

The History of One Book One Bloomington and Beyond



Discussion of a single book and the issues therein to encourage literary reading and to build community by encouraging conversation and the sharing of ideas by members of the community.

The Beginning

In 2001, Sally Gaskill, then Executive Director of the Bloomington Area Arts Council, proposed to the Board of Directors of the Council that Bloomington should have a community read such as programs in Rochester, New York, and Chicago, Illinois. The Board approved the proposal, and Board member Michael Simmons was appointed chair of the Steering Committee of One Book, One Bloomington (OBOB).

The initial committee had representatives from: Bloomington Area Arts Council, City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department, Monroe County Public Library, Monroe County Community School Corporation, and Indiana University. A number of these representatives still serve on the committee, and all of the original partnering organizations still participate.

In 2006, the project expanded its name to One Book, One Bloomington and Beyond, to reflect participation by Ellettsville and surrounding communities.

One Book Selections by Community Vote

From the beginning, the community has selected the book to be read. At first, the Steering Committee developed a list of books that met the criteria created by the committee and provided ballot boxes for the community vote. For the 2003 Community Read and in subsequent years (with the exception of 2007), the community has also had the opportunity to nominate books that fit the criteria.

Criteria:

- A contemporary work of fiction
- Available in paperback
- Accessible to high school students age 16 and up
- A work that lends itself to thoughtful discussion of significant social/cultural issues

The Big Read (2007)

For the 2007 Read, The Bloomington Area Arts Council received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) literary reading program, The Big Read. For that year, community members voted for a selection from the list of books proposed by the NEA for The Big Read. The grant provided resource materials for use in discussion groups, and funding for books and events, which greatly enhanced the One Book experience.

Selection Announcement

The announcement of the first One Book selection was made in January at a special event at the John Waldron Arts Center. In subsequent years, the announcement has been made as a part of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration in January at the Buskirk-Chumley Theatre.

Community Book Discussions: *Ex Libris*, the discussion group of People's University of

Bloomington, has provided the first opportunity for community discussion of the selected book on the fourth Wednesday of February. Books Plus, Monroe County Public Library's monthly book discussion group, has followed with discussion of the selected title in March. The official reading period extends each year from January through June, and many discussion groups participate.

One Book Support: In addition to the organizations represented on the Steering Committee, OBOB has received support at various times from the *Herald-Times*, NEA, Indiana Humanities Council, Friends of Monroe County Public Library, AuthorHouse and Bloomington Area Arts Council (2001-2009).

One Book One Bloomington and Beyond is a project of the *Bloomington Arts and Entertainment District*, *Boxcar Books*, *Free University of Monroe County*, *Indiana University Libraries Bloomington*, *Monroe County Community School Corporation*, *Monroe County Public Library*, and *WFHB*.

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Links
[1] <https://mcpd.info/fiction/history-one-book-one-bloomington-and-beyond>
[2] <http://bloomington.in.gov/boob>
[3] <http://www.boxcarbooks.org>
[4] <http://www.freebook.com/freeunc>
[5] <http://www.libraries.iub.edu/>
[6] <http://www.mccsc.edu/>
[7] <http://mcpd.info>
[8] <http://wfhb.org/>