



Open eBooks Opens World of Digital Reading to Children

Major publishers contribute thousands of titles to benefit students in need

February 24, 2016 - [Open eBooks](#), a new initiative and e-reader app that will make thousands of popular, top-selling eBooks available to children in need for free, is launching today. First Lady Michelle Obama [is releasing a video today](#) raising awareness of the new opportunity for children. The initiative is designed to address the challenge of providing digital reading materials to children living in low-income households, and offers unprecedented access to quality digital content, including a catalog of eBooks valued at more than \$250 million.

President Obama announced a nongovernmental eBooks effort in support of the [ConnectED Initiative](#) at the [April 30 Kids Town Hall](#) held by the White House at the Anacostia Branch of the District of Columbia Public Library. ConnectED is multi-pronged effort designed to provide all youth with access to high-quality digital learning tools. Since it launched, over 20 million more students have been connected to high-speed broadband in their schools and libraries and millions more are taking advantage of its free private sector resources. Open eBooks complements the new digital infrastructure to provide an opportunity for kids in need to have a world-class eLibrary in their homes.

A coalition of literacy, library, publishing and technology partners joined together to make the Open eBooks program possible. The initiative's partners -- [Digital Public Library of America \(DPLA\)](#), [First Book](#), and [The New York Public Library \(NYPL\)](#), with content support from digital books distributor [Baker & Taylor](#) -- created the app, curated the eBook collection, and developed a system for distribution and use. They received financial support from the [Institute of Museum and Library Services \(IMLS\)](#) and content contributions from major publishers. National Geographic announced today that they will provide all of their age-appropriate content to the app, joining publishers Bloomsbury, Candlewick, Cricket Media, Hachette, HarperCollins, Lee & Low, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, and Simon & Schuster, who made commitments providing thousands of popular and award-winning titles last year.

The books in the Open eBooks collection were selected by the DPLA [Curation Corps](#), which was established to ensure a diverse, compelling, and appropriately targeted set of thousands of titles—something from which every child could read, enjoy, and learn. The Curation Corps was selected through a competitive process from a pool of more than 140 applicants from across the country, and they bring their extensive experience helping children select titles in school and public libraries.

Adults who work with children in need through libraries, schools, shelters and clinics, out-of-school programs, military family services, early childhood programs and other capacities can qualify for Open eBooks credentials by first signing up with First Book and then requesting Open eBooks access for the

children they serve. Students can download the free Open eBooks app to their individual devices from the App Store or Google Play and enter their access code to start enjoying Open eBooks.

"We are thrilled to be a part of this fantastic initiative that will bridge a major gap in our society and help all children discover a love of reading," said Dan Cohen, DPLA's executive director. "Maximizing access to our culture has been the Digital Public Library of America's goal from its inception, and we are so delighted to join together with such great partners to make eBooks much more widely available."

"The Open eBooks initiative recognizes the critical need for books -- in all forms -- among children growing up in families in need," said Kyle Zimmer, president and CEO of First Book. "We're proud to support this ground-breaking effort to put high quality digital content into the hands of those who need it most, and to welcome the teachers and program leaders seeking access to these resources into the largest national network of educators serving kids in need."

"The New York Public Library is proud to work with these partners on the Open eBooks initiative, in support of the White House's ConnectED initiative that is perfectly aligned with NYPL's mission to provide free and open access to information, education, and opportunity," said Tony Marx, president and CEO of The New York Public Library.

"This program is the result of an extraordinary public-private partnership, which could not have been made possible without the support of many committed partners, particularly those in our libraries who really stepped forward to help move this vision into reality," said IMLS Director Kathryn K. Matthew. "Digital books open new doors to learning opportunities for students and can underpin brighter educational futures. IMLS is very proud to be a part of this unique initiative."

"We hope that by donating our technology to this innovative program, we help expand access to information and create new reading opportunities for school-age children throughout America," said George Coe, president and CEO of Baker & Taylor.

In the future, the partners will expand the initiative by adding to the collection with new and enhanced content from publishers and public domain titles; broadening the network of Title I schools, preschools, libraries, and other programs; incorporating new features into the app; and researching and sharing the effort's impact and best practices.

Access and Equality

The Open eBooks initiative is a significant step toward more equitable digital access for all U.S. residents, addressing the need for free, quality digital content for children in pre-kindergarten through high school. Specifically targeting youth in need, Open eBooks aims to ensure that any device can be enjoyed as a tool to deepen a child's love of reading.

While Internet access and device availability remain major hurdles in closing the digital divide, a [recent study](#) funded by the Gates Foundation and published by the Joan Ganz Cooney Center finds 85% of families below the poverty line have a mobile device (tablet or smartphone) in surveyed households with children aged 6 to 13. Additionally, a growing number of students can access and borrow electronic reading devices, and connect to the Internet at school and local public libraries. Open eBooks is designed to complement the Wi-Fi, computer, and physical book offerings of public libraries and school libraries, and serve as a gateway to more reading.

The Open eBooks Collection

The catalog of content in the Open eBooks initiative includes contributions of the most exciting, top-selling titles from publishers. Using Open eBooks, children will be able to build their own virtual collection of favorites and access single titles. The major publishers have committed to make thousands of popular and award-winning titles available to students over a three-year period include: **Bloomsbury, Candlewick,**

Cricket Media, Hachette, HarperCollins, Lee & Low, Macmillan, National Geographic Kids, Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster.

Snapshot of the Open eBooks initiative

Each partner has made, and will continue to make, a unique contribution to the success of this initiative:

- **The app:** The New York Public Library developed the app that allows users to easily access the full text and illustrations of thousands of titles generously contributed by publishers.
- **The distribution services:** Baker & Taylor provided support with publisher relations, content management and the digital distribution technology.
- **The eBook collection:** The Digital Public Library of America recruited and enlisted a team of expert librarians to curate the collection to ensure a diverse, compelling, and appropriately targeted set of thousands of titles—something for every child at any age and reading level to read, learn from, and enjoy.
- **Reaching the children:** First Book, a non-profit social enterprise that provides books and educational resources to classrooms and programs serving kids in need, will tap into its network of more than 225,000 schools and programs to reach children in Title I schools, Head Start programs, military families, after school or community programs, and others serving low-income families.

Qualifications

The Open eBooks app is available through Title I and Title I-eligible schools as well as libraries, preschools, and community after school programs serving a minimum of 70 percent children in need. The program will also be available through schools and programs serving children whose families are enlisted in the armed forces, or serving special needs children.

How do programs and classrooms get started?

The Open eBooks initiative site, at www.openebooks.net, has full program instructions, including Frequently Asked Questions and links to program registration. From there, qualifying educators, librarians, community program directors, and others working with low-income children and youth must register their organization with First Book. Next, users will request a code and PIN combination for every student they serve or device available, and they should indicate the student's grade level from one of three categories: elementary, middle or high school. Qualifying educators will be able to obtain enough codes to cover all of the students that they serve. Codes will correspond to Open eBooks Elementary Collection (for PreK - Grade 4), Open eBooks Middle School Collection (for Grades 5 - 8), Open eBooks High School Collection (for Grades 9 - 12). An All Ages code will also be available.

The registrant will receive a confirmation email with the codes and a letter for families and caregivers with instructions on how to download the Open eBooks app and input the code and PIN combination for their child. The app requires a device with an iOS 8.0 or later operating system or Android equivalent.

The Open eBooks app allows users to instantly borrow up to 10 eBooks at a time to their digital device. Each borrowed eBook will be available for 56 days before it must be renewed, or the eBook will be automatically returned. Because of this automatic return process, there are no late fees or penalties for Open eBooks users. Students and their families can choose eBooks based on the topics that get them excited about reading and learning, and sort by reading level, grade level, or title. The app can be used anywhere with an Internet connection.

The First Book Help Team can be reached at help@firstbook.org or by phone at (866) 732-3669 (8am - 6pm EST).

Information and updates on the initiative will be shared on the Open eBooks website and on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

About the Digital Public Library of America

Launched in April 2013, the Digital Public Library of America brings together the riches of America's libraries, archives, and museums, and makes them freely available to the world. Connecting digital collections of a growing network of the nation's libraries, archives, and museums, the DPLA provides access to this collection, free to all, through its website and API. Learn more about the DPLA by watching [this brief video](#) or by visiting their website at <http://dp.la>.

About The New York Public Library

The New York Public Library is a free provider of education and information for the people of New York and beyond. With 92 locations—including research and branch libraries—throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, the Library offers free materials, computer access, classes, exhibitions, programming and more to everyone from toddlers to scholars, and has seen record numbers of attendance and circulation in recent years. The New York Public Library serves more than 18 million patrons who come through its doors annually and millions more around the globe who use its resources at nypl.org. To offer this wide array of free programming, The New York Public Library relies on both public and private funding. Learn more about how to support the Library at nypl.org/support.

About First Book

First Book is a non-profit social enterprise that has distributed more than 135 million books and educational resources to programs and schools serving children from low-income families throughout the United States and Canada. By making new, high-quality books and educational resources available on an ongoing basis to its network of educators and program leaders, First Book is transforming the lives of children in need and elevating the quality of education. For more information, please visit firstbook.org or follow the latest news on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

About Baker & Taylor

Baker & Taylor, LLC is the premier worldwide distributor of books, digital content and entertainment products. The company offers cutting-edge digital media services and innovative technology platforms to thousands of publishers, libraries, schools and retailers worldwide. Baker & Taylor also offers industry-leading customized library services and retail merchandising solutions. Charlotte, N.C.-based Baker & Taylor is majority owned by Castle Harlan Partners IV, L.P., an institutional private equity fund managed by Castle Harlan, Inc., a leading private equity investment firm. For more information, please visit www.baker-taylor.com.

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The Open eBooks team is proud to support President Obama's ConnectED Initiative. Learn more at www.wh.gov/ConnectED.

