



## ABA EDUCATION

**PLEASE NOTE: The following suggestions were made by booksellers in the Bookseller Discussion Groups held during Winter Institute 12 in Minneapolis, immediately following Roxane Gay's opening plenary remarks. These suggestions may or may not work for every store. Please consider your store culture, your community, and your business goals when deciding to act on any of the following.**

### ACTIVISM

- Store values are reflected by the books that you choose to stack on your shelves. Be aware that those decisions may be viewed differently by different customers.
- Booksellers are on the front line of customer questions about free speech issues. Communicate your free speech and free expression policy to your staff. Give them the information they need to explain your policy regarding the books you carry or don't carry.
- Use advocacy materials from outside groups, such as Black Lives Matter signs in windows, to show support for marginalized groups and/or other groups that you think need your support.
- Be aware that even non-political statements can be perceived as political at this time.
- Have a postcard-writing event to encourage your community to interact with elected officials.
- Host teach-ins that are not tied to books. Ideas for teach-ins include panels on civil rights, immigration, or climate. Invite experts from local advocacy organizations to participate.
- Promote voter sign-up.
- Start a social justice book club or other book club that highlights the activism in which your store participates.
- Offer your space to groups that reflect your store mission.

### COMMUNITY

- Offer windows into other people's experiences as well as being a mirror of your community.
- Recognize that your community may have many different perspectives. You may be confronted with ideas or opinions that you find challenging; be prepared.

- Try to offer something for everyone on your event calendar.
- Be conscious of gender assumptions — don't assume what "they" like.
- Use social media to celebrate all in your community.
- If you can, offer paid time for booksellers to volunteer.
- Create experiences in bookstores for refugees or other transient populations.
- Work with your state and/or local poet laureates to create inspiring programming.
- Highlight book recommendations from children in your community.
- Invite a community nonprofit to provide holiday gift-wrapping services.
- Host science workshops for adults and children.
- Work with your community nonprofits: SPCA, City Year, library, domestic and homeless shelters, etc.
- Run book drives, charity drives, and/or food drives during in-store events.
- Provide realtors with housewarming gifts to give to those who move into your community.
- Broaden your understanding of your community to create more inclusive book group discussions.
- Remember to connect and work with other independent businesses in your community.

#### **DIVERSITY**

- Display a world map featuring national and international authors and their books.
- Highlight the deep backlist of authors from diverse backgrounds.
- Educate yourself on how to reach a wider array of diverse applicants when hiring. When hiring for diversity and selling for diversity:
  - Send staff of color out to schools during book fairs to represent the bookstore and the bookselling community.
  - Remember that cultural, physical, and economic factors may affect a person's ability to be a bookseller.
  - Work to be aware of implicit biases.

- Ask staff what they are reading as part of the monthly staff meeting. Encourage all staff to read diverse books and expand your own reading as well.
- Buy sidelines that reflect diverse cultures.
- Talk with your reps about offering more diverse books. For other recommendations, follow diverse authors and bloggers on Twitter, use We Need Diverse Books, and ask customers what they want to see in the store.
- Participate in the Reading Without Walls Challenge started by Gene Luen Yang, National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature.
- Use experts if you are running a discussion on diversity.
- Have go-to books with diverse characters in all subjects, and if a diverse book doesn’t sell, KEEP TRYING.
- Recommend diverse titles to all book clubs as well as to teachers and schools. Host book talks featuring these titles.
- Don’t forget the small and university presses when looking for diverse books.
- Start in-store projects to spark discussions and promote diversity. For instance, Little Shop of Stories (Decatur, Georgia) runs The Kindness Project, a book group that focuses on different marginalized groups each month.
- Put diverse books in the hands of a non-diverse community by including these titles in every book list and display — no exceptions — and handsell these books.
- Know your school demographics.

## **EMPATHY**

- Anticipate the needs of those who have challenges entering and/or navigating your space.
  - Provide portable wheelchair ramps.
  - Provide sensory story times.
  - Use the Americans with Disabilities Act website for resources and staff training: <https://adata.org/find-your-region>
- Listen to your staff and customers regarding messages that offend them and why —this leads to empathy.
- Hire people who have strong empathic skills. Staff must enjoy people as much as they enjoy

reading.

- Train staff to use sincere and respectful language when navigating situations with customers and others who have different views from the store's views.
- Model empathy to children in your store by showing them they matter.
- Actively anticipate needs.
- Provide foreign language story times for customers who speak other languages.
- Offer a book angel or other book giving program.
- Make all customers welcome.
- Don't shame customers for their reading choices.
- Listen. Ask. Listen.

## **OUTREACH**

- Reach out to Chris Finan, director of American Booksellers for Free Expression, and ask questions regarding freedom of speech/hate speech. ([chris@bookweb.org](mailto:chris@bookweb.org))
- Search for titles beyond what publisher reps pitch.
- Work with high school groups.
- Offer book discussion groups to readers outside your immediate customer base.
- Get out of your store and more involved in your community.
- Offer pop-up stores throughout the community. Focus on underserved areas.

## **SANCTUARY**

- Bookstores are a place to reflect the specific needs of your own community — use the physical space to give your community a place to share their ideas.
- Does your store have a defined identity, or is it more fluid and able to quickly respond to your community needs?

- Have a statement in your store that makes ALL feel welcome.
- Display diverse books in windows, have conversations about inclusion, and try not to alienate anyone.
- Resist building walls. Encourage dialogue from all points of view.
- A diverse staff creates a welcoming space for customers.
- Think about security for controversial events.
- Offer store space to community groups.
- Host “Living Room Conversations.” (<http://www.livingroomconversations.org/>)

