

# Read All Over

INDEPENDENT, CURATED BOOKSTORES ARE POPPING UP ACROSS METRO DETROIT

Ask a group of readers where they buy their books, and you might be surprised by the answer. Despite years of headlines denoting the life and death of American bookstores – for instance, the demise of Borders and the uneasy outlook for Barnes & Noble, one of America’s last remaining bookstore chains – bibliophiles are stepping into independent community bookstores to survey the aisles for their next favorite book.

“All small businesses are important because they help support the community, bring jobs to the community, pay taxes to the community and create spaces for people to meet,” says John King, owner of John K. King Used & Rare Books. “An independent bookstore may not have every book, but it will have books that matter to someone.”


While reading for fun might seem like a dying pastime in an age where consumers are glued to social media and can binge-watch television for hours with streaming services like Netflix and Hulu, a 2013 Snapshot of Reading in America report by Pew Research Center found that on average the typical adult read five books that year. And overall, print remained the dominant medium Americans chose, with 69 percent reading print books, 28 percent reading e-books and 14 percent listening to audiobooks.

If anything, dedicated bookworms, or even people simply seeking information, have more outlets for reading and gaining knowledge by way of online news and smartphones, among other tech tools.

“They’re going to get information from wherever they wish to get it from,” says Janet

Webster Jones, owner of Source Booksellers in Midtown. “We still have many libraries. People read online. ... People are after information. Reading is a form of information.”

One could argue that as a society we’re reading more than ever, whether it’s a

text message, an email or a 300-word book. “Statistics say that more people read now than ever before,” King says. “People complain about how communication is no longer in person, but over mobile devices, texting, etc. That’s reading. Reading is power.”  — Audrey LaForest



John King | Owner

## John K. King Used & Rare Books

901 W. Lafayette Blvd. in Detroit | [kingbooksdetroit.com](http://kingbooksdetroit.com)

**SECRET TO SUCCESS:** “We’ve survived by sticking to our original game plan: selling used and rare books, not branching out to sell new books, coffee, pastries, etc. Strictly used and rare books. That’s how you become experts, respected people in the bookseller community, and how you stay afloat when technology and people’s interests change.”

**THOUGHTS ON E-BOOKS:** “E-books are bad for the eyes and bad for the environment. How much battery power should be needed to read a book? On a sunny day, none.”

**FAVORITE BOOK – FOR NOW:** “Right now,

it’s *The Daily Coyote* by Shreve Stockton.”

**MEMORABLE STORY AT THE BOOKSHOP:**

“It seems like there’s a memorable story every day here at the bookstore, but my favorite story is about the time William Safire came to town and to our bookstore (every time he came to Detroit, his first stop was at our bookstore). He got so involved with all the books that he lost track of time and almost missed his interview on a local radio station – the reason he came to Detroit in the first place. I had to drive him to the radio station at breakneck speed just so he wouldn’t miss his appointment.”

We asked a few of metro Detroit’s finest independent bookstore owners their thoughts on e-books, the importance of having a bookstore in their communities, and what they’re currently reading. Here’s what they had to say:

photo: Courtesy of John K. King Used & Rare Books



Susan Murphy | Owner

## Pages Bookshop

19560 Grand River Ave. in Detroit | [pagesbkshop.com](http://pagesbkshop.com)

**IMPORTANCE OF READING BOOKS:** "Children can learn about feelings, empathy, other cultures and the world by reading. They learn the art of storytelling, vocabulary, writing styles and punctuation. Why is it important for older people to read? The same reasons. We learn history and tolerance."

**READING IN THE 21ST CENTURY:** "In our fast-paced world it's easy to feel like you don't have the time to read. There are so many alternative forms of learning and entertainment."

**FAVORITE BOOK – FOR NOW:** "*All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr. I love historical fiction, a well-told story and well-developed, believable characters. This book has everything."

**MEMORABLE STORY AT THE BOOKSHOP:** "One day, a couple of weeks ago, a woman from the neighborhood came in and was very quiet. I introduced myself and offered to help if she needed something. She walked slowly around, came to the cash counter with tears in her eyes and told me that my store raised her spirit. She sat for a while, and we talked about the neighborhood, my store and my plans. That was a very good day."



Maia Asshaq | Owner

## DittoDitto Books

1548 Trumbull St. in Detroit | [dittoditto.org](http://dittoditto.org)

**COMPETING IN THE DIGITAL AGE:** "For me, used books are a great way to remain competitive with pricing; that's part of the reason I stock them. Some books are priced as low as \$1. ... Events are also a great way to get people in the shop and to promote writers, especially local writers, and publishers. Online sales are something that I haven't fully wrapped my head around, but definitely something worth embracing."

**THOUGHTS ON E-BOOKS:** "I don't really read e-books. There have been times, however, where I'm about to take a trip, and I want to bring like 20 books with me, which seems ridiculous. So, I can see why they'd be handy."

**THOSE WHO DON'T LIKE TO READ:** "I'm

confident that there's a book out there for everybody. Usually, it's about figuring out a genre that works for you. I'm also not someone who forces myself to finish reading a book if I decide halfway through that I hate it, so maybe not putting pressure on yourself and just trying different things until one piques your interest."

**MEMORABLE STORY AT THE BOOKSHOP:** "There was one reading last summer with (poets) Gregory Laynor and Zan de Parry that was planned for the outdoor space. It began raining earlier in the day, and I was worried we'd have to do the reading inside, which would've been really muggy and cramped. Everyone voted to have the reading outside anyway, and the rain stopped just in time for the poets to begin. I think there was even a rainbow!"



Janet Webster Jones | Owner

## Source Booksellers

4240 Cass Ave. in Detroit | [sourcebooksellers.com](http://sourcebooksellers.com)

**SOURCE BOOKSELLERS IN A NUTSHELL:** “We are in the unique niche of nonfiction books that are well-curated in four major categories: history and culture, health and well-being, books that are by and about women, and metaphysical, spiritual, new age type books.”

**INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORES AND THE COMMUNITY:** “Bookstores are often a meeting place. You can come and not only buy a book, but also you can talk to other people about books that you’ve read. ... We have a lot of different events that will bring people to the store for the purpose of knowing, getting information and understanding.”

**THOUGHTS ON E-BOOKS:** “I think, like any other tool that human beings create, they found out what it can do and what it can’t do, and then they make room for it or not make room for it in their repertoire of tools.”

**MEMORABLE STORY AT THE BOOKSHOP:** “I’ve been in (the bookselling) business for 26 years. Every day is memorable.”



photo: Karen Minto

David Oyerly | Owner

## Classic Book Shop

32336 Woodward Ave. in Royal Oak | [classicbookshop.dawntreaderbooks.com](http://classicbookshop.dawntreaderbooks.com)

**PURCHASING BOOKS IN THE DIGITAL AGE:** “The Internet is useful if you can’t find a particular book in person. For a number of reasons, I find it unreliable and unpleasant. Websites are not run by book people, but by computer people. Their emphasis is often wrong, and they create an adversarial attitude between the buyer and seller. ... Personally, I find it much quicker and more pleasant to go to a store and look at hundreds or thousands of books in person and actually know what I’m getting.”

**THOUGHTS ON E-BOOKS:** “E-books are not books. They are words on an electronic device. Put the same words

on a chalkboard – that doesn’t make it a book either.”

**FAVORITE BOOK – FOR NOW:** “Whichever book I’m currently reading, but usually I’m in the midst of two or three at the same time. Let’s say, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*.”

**MEMORABLE STORY AT THE BOOKSHOP:** “I’ve been here for almost 27 years, so it’s really impossible to give a good story. There are lots of little stories. Rare book dealers are like fishermen, always bragging about their buys, sales or the ‘ones that got away.’”