



THE BOOKSELLER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

—*The Story of Bookselling in America
told by its own Booksellers*—

Suggested Prompts & Questions

Please begin by stating:

- your name and how it is spelled,
- your current job title and place of employment,
- all bookstores in which you have worked: name, city, and state,
- (optional) how you identify yourself (pronouns, cultural identity, etc.).

*The following are suggestions to guide you. You can answer all, some, or just one.
Or you are welcome to tell your story in your own way!*



How and when did you first become a bookseller?



What jobs have you performed as a bookseller? (frontline bookseller, manager, receiver, buyer, marketing, events, etc.)



What drew you to bookselling? Why did you become a bookseller?



Who were the first people you worked with? How did you learn bookselling? How did they give you instruction?



Describe your mentors and their approaches or philosophies to bookselling.



What was the first bookstore you experienced? (Name, city, state). Describe how it looked and felt. What was your experience in that space?



What would you consider to be the ideal characteristics of a bookseller? What skills are needed to do this job?



What is your philosophy about bookselling? Has it changed? What and how is bookselling important to you, your community, the world at large?



Describe a particularly satisfying moment in your career. What have you done that you are proud of?



Do you have a customer you will never forget? Or a particularly memorable or emotional interaction in your bookstore? Please describe it.



Describe the bookstore's neighborhood or community. How has the community changed over time? What makes the bookstore a part of that community? What have you and your colleagues done to connect with your community?



















Describe any specific impacts of your bookstore on its community that you have witnessed.



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Suggested Prompts & Questions (continued)

-  Regarding your bookstore or bookselling: what would you like to do that you have not done? What are your ideas for your future?
-  What surprised you about working in the larger world of bookselling and publishing?
-  What is your favorite aspect of being a bookseller?
-  What do you think needs to change about bookselling? What aspects of being a bookseller do you not like?
-  Are you or have you been involved in any industry-related groups, committees, or organizations? (Regional Bookseller Associations, Advisory Councils, etc.) Describe your involvement. Did you work on anything you are proud of? Who did you meet? Describe any unique or memorable experiences.
-  Are you or have you been involved in any organizations outside of the bookstore? Does your bookstore work with other community groups? How did you form those relationships? Why?
-  Describe a difficult time in your bookselling career. What was the issue? How did you handle it?
-  What are your opinions/thoughts on the book business in general? Have you witnessed any major changes? If so, what was your reaction or opinion on those events?
-  Bookselling has survived multiple external threats, from the rise of the chain stores and e-books to censorship and book bans. Have you personally experienced any external challenges to your bookstore? How did you respond?
-  Describe a time when a particular book and/or author made an impact on you, your community, or the book industry as a whole.
-  Have you organized or participated in any actions for social change through your bookstore? What were they? What did you do? What were the results?
-  What do you think are the shared values, customs, and practices of bookselling? How did you learn them?
-  What lessons has bookselling taught you?
-  What is the future of bookselling as a profession?
-  Why are bookstores important? Why do we need them?
-  Describe the most fun you've ever had as a bookseller.