



# 2023 Annual Report

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Helping Indie Bookstores Thrive Since 1900

OUR MISSION

ABA works every day  
to help independent  
bookstores across the  
U.S. survive and thrive.



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# Letter from CEO



The growth and impact of independent bookstores was evident in 2023. **ABA membership grew by 11%** and for the third consecutive year **over 200 independent bookstores opened** in the U.S. ABA felt honored to support all of our members this past year and we're proud to present ABA's 2023 Annual Report.

In 2023, education continued to be a priority for ABA. In February, we hosted the largest Winter Institute in ABA's history. Over 1,600 attendees met in-person in the beautiful city of Seattle for our first COVID-era, in-person Winter Institute conference to talk about everything from antitrust and best business practices to banned books, and to celebrate books and bookselling. It was especially meaningful to do so with 900 independent booksellers in Amazon's hometown! In June, we hosted the largest Children's Institute in ABA's history with almost 700 attendees meeting in the charming city of Milwaukee to talk about everything from the state of the children's

book market and best business practices to e-commerce for book fairs, and to celebrate books and children's bookselling. A highlight was the closing keynote with Ruby Bridges and Nikkolas Smith! Over the course of the year, ABA also offered over 100 virtual educational and networking opportunities and created new resources like BookED, a new educational podcast for booksellers; and a Resource Library for members. ABA also took the show on the road providing critical education on preparing for, and avoiding, emergencies for booksellers at the regional associations' summer/fall shows.

Advocacy was another priority in 2023. ABA lobbied for the Credit Card Competition Act and the American Innovation and Choice Online Act. Our communication with the Federal Trade Commission and 2023 white paper, *The Stepping Stone to Monopoly*, contributed to the subsequent launch of an FTC lawsuit against Amazon. ABA lobbied to raise the federal debt ceiling and lobbied on the state level in opposition or support of several state bills related to our members' interests. Some of the most important advocacy work ABA conducted in 2023 was in the fight against banned books and for free expression. ABA expanded its advocacy team, created a Right to Read Toolkit for booksellers, and advocated against almost three dozen censorship and free speech bills that directly impacted our members while also assisting individual stores with local challenges and opposition to their own free speech. Most significantly, ABA, along with a coalition of partners, challenged and won injunctions against two unconstitutional laws that restrict members' First Amendment rights: Texas HB 900 and Arkansas Act 372. These lawsuits are still pending and the work goes on.

And finally, IndieCommerce was a priority in 2023. This multi-year project made significant progress in 2023 as we began migrating stores to the new IndieCommerce 2.0 platform. That said, like many construction projects there have been unexpected delays; a top priority for 2024 is to cross the finish line and migrate all the stores. The Board has provided additional funding to make this possible and the team remains committed.

These were ABA's strategic priorities in 2023. But we offered so much more that we hope you

found valuable in terms of your business and in terms of your membership. This annual report is evidence of some of that work and the success of that work is a testament to the efforts of the entire ABA staff.

**Our team visited over 150 independent bookstores this year** and during those visits we spoke with hundreds of booksellers to hear how their stores were doing, what they needed, and what their concerns



for the future were. **Each store had its own unique magic but the booksellers were universally passionate about, and committed to, serving their community and championing books.** This is what makes independent bookstores special and important.

Thank you for the continued honor of supporting you.

Allison K Hill, CEO

# The State of the Independent Bookstore

The growth in the indie channel continued in 2023, confirming once again that The Future is Indie.

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

**291** bookstore businesses  
opened in 2023



**230**  
storefronts



**34**  
pop-ups

**18**  
online



**9**  
mobile

**28**  
Black-owned



**51**  
BIPOC-owned

**192**  
bookstores planning  
on opening in the  
next 1-2 years



**19**  
Black-owned

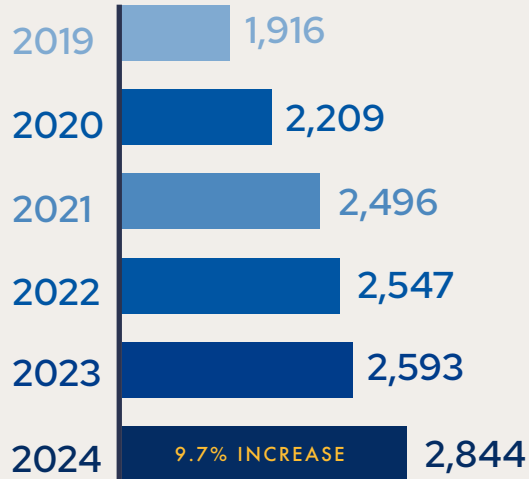
**29**  
BIPOC-owned

**95**  
bookstore  
businesses  
closed in 2023

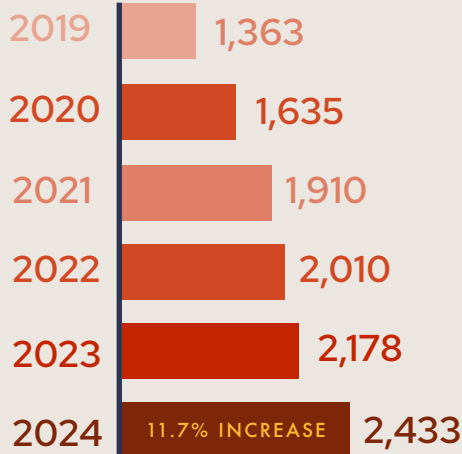
*Note: some members do not share their racial identity.*

# ABA Membership

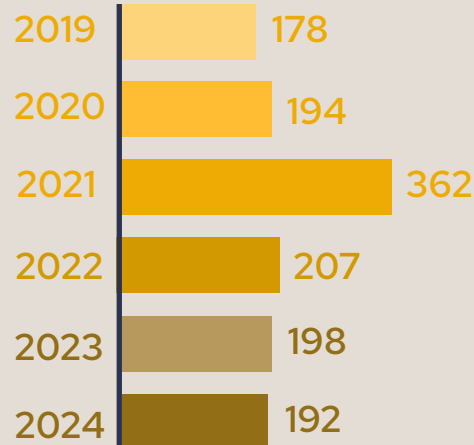
## MEMBER LOCATIONS



## BOOKSTORE COMPANIES



## PROVISIONAL MEMBERS





INDIES BY THE NUMBERS

# ABACUS

2023 marked the **highest participation in history** for ABACUS, ABA's financial benchmarking report for independent bookstores. ABACUS helps stores see how they compare to other stores and identify areas to improve profitability.

441

bookstore  
companies with

501

locations

10% INCREASE FROM  
PREVIOUS REPORT

# Indies First

NOVEMBER 26, 2023

This was the 11th anniversary of the national campaign in support of independent bookstores in conjunction with Small Business Saturday, the Saturday after Thanksgiving. **Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman** became ABA's Indie Ambassador!

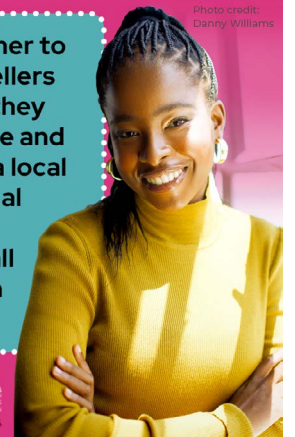
**Amanda Gorman**  
Indie Bookstore Ambassador  
2023-2024

“We must work together to support local booksellers everywhere so that they can continue to thrive and champion books on a local level with the personal touch and human connection that we all need, now more than ever.”

Photo credit:  
Danny Williams



American Booksellers Association. Copyright 2023-2024.



EDUCATION, INSPIRATION + SUPPORT

# Strengthening Our Community



EDUCATION, INSPIRATION + SUPPORT

# Winter Institute

FEBRUARY 20-23, 2023

Wi2023 in Seattle was ABA's biggest Winter Institute in history with over **900 booksellers** in attendance and over **1,600 total attendees**.

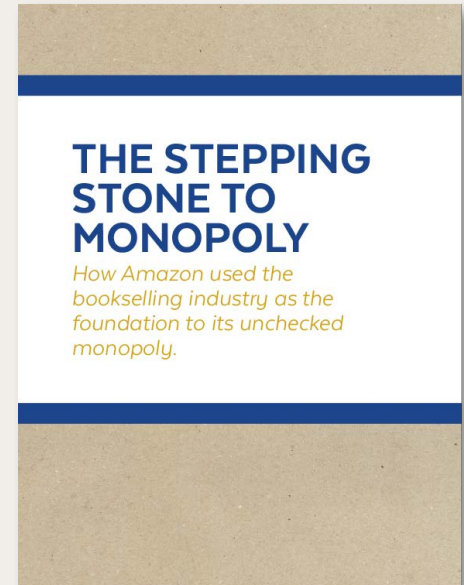
The conference **PROGRAM** included keynote speakers, education, networking, and affinity groups to help booksellers with their businesses.



# Advocacy

## Antitrust

- ABA advocated in support of the American Innovation and Choice Online Act, an antitrust bill that would protect competition in the marketplace.
- In June 2023, ABA sent a new white paper detailing Amazon's anticompetitive behavior in the bookselling industry to contacts at the Federal Trade Commission.
- In September, Allison Hill, Ray Daniels, and David Grogan, met with counsel from the FTC in Washington, DC, to discuss Amazon's behavior in the bookselling and publishing space, and to answer questions about ABA's white paper. The FTC subsequently filed an antitrust suit against Amazon. This one should be last on the list since the other actions led to the lawsuit.
- In a letter to FTC Chair Lina Khan, ABA CEO Allison Hill cautioned the FTC about Amazon's request for an eleventh hour meeting saying it was likely to propose a deal to avoid real punishment for its anticompetitive behavior. ABA strongly asserted that it's the FTC's responsibility to fully investigate before making a determination.
- ABA joined with Authors Guild and Open Markets Institute calling for an investigation into Amazon.



## Swipe Fee Reform

- Lobbied in support of the Credit Card Competition Act (CCCA) to end the Visa/Mastercard duopoly and spur price competition in swipe fees. ABA met with lawmakers in support of CCCA and ABA and mobilized bookstore members to participate in multiple fly-ins to Washington DC to meet with lawmakers and share their small business experience.

## Government Assistance

- Provided booksellers with information on the Hardship Accommodation Plan (allowing eligible borrowers to make reduced loan payments for six months) and hosted webinars about overlooked additional opportunities for Employee Retention Credits.

## Partnerships

- Opposed licensing laws like HI HB 1412, in partnership with the Association of American Publishers, that would have taken e-book sales from independent bookstores.
- Reached out to the Authors Guild to discuss ways to support authors in the age of AI and shared Top 5 Ways booksellers could help with members.
- Advocated, along with other small businesses, for the debt ceiling to be raised.

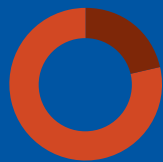
## Outreach to Lawmakers

- In March, ABA's Advocacy division wrote an introductory letter to the new federal lawmakers to share some of the challenges facing independent bookstores.
- Lobbied on behalf of independent bookstores' interest in favor of, or in opposition to, proposed legislation in several states.

# Independent Bookstore Day

APRIL 27, 2023

ABA's national celebration of independent bookstores was the largest in Indie Bookstore Day history to date with **1,063** stores participating from all 50 states!



**21.6%**

increase from 2022

(874 PARTICIPANTS)



Brain Lair Books




Courtney Wallace,  
Program Director  
of Independent  
Bookstore Day



The Novel Neighbor

**Celeste Ng**  
2023 INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORE DAY  
Ambassador



INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORE DAY  
SATURDAY  
APRIL 29, 2023  
10TH ANNIVERSARY

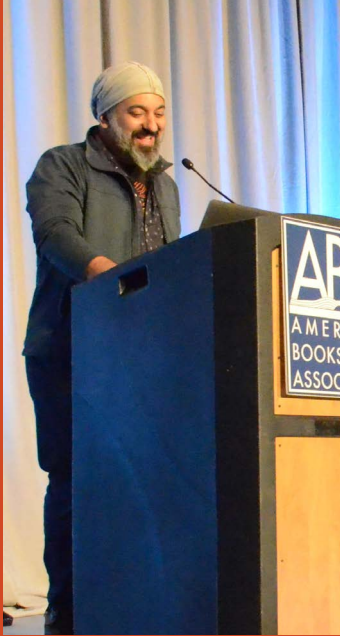
“ [Independent bookstores] are part of the fabric of the neighborhood, staffed by booksellers who know books and their customers. And shopping locally supports our communities as well as the people who live there. ”



Mainpoint Books



Talking Leaves





# Children's Institute

APRIL 27, 2023

Children's Institute 2023 was the largest in ABA history. **359 booksellers** representing **238 stores** across the United States met in Milwaukee to celebrate children's bookselling.

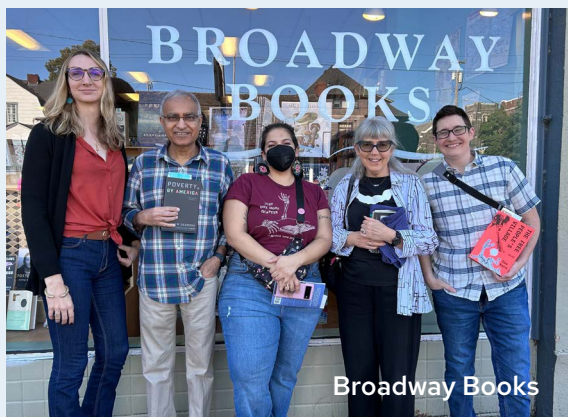
[CHECK OUT THE PROGRAM DETAILS.](#)



# Fall Regional Trade Shows

SEPTEMBER + OCTOBER, 2023

ABA was happy to be back on the road in full force talking with members and visiting stores.



SOURCE BOOKSELLERS HAS  
**EXPANDED**

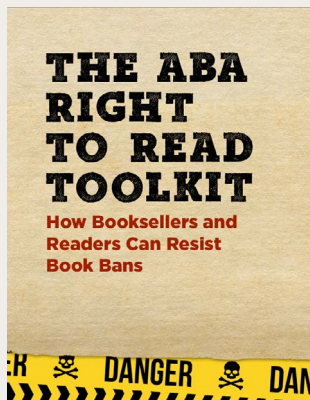
**READ**

HEALTH EDUCATION BUSINESS  
History COOKING culture PHILOSOPHY politics



# ABFE

American Booksellers for Freedom of Expression (ABFE), ABA's free expression initiative, doubled our efforts this year, expanding the Advocacy team and modifying our strategy to address the growing need to fight book bans.

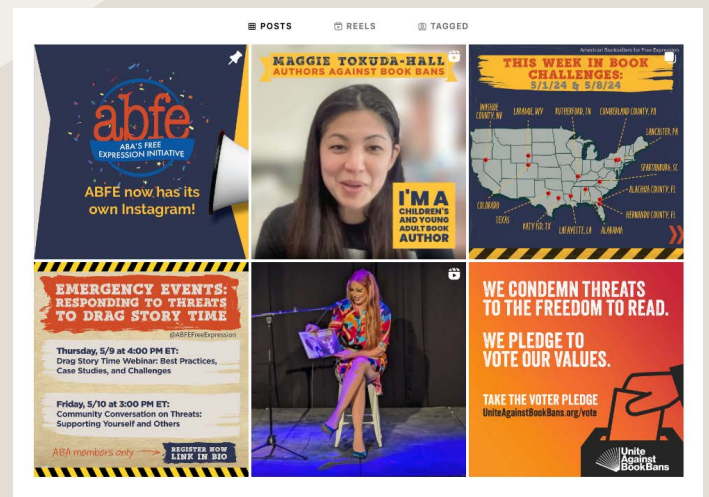


## Right to Read Toolkit

- ABFE released “The ABA Right to Read Toolkit” a member resource containing information about the book ban crisis; interviews with booksellers, book ban experts, and organizers; and how-tos on safely defending the right to read in stores.

## Social Media

- ABFE launched on Instagram, Facebook, and X to expand our advocacy community and highlight announcements about ABFE's initiatives and events, weekly book ban roundups, interviews with Free Expression Advocates, and deep dives into the nuances of book censorship.



## Department of Education Outreach and Webinar

- ABFE initiated a relationship with Matt Nosanchuk, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and President Biden's newly appointed "Book Ban Czar." We briefed Nosanchuk on the impact of book bans on independent booksellers, learned about his office's efforts to combat hostile and discriminatory school environments, and hosted him for a webinar on the role of the Office for Civil Rights and how booksellers can file reports with his office.



## Developing Grassroots Relationships

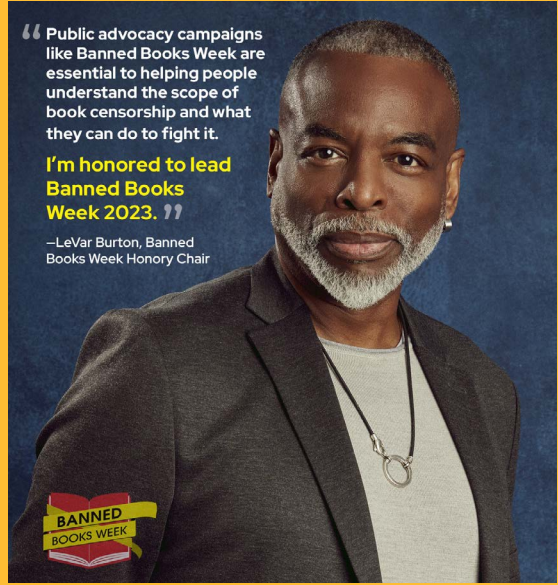
- ABFE increased its outreach to, and partnerships with, grassroots organizers on the state, national, and local levels, including Red Wine & Blue, Our Schools USA, and smaller organizations in Florida, Texas, Missouri, and Alabama, enabling us to brief these organizations when we have information on bans in their area or connect them with interested booksellers.

## Direct Support for Stores

- ABFE reached out and offered support, guidance, and best practices to stores facing harassment for their support of banned and diverse books. ABFE intervened on behalf of stores with their local governments in cases where they faced permitting issues or restricted access to events because of the content they sell.



Fox Tail Book Shoppe



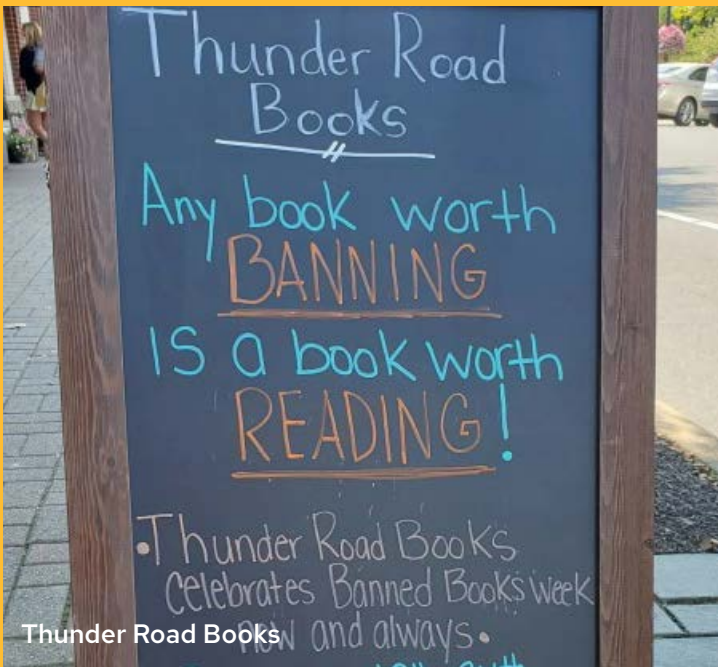
“Public advocacy campaigns like Banned Books Week are essential to helping people understand the scope of book censorship and what they can do to fight it.”

I'm honored to lead Banned Books Week 2023.

—LeVar Burton, Banned Books Week Honorary Chair



Snug Books



Thunder Road Books

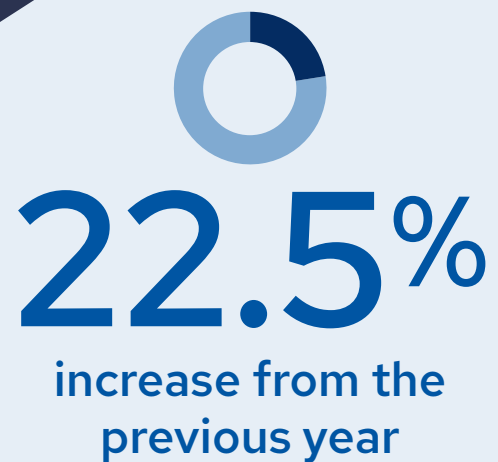


Powells Books

# Banned Books Week

OCTOBER 1-7, 2023

**Over 735 member stores** signed up to receive ABA's Let Freedom Read kits, including displays, materials, and digital resources.



# E-Commerce Solutions for Booksellers

One of the biggest priorities for ABA in 2023 continued to be the upgrade of the ABA’s e-commerce platform and the migration of all of the stores to IndieCommerce 2.0.

During 2023, most IndieLite stores were moved into the pipeline or migrated enabling the IndieCommerce team to address issues and test the platform. The majority of the development work was completed in 2023, and the IndieCommerce team began migrating IndieCommerce stores to 2.0.

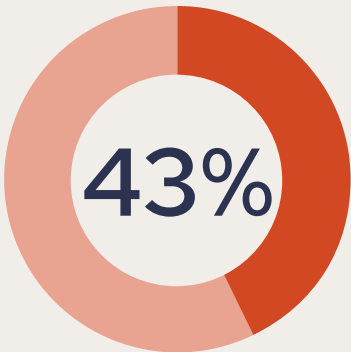
Members were updated on the project throughout the year via the IndieCommerce email communications and the IndieCommerce.org blog:

INDIE COMMERCE BLOG FEATURES		
2.0 Blog Migration Updates	Feature Updates Released on 2.0	Fast Track Migration for IndieLite Stores
2.0 FAQs Available for Migrating Stores	Board OKs Funding to Expedite Migration	Website Accessibility Best Practices Webinar

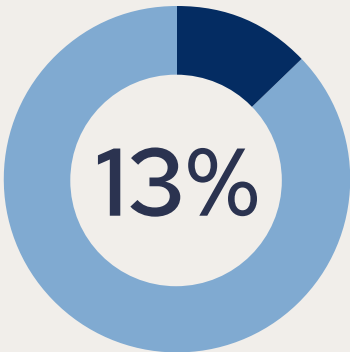


The IndieCommerce Advisory Council offered feedback through their ongoing asynchronous work and an in-person meeting at Winter Institute.

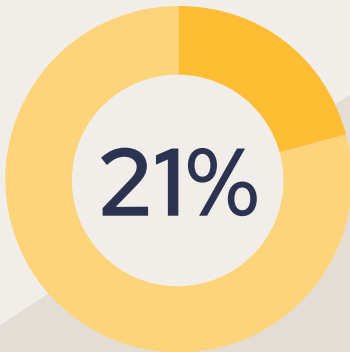
In May of 2024, the ABA Board approved an additional **\$1.1M in funding** for IndieCommerce 2.0 to accelerate the completion of the store migrations to the new platform.



IndieCommerce traffic was **43% higher** in 2023 than 2019



IndieCommerce traffic **declined 13%** when compared to 2022



IndieCommerce sales conversion rate was **21% higher** in 2023 than 2019

For the latest IndieCommerce updates and information about the migration to IndieCommerce 2.0, please view the [INDIECOMMERCE BLOG](#).

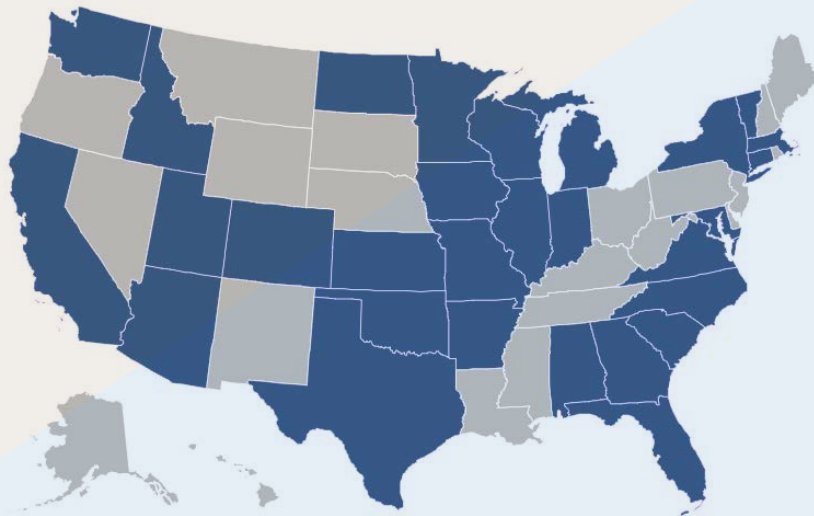
# New Marketing Partners

## *USA Today*

ABA began a partnership with *USA Today* to share weekly bookstore features on their Books page linking to a U.S. map of indie bookstores featured.

## **The USA TODAY Featured Independent Bookstores**

Check out our interactive map of the U.S. to find each of our featured independent bookstores. This is just a sampling of the 2700+ independent bookstores across the United States. Watch for more stores to be featured in the weeks ahead.



# Thank-You

Thank you to all of the **publishers, authors, poets, illustrators, wholesalers,** and **business partners** who made ABA's work possible in 2023.

A special thanks to **James Patterson** and **Book Industry Charitable Foundation** (BINC) for their generous support of booksellers this year.

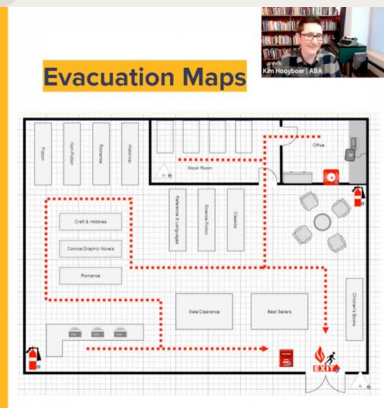
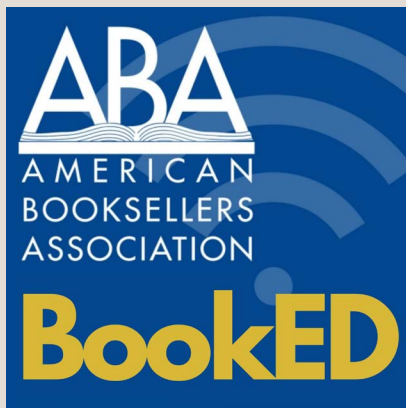
And thank you to **Bookshop** for generating **\$5.1M** for bookstores in 2023!

# New + Continuous ABA Support

Here's What Was New In 2023

## EDUCATION

- **Bookstore Resource Library**
- **Toolkits:**
  - **Book Fair Toolkit**
  - **ABA Right to Read Toolkit**
- **BookED: ABA's Bookstore Education Podcast**
- **Bookseller Lightning Talk Series**
- **Virtual Bookstore Tours Series**
- **This is a Fire Drill: Preparing For and Avoiding Crises**
  - **Presented live at the Fall Regional Association Conferences**



## WEBINARS

- Employee Retention Credit Informational Webinar
- Local Organizing to Combat Book Bans Webinar
- ABACUS Workshops

## NEW BUSINESS SERVICES/DISCOUNTS

- Square
- ZingTrain

## MARKETING CAMPAIGNS + ASSETS

- Indie Bestsellers List branding refresh including new logo, speciality social media assets, and weekly, printable one-sheets

**INDIE BESTSELLERS LIST**  
December 27, 2023  
For the week ending December 24, 2023 based on orders in hundreds of independent bookstore nationwide.

HARDCOVER		PAPERBACK	
1	<b>The Heaven &amp; Earth Grocery Store</b> James McBride, Riverhead Books, \$28	1	<b>All the Light We Cannot See</b> Anthony Browne, Scribner, \$18.99
2	<b>Lessons in Chemistry</b> Bonnie Garmus, Doubleday, \$29	2	<b>A Court of Thorns and Roses</b> Sarah J. Maas, Bloomsbury Publishing, \$19
3	<b>Tom Lake</b> Ann Patchett, Harper, \$20	3	<b>Trust</b> Hervé Le Tellier, Riverhead Books, \$17
4	<b>Devon Copperhead</b> Barbara Kingsolver, Harper, \$22.50	4	<b>The Thursday Murder Club</b> Richard Osman, Penguin, \$18
5	<b>Fourth Wing</b> Riordan Yancey, Entangled, Red Tower Books, \$29.99	5	<b>The Midnight Library</b> Matt Haig, Penguin, \$18
6	<b>The Covenant of Water</b> Abraham Verghese, Grove Press, \$32	6	<b>The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo</b> Taylor Jenkins Reid, Washington Square Press, \$17
7	<b>Iron Flame</b> Rebecca Yarros, Entangled, Red Tower Books, \$29.99	7	<b>Babel</b> R. F. Kuang, Harper Voyager, \$20
8	<b>North Woods</b> David Mason, Random House, \$28	8	<b>Crow</b> Michelle Wildgen, Black Bay, \$18.99
9	<b>Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow</b> Gabrielle Charbonnet, \$29.95	9	<b>Bookshop &amp; Bonedust</b> Tara Beckett, \$9, \$21.99
10	<b>The Fraud</b> Julia Finch, Torrey Press, \$29	10	<b>The Maid</b> Nita Prose, Ballantine, \$18
11	<b>The Bee Sting</b> Paul Murray, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$30	11	<b>Newer Whispers at Night: An Indigenous Dark Fiction Anthology</b> Orlando Pace (Ed.), TheCrownC, Van Alen Jr. (Ed.), Vintage, \$17
12	<b>The Exchange</b> Caleb Carr, Doubleday, \$29.95	12	<b>The Other Eden</b> Paula Hawkins, Vintage, \$17.99
13	<b>Prophet Song</b> Chitra Divakaruni, Henry Press, \$26	13	<b>The Best American Short Stories 2023</b> Alice LaPlante (Ed.), Merrin Books, \$18.99
14	<b>Fourth Wing Special Edition</b> Rebecca Yarros, Entangled, Red Tower Books, \$29.99	14	<b>The Silent Patient</b> Alex Michaelides, Canopus Books, \$17.99
15	<b>So Late in the Day: Stories of Women and Men</b> Claire Keegan, Grove Press, \$23	15	<b>The House in the Pines</b> Avery Adams, Scribner, \$18

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New York Times bestselling author of  
THE SEARCHER

**TANA FRENCH**

**The Hunter**

A NOVEL

**INDIE BESTSELLERS LIST**

# ABA Perennials

## EDUCATION

- **Winter Institute: Wi2024 Cincinnati**
- **Children's Institute: Ci2023 Milwaukee**
- **Book Buyer's Handbook**
- **Book Biz Book Club**
- **"Welcome to Bookselling" Onboarding Resource**
- **Developing a Bookstore Business Plan**
- **Suggested Steps to Opening a Bookstore**
- **Buzz Books Editors Panels**

## VIRTUAL NETWORKING

- **Affinity Group Meetups**
- **New Member Series**
  - **Store Ownership 101**
  - **Intro to ABA Benefits**
  - **ABA Partnerships**
- **ShopTalks**
  - **Dedicated ABA Children's Group ShopTalks**
- **ABA Open House/ABA Board Office Hours**

## MARKETING CAMPAIGNS & ASSETS

- **Independent Bookstore Day**
- **Indies First**
- **Indies Introduce**
- **Indie Next Program**
  - Indies Next List
  - Kids' Indie Next List
  - Reading Group Guide
  - Indie Gift Guide For Genre Lovers
  - Matchbook Marketing Email Program for Indie Customers
  - Best Books for Young Readers Catalog
- **Indie Bestsellers List**
- **Marketing & Social Media Calendar Handouts**
- **Anti-Amazon Campaigns**
  - **The Future Is Indie: A Reader's Journey**
  - **#SBADumpAmazon**
  - **Here's What You Just Did Infographic**
- **Seasonal Holiday Campaigns**
  - **The Presents Are Now and Jólabókaflóð Holiday Campaign**
  - **Plant the Future You Want to See Pre-Holiday Campaign**
- **Get Out the Vote Campaign**
- **Banned Books Week BINGO card, Checklists, and social media**
- **Boxed Mailing**
- **Preorder Calendar**



# The Future Is Indie



For more information on ABA programs,  
contact [INFO@BOOKWEB.ORG](mailto:INFO@BOOKWEB.ORG).

View consolidated financials on [BOOKWEB.ORG](http://BOOKWEB.ORG).