's GUIDE TO COMMERCIAL-FREE SCHOOL BOOK FAIRS<sup>1</sup>

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## 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 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.*



**Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood**

NonProfit Center

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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.<sup>2</sup>

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*



Photos by James Valastro

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



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

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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.<sup>3</sup>*

### 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 without using the leading book fair company. Here's what they did:

*"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.*

*It's recycling. And it's a simple way to stop putting more money into the children's marketing machine." - Lisa Ray, Minneapolis, MN*

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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 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/](http://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: [www.marketingbarefoot.com/](http://www.marketingbarefoot.com/)

Usborne Books & More is a national bookseller which sells books and services through independent consultants, many of whom hold in-school book fairs through their Reading is a Gift program. To locate an Usborne consultant in your area, visit: [www.readingisagift.com/FindConsultant.asp](http://www.readingisagift.com/FindConsultant.asp)

## CCFC's GUIDE TO COMMERCIAL-FREE BOOK FAIRS

### Northeast

Name: Apple Valley Book Fairs  
Type of Fair: In-School  
Address: 121 Main Street, Winthrop, ME 04364  
Geographic Area: Within 75 miles of Winthrop, ME  
Phone: 207-377-3967  
Website: [www.ctel.net/~applebooks/accounts.htm#book%20fairs](http://www.ctel.net/~applebooks/accounts.htm#book%20fairs)

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](http://www.bankstreetbooks.com)

Name: Book Ends  
Type of Fair: In-School  
Address: 559 Main Street, Winchester, MA 01890  
Geographic Area: East-Central MA  
Phone: 781-721-5933  
Website: [www.bookendswinchester.com](http://www.bookendswinchester.com)

Name: Booktenders' Secret Garden  
Type of Fair: In-School  
Address: 42 E. State Street Rear, Doylestown, PA 18901  
Geographic Area: Lower and Central Bucks County, Northeastern Montgomery County  
Phone: 215-348-7160  
Email: Ellen Mager ([ellensbooks@aol.com](mailto:ellensbooks@aol.com))

Name: Eight Cousins  
Type of Fair: In-School and In-Store  
Address: 189 Main Street, Falmouth, MA, 02540  
Geographic Area: Upper Cape Cod and the Islands  
Phone: 508-548-5548  
Website: [www.eightcousins.com/](http://www.eightcousins.com/)

Name: Merritt Books  
Type of Fair: In-School, In-Store, Pocket, and Conference  
Address: 57 Front Street, Box 918, Millbrook, NY 12545  
Geographic Area: CT, MA, NJ, NY  
Phone: 845-677-5857  
Website: [www.merrittbooks.com](http://www.merrittbooks.com)

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

## CCFC's GUIDE TO COMMERCIAL-FREE BOOK FAIRS

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](http://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  
Geographic Area: 20 miles radius of Bellows Falls, VT  
Phone: 802-463-9404  
Website: [www.villagesquarebooks.com](http://www.villagesquarebooks.com)

Name: Wellesley Booksmith  
Type of Fair: In-Store  
Address: 82 Central Street, Wellesley, MA 02482  
Geographic Area: Dover, Natick, Needham, Newton, Sherborn, Wellesley, Weston  
Phone: 781-431-1160  
Email: Margaret Aldrich ([Margaret@wellesleybooks.com](mailto:Margaret@wellesleybooks.com))  
Website: [www.wellesleybooksmith.com](http://www.wellesleybooksmith.com)

### Southeast

Name: The Book Rack  
Type of Fair: In-School  
Address: 12 Galloway Ave. Ste. 1B, Cockeysville, Md. 21030  
Geographic Area: Baltimore, Baltimore County, and Southern PA  
Phone: 410-667-6897 / 800-933-1023  
Fax: 410-666-1262  
Email: [TBR55@aol.com](mailto:TBR55@aol.com)

Name: Cardinal Lane Book Fairs  
Type of Fair: In-School  
Address: 327B W. Tremont Ave., Charlotte, NC  
Geographic Area: 200 mile radius of Charlotte, NC  
Phone: 866-567-2609  
Website: [www.bedfordfallsusa.com](http://www.bedfordfallsusa.com)

### Midwest

Name: Anderson's Bookfair Company  
Type of Fair: In-School, In-Store, and Online  
Address: 520 North Exchange Court, Aurora, IL 60504  
Geographic Area: Chicago Land Area  
Phone: 630-820-0044  
Email: [Kati.eddinger@abcfairs.com](mailto:Kati.eddinger@abcfairs.com)  
Website: [www.abcfairs.com](http://www.abcfairs.com)

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- Name: Big Timber Book Club  
Type: Online  
Address: 1658 Cliff Road E, Burnsville, MN 55337  
Phone: 952-224-5030  
Email: [bookclub@bigtimbermedia.com](mailto:bookclub@bigtimbermedia.com)  
Website: [www.bigtimberbookclub.com](http://www.bigtimberbookclub.com)
- Name: The Bookworm  
Type of Fair: In-School (on a limited basis)  
Address: 8702 Pacific Street, Omaha, NE 68114  
Phone Number: 402-392-2877  
Website: [www.bookwormomaha.com](http://www.bookwormomaha.com)
- Name: Personalized Book Fairs  
Type of Fair: In-School and Online  
Address: Plainfield, IL  
Geographic Area: Chicago, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and St. Louis  
Phone Number: 815-436-5581  
Website: [www.personalizedbookfairs.com](http://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: Metropolitan Kansas City  
Phone: 816-753-0441  
Email: [pete@readingreptile.com](mailto:pete@readingreptile.com)  
Website: [www.readingreptile.com](http://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](http://www.selectionsbooks.com)
- Name: Wild Rumpus Bookshop  
Type of Fair: In-Store  
Address: 2720 West 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, Minneapolis, MN 55410  
Geographic Area: Minnesota  
Phone Number: 612-920-5005  
Email: [Katie McGintley \(wrumplus@qwestoffice.net\)](mailto:KatieMcGintley@wrumplus@qwestoffice.net)  
Website: [www.wildrumpusbooks.com](http://www.wildrumpusbooks.com)
- Name: Wonderland Books and Toys, Inc.  
Type of Fair: In-School and In-Store  
Address: 1625 N. Alpine Road, Rockford, IL 61107  
Geographic Area: Rockford, IL and surrounding area  
Phone Number: 815-394-1633  
Email: [wonderlandbooks@sbcglobal.net](mailto:wonderlandbooks@sbcglobal.net)



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### West

Name: Hicklebee's Book Fairs  
Type of Fair: In-School, In-Store, and online  
Address: 1378 Lincoln Avenue, San Jose, CA 95125  
Phone: 408-292-8880  
Email: [thebookelf@yahoo.com](mailto:thebookelf@yahoo.com); [hicklebees@hicklebees.com](mailto:hicklebees@hicklebees.com)  
Website: [www.hicklebees.com](http://www.hicklebees.com)

Name: Linden Tree Children's Recordings and Books  
Type of Fair: In-Store  
Address: 265 State Street, Los Altos, CA 94022  
Geographic Area: San Francisco Peninsula  
Phone: 650-949-3390  
Website: [www.lindentreebooks.com](http://www.lindentreebooks.com)

Name: Mrs. Nelson's Book Fair Co.  
Type of Fair: In-School  
Address: 1648 W. Orange Grove Avenue, Pomona, CA 91768  
Geographic Area: Southern California  
Phone: 909-865-8550  
Website: [www.mrsnelsons.com](http://www.mrsnelsons.com)

### Southwest

Name: Blue Willow Bookshop  
Type of Fair: In-Store and Catalogue (through American Booksellers Association)  
Address: 14532 Memorial Drive, Houston, TX 77079  
Phone Number: 281-497-8675  
Email: Valerie Koehler ([girlboss@bluewillowbookshop.com](mailto:girlboss@bluewillowbookshop.com))  
Website: [www.bluewillowbookshop.com](http://www.bluewillowbookshop.com)

Name: Southwest Books  
Type of Fair: In-School  
Geographic Areas: Greater Houston and Dallas areas  
Phone Number: 800-444-1228 (Houston); 214-357-9656 (Dallas)  
Website: [www.southwestbookco.com](http://www.southwestbookco.com)



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