

Selling Books

by Alexis O'Neill

Selling books is all about making connections with kids, creating a fan base, and extending the educational – and personal – value of a school visit beyond that one day.

No matter what your host may think, selling books at schools really isn't about the money. Most of us could make more with a tin cup on a street corner.

But making sure that our books are available for students and staff to purchase is often a major challenge. Why?

Some schools refuse to sell books. Some claim that it's unfair to kids who can't afford to buy them. Others don't know how to organize a sale. Still others resist holding a sale in addition to paying your presentation fee. (They think that the entire cover price of the books goes into your pocket and resent being a sales agent.)

What can you do to remove or diminish the objections so that schools will offer your books for sale? How can we convince hosts that, as author [Kay Winters](#) says, "encouraging book ownership among kids" is important to the growth of a reader?.

The Hassle Factors

Running a book sale is not a trivial matter for schools. They have to design or customize an order form and send it home with the kids, collect money, order books, sort them when they arrive, distribute purchases, and return unsold books. Book sales are usually handled by parent volunteers, librarians or teachers. This is an **extra** duty. *It helps for you to be sensitive to and appreciative of this effort.*

Book Ordering Alternatives

Hosts usually access books by:

- **Ordering through a bookseller:** Send your

host a list of the nearest booksellers (this helps support the local economy!) For lists of stores, go to

- <http://www.indiebound.org/>
- www.barnesandnoble.com
- www.borders.com

- Go the extra mile by connecting the host with a specific, helpful person at that store. Booksellers often offer a discount to the school. The school can either pass that savings along to the students, or keep the profit to support more programs. Suggest working with a bookseller who will let them have the books "*on consignment*" which allows returns of unsold books without penalty.

- **Ordering from the publisher:** This is fairly straightforward if all of your books are at one publishing house. It's more complicated if you've published with multiple houses. But this alternative offers the best school discount. Provide your host with your publishers' contact information, including the name of a key contact person.

- **Ordering from Amazon:** This may be the only alternative to schools in remote regions or for schools that decide at the last minute to sell your books.

- **Purchasing directly from you:** When your book is out of print, this is often the only way to provide backlist titles to schools. To do this, you will need a business license and must report sales and taxes. You are, in essence, a bookseller, so you need to do all the legal bits.

How You Can Help

- In your pre-visit materials, send a checklist that includes booksellers' addresses closest to your host and an ordering timeline.

- Send a list of your books to your host in advance. Include ISBN, price and a one-sentence synopsis of each book. If you have many, highlight

the books you will be addressing in your assemblies.

- Send a sample order form in your pre-visit packet or as a PDF file. Leave spaces where the host can fill in the blanks (name of school, deadline for money, etc.). The school can either adapt or adopt this form. (The school will send the form home with kids. Kids will bring back the form with their money. Then school will place the order with the bookseller.) Booksellers often will add a few extras for last-minute purchases. Eight weeks before your visit, check with your host to see if they plan to do a book sale. Follow up with an e-mail about three weeks before your visit. Ask how you can help.

Q & A

Should I carry extra books in my car?

Keeping an “emergency” box of books on hand is a good idea. Consider working out a system with your local bookseller: if you use your copies, have the checks made out to your bookseller and have her replace any copies sold. This way you avoid having to get a business resale license. (Besides – most contracts prohibit authors from selling their own books.)

If schools can run two book fairs a year, why won't they sell my books?

Probably *because* they are doing book fairs, the school may think that these events have the “literacy thing” covered. Organizers don't realize that your books won't necessarily be available to kids through the fair.

What if, after all my efforts, they still refuse to allow my books to be sold in school?

Here are some choices.

- Be mad
- Refuse to appear
- Make minimum book sales part of your contract

Some better choices might be:

- As part of your contract, you might ask the school to purchase a “library set” to circulate among classrooms before your visit, or to purchase a book or books for each *classroom* library.
- Have the school run off autographed bookmarks that include your website to hand out to all the kids.
- Offer to send autographed bookplates to anyone who purchases a book after your visit.

Just go and *be gracious* and know that you are still making important connections with kids and staff who will become part of your fan base.

The Bottom Line

While nothing compares to those private one-on-one moments with kids during an autographing session, I don't require that schools sell my books. But I do make it clear that kids should have access to my books in through the school library or classroom libraries. This is an important way for the school to carry on the value of the day long after I've gone. Librarians have told me time and again, “After authors have been here, I can't keep their books on the shelves!”

The bottom line is, the more helpful you are, the more likely the schools will be to get your books into the hands of eager readers.

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Click here for sample forms [Book Sale Procedure](#) and [Sample Book Order Form](#) or send an email request to Info2@schoolvisitexperts.com

Alexis O'Neill, Ph.D., is the author of *THE RECESS QUEEN* and other award-winning books for children. She has been an elementary school teacher, a teacher of teachers, and a museum educator. She is a popular school visit presenter and helps other authors create and deliver quality programs. Visit her at www.schoolvisitexperts.com
