

World Book Night – the countdown has started...

✘ Edinburgh publisher Jamie Byng is at the heart of a new push on reading. The last encouragement to read came in the form of the Harry Potter books. Now the new idea is that 20,000 book lovers will give away 1,000,000 books on the inaugural World Book Night – if they are chosen and are successful in being appointed by 4 January 2011. Prospective “givers” must explain in 100 words why they would want to recommend one of the books on the list and then, courtesy of the publishers, will receive a package of 48 books to give away on 5 March. So givers must also be free on that night. A very simple idea – so simple it is a bit hard to get your head round in the first place! You can apply [here](#) to become a “giver”.

The countdown has now started. World Book Night will take place on Saturday 5 March 2011 and will be broadcast in partnership with BBC Two. This dynamic and unprecedented industry-wide initiative to celebrate adult books and reading will see one million free books given away on World Book Night by 20,000 passionate readers to other members of the public across the UK and Ireland. World Book Night will take place two days after World Book Day, the established nationwide reading campaign.

A growing list of high-profile figures from publishing, media and the arts are lending their support to this ambitious initiative by becoming Patrons of World Book Night including Damon Albarn, Dave Eggers, Colin Firth, David Gilmour, Antony Gormley, Seamus Heaney, Damien Hirst, Nigella Lawson, Mary Portas, J.K. Rowling and Tilda Swinton.

Boss of the Edinburgh based publisher, [Canongate books](#), Jamie Byng is chairman of World Book Night and he said:-“World Book

Night is a unique collaboration between publishers, booksellers, libraries, writers and individual members of the public and one that I think is going to have an enormously positive impact on books and reading. There are few things more meaningful than the personal recommendation and having one million books given to one million different people on one night in this way is both unprecedented and hugely exciting.”

Antony Gormley, Patron, World Book Night says: -“Hooray for World Book Night, a truly wonderful celebration of reading, writing, and sharing! When the joy of giving and receiving is added to the fruit of the imagination, something big, lovely and generous can happen: for a book allows us to hold the experience of another in our hands and absorb it in our minds. And this brilliant idea enables this to happen in ever widening and deepening circles of considered and connected life.

Members of the public are invited to apply to be one of the 20,000 givers of 48 copies of their favourite book chosen from a carefully selected list of 25 titles. Most givers are expected to be passionate readers who will take pleasure in recommending a book they love to other readers. However, World Book Night will also encourage givers to pass the books on to others who either may be reluctant readers or who are part of communities with less access to books, bookshops and libraries. 960,000 books will be distributed by givers and a further 40,000 will be distributed by WBN to people who might not otherwise be able to participate.

The 25 titles selected for the inaugural World Book Night are as follows (there is a complete list at the foot of the article with excerpts about each – if nothing else it will serve as an aide-memoire of books you should read)

Kate Atkinson – Case Histories (Black Swan)

Margaret Atwood – The Blind Assassin (Virago)

Alan Bennett – A Life Like Other People’s (Faber/Profile)

John Le Carré – The Spy Who Came in From the Cold (Penguin)
Lee Child – Killing Floor (Bantam)
Carol Ann Duffy – The World’s Wife (Picador)
Mark Haddon – The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (Vintage)
Seamus Heaney – Selected Poems (Faber)
Marian Keyes – Rachel’s Holiday (Penguin)
Mohsin Hamid – The Reluctant Fundamentalist (Penguin)
Ben Macintyre – Agent Zigzag (Bloomsbury)
Gabriel García Márquez – Love in the Time of Cholera (Penguin)
Yann Martel – Life of Pi (Canongate)
Alexander Masters – Stuart: A Life Backwards (Fourth Estate)
Rohinton Mistry – A Fine Balance (Faber)
David Mitchell – Cloud Atlas (Sceptre)
Toni Morrison – Beloved (Vintage)
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – Half of a Yellow Sun (Fourth Estate)
David Nicholls – One Day (Hodder)
Philip Pullman – Northern Lights (Scholastic)
Erich Maria Remarque – All Quiet on the Western Front (Vintage)
C.J. Sansom – Dissolution (Pan)
Nigel Slater – Toast (Fourth Estate)
Muriel Spark – The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (Penguin)
Sarah Waters – Fingersmith (Virago)

An independent editorial committee composed of a broad mix of booksellers, librarians, authors, broadcasters and other individuals carefully selected the 25 titles which will be given away to the public on World Book Night. Prior to this, the entire book trade was canvassed for recommendations and hundreds of lists were received. The final selection offers a wide array of outstanding books encompassing all types of fiction be it historical, literary, crime and commercial as well as poetry, memoir and young adult. Whether a huge bestseller, a prize-winning debut, a lesser known gem or an undisputed classic, it was felt that every book needed to be

an accessible work of enduring quality that people would feel passionate about sharing with others.

Alan Yentob Creative Director, BBC and member of the World Book Night editorial committee said:- “BBC Two will host World Book Night from its inception on December 2 through to the event itself on 5 March. Whether as a giver, recipient or viewer, we hope that BBC audiences will be inspired to get involved with this groundbreaking project.”

Author John le Carré says:

“No writer can ask more than this: that his book should be handed in thousands to people who might otherwise never get to read it, and who will in turn hand it to thousands more. That his book should also pass from one generation to another as a story to challenge and excite each reader in his time -that is beyond his most ambitious dreams.”

Author Margaret Atwood adds: -“When Jamie Byng told me about World Book Night, I was amazed not only by its magnitude but by its simplicity. The love of writing, the love of reading – these are huge gifts. To be able give someone else a book you treasure widens the gift circle. I was thrilled to be asked to support World Book Night, and doubly thrilled that *The Blind Assassin* was chosen to help launch it. Long may its voyage be!”

The World Book Night website www.worldbooknight.org will serve as the primary means through which members of the public can apply to be a giver. People will be asked to say in up to 100 words why they want to give away a book chosen from the list and the sort of people they would like to give it to. Information about World Book Night will also be available via libraries and bookshops across the UK and Ireland.

The 20,000 givers and members of the public will be invited to take part in events, parties and celebrations on World Book Night across the UK and Ireland, with many libraries and

bookshops extending their opening times. These events are being organized with the generous support of the Booksellers Association, the Publishers Association, Independent Publishers Guild, the Reading Agency with libraries, charities and others.

Here is the synopsis of the 25 books on the list.

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The Telegraph writes about WBN [here](#) – they seem to like the idea!