



Authors for Indies Day Celebration Ideas

It takes time coming up with ideas, so here's a collection of event ideas from real stores and booksellers, courtesy of our American cousins at Independent Bookstore Day (IBD)

Some may work for you, some not, but we hope these ideas get you thinking about creative ways to provide a fun, welcoming experience for each person who enters your store on Authors for Indies Day.

Strut Your Stuff:

Bring customers in beyond the front of the store displays. We hope you will create a big and beautiful display of the author-recommended books and any special items, but we hope that AFI Day is a record day for you storewide. In the US, most stores saw their major sales increases from regular inventory.

- **Plant simple prizes, coupons, or treasures throughout the store.** This doesn't have to be monetary. It could be a handwritten note from an author recommending their favorite books. It could be some simple positive reinforcement—notes that say things like "You are smart and beautiful. We've noticed."
- **Curate sections with fun, thoughtful, or kooky themes** so that regular customers don't just see the same old fiction, non-fiction, cooking, and kids sections. Instead they might see sections called "A cure for melancholia" or "Loveable criminals" or "Books that will make you sexy" – themed displays of books from across all sections and genres.
- **Offer quirky discounts** (e.g., 20% off all books with the word "book" in the title) or hourly alphabet sales (e.g., from 1pm --- 2pm authors with last names starting with M or N are 10% off)
- **Offer an early bird, pre-opening "behind the scenes" store tour** with coffee, muffins, and special discounts. Make sure your peppiest bookseller gives the tour and be prepared with some good insider stories about authors you've hosted (some of whom should remain anonymous!)
- **Promote existing stock.** Think about the programs and products you already offer and show them off with a special sign, or use them as prizes for other activities. Think store-themed shirts, mugs, book-of-the-month clubs, etc.
- **A Canadian contribution: give your authors a job:** sometimes authors don't know what to do for you besides show up. Here is something they can all do: have them ask all their friends and family to drop in on AFI Day to do a little book shopping.

Author Events:

Make sure your author line-up has variety. Author events are more fun when your authors represent a range of genres and talents. Goal: when families come, there is an author and/or activity of interest to every member of the family. Think illustrators, cookbook authors, adventure/travel writers, gardeners, musicians, historians.

- **Quirky author events work best.** Invite authors to read and sign, but also invite them to participate in a quiz, sell books, or sing karaoke too. Reading to kids is always popular.
- **Start conversations.** Ask a favorite author to make a list of the ten books that have changed their life and then create a display. It doesn't have to be a display of books, it could be a poster listing the books and asking the question: which book(s) changed your life?
- **Set up a "Psychology 5¢" booth:** put a funny author or local celebrity to work.
- **Demonstrations:** Ask a cookbook author to demonstrate making hors d'oeuvres, or a famous libertine to mix cocktails (check your province's liquor license laws).
- **Create a quiz show** where authors have to answer questions about something far outside their expertise (see: NPR's *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me*).
- **Get a children's author to do a mini-workshop** on how to create a children's book. For example, *How to Draw a character*. Ask the author what would work. Can't get an author? Do you have a talented staff member?
- **Create a "get your portrait" station** but have it run by an awesome illustrator. Think about the *How to Draw* contributors: buy the book, get a one-minute portrait?
- **How much is that author in the window?** Ask a writer to sit in the window for a few hours and write. This attracts passers-by!
- **Arts and crafts:** Ask an author-artist or a local artist to do screen printing workshop/demo, work on a quilt piece, something from their latest book of crafts, etc.

Partner up:

The more you work with your community and other retailers, the farther you spread the word.

- **Organize with other bookstores in your area** to create a passport with stamps and prizes for customers who plan to visit multiple stores. You're the only bookstore? Do a passport with other local businesses.
- **Work with neighborhood businesses on cross-promotions.** Show a receipt from your store and get a free cookie at the local cafe. Ask for food donations and give prominent signage to the restaurant or bakery.
- **Work with organizations in the arts.** Is there a local theatre group willing to give away some tickets?
- **Reach out to your local literary festival.** Tickets to lit fest events? A one-year membership? Opportunity to attend a special lecture featuring a CanLit star?

Feed people:

Feed them and they will come. Nuff said.

- **Food trucks are fun.** Have a food truck come to the store during lunch or dinner
- **The Edible Hour.** Offer the first 25 or 50 customers a cupcake (or bagel, or muffin) in the morning or hold a different edible event for every hour you're open. This can be as simple as "free donut hour" from 10 to 11, sushi from 11 to 12, and so on.
- **Food and beverage tastings.** Partner with a local beer, spirit, or wine maker to host a tasting. Or a local artisanal tea or coffee or chocolate vendor. Make it educational and interesting for customers and give the partner an opportunity to talk about the products and how to differentiate.
- **Invite literary and/or educational non-profits to raise money:** give them space to hold a bake sale in front of the store that day.
- **Create themed food/drink hours:** an F. Scott Fitzgerald cocktail/mocktail hour, or a Jane Austen English tea.

Storm Social Media:

- **Our hashtag is #AFI2017.** Please use it throughout AFI Day. Our intrepid social media mavens will be monitoring the air waves retweeting and sharing to amplify your tweets and posts! Plus, for the past two years, CBC Books has let us use their handle for a "Twitter takeover" to their thousands of followers.
- **Get more social followers:** as part of your lead up to AFI Day, let customers know that if they come to your store on AFI Day, there will be special prizes available via social media hints. You can announce this using store signage, newsletters, word of mouth at the store.
- **Tweet and Facebook secret social media codes** customers can whisper to booksellers to win prizes
- **People like doing selfies:** Create little hashtag signs people can hold up for selfies and post to social media: #AFI2017 or #yourstorename or #LoveIndieBookstores
- **Set up events that are easy to Instagram or share on social media.** Create attention-getting displays, funny signs, or other in-store attractions that people can pose with.
- **Rewards for spreading the word:**
 - Give a prize or coupon to anyone who shows you an AFI-themed social media post.
 - Post a photo on social media of a special book or item on FB, Instagram, or Twitter and tag the bookstore in the post for a chance to win that item.

Play!

Children's books are an important market. If parents know that your AFI Day is for the whole family and not just adults, they'll be more willing to come and join the fun. But grown-ups like to play too.

- **Set up an arts and crafts table** for kids and/or adults. Maybe *Drawing Your Favorite Characters*. Maybe *Collages from your favorite books*. Make bookmarks or notebooks.
- **Give customers a chance to voice their love of reading.** Put up a giant piece of brown paper and supply Sharpies; invite customers to write titles of their favorite books or why they love their local independent bookstore. Make it visible to people outside. Replace as necessary.
- **Set up a treasure or scavenger hunt:** one for grown-ups and one for kids. Have customers use a clue sheet to find authors with certain initials, or a book with the word "dog" in the title, etc. Completed sheets can be included in a prize raffle or turned in for discounts. This can go on throughout the day.
- **Photo booth.** Create a little corner where customers can create their own funny photo shoots with costumes and props (make sure you get some shots too!)
- **Mad about [Mad Libs](#):** Create a book-themed Mad Libs station or a public Mad Libs hour
- **Meet & greet book swaps for customers.** Each customer gets one minute to talk about the book they just brought. At the bell, everyone is invited to swap!
- **Hold a blindfolded gift wrapping race** for prizes and bragging rights. See if customers can beat your best staff wrapper.
- **Hold a literary quiz "show" for customers.** Customers against staff? Authors against staff? Authors against authors? Offer prizes and bragging rights.
- **A Canadian contribution: blind dating for books.** Wrap a selection of books in brown paper. Set an attractive price. What's inside is a surprise.

Entertain and educate

Attract passers-by with jugglers, mime artists, or other performers

Keep the action moving inside: have a balloon animal maker, face painter, performance poet, tarot reader or caricature artist in the store.

Drop-in book club: hold a book club led by a staff member or a friendly customer to discuss the newest book by one of the authors.

Open Mic: Set up a microphone and a large collection of poetry books, kids' books, classics. Invite customers to read their (one) favorite. This could be ongoing all day.

Music: Invite a local band to play in the store or have a small jazz trio play browsing music during "cocktail hour."

Ideas for Free Stuff:

- Offer some of your merchandise as prizes and treats for contests and games.
- Have 'blind dates' with galleys of not-yet-released books wrapped in brown paper with a funny written description
- Free literary temporary tattoos (although how fun would a real tattoo artist be....)
- Hourly drawings for prizes.
- Have a children's prize treasure chest so every kids that comes in gets little something (fill it with stickers, super balls, erasers, small toys, pencils, etc.)
- Offer a different small giveaway to the first 10, or 5 or 2 customers every hour

A word about merchandising & displays:

- Decorate! Balloons and streamers. Displays. Large hand-drawn AFI logos!
- Plan displays ahead of time. Think about creating context for the items.
- Keep in mind that eyes start to glaze over when there are too many signs with too many messages. Keep it clear and simple.
- Create displays with several books by the same author.
- Enlist the talents of your staff and get creative

Have fun!