

Bigger book sales? Just say "O"

Living authors get Oprah's stamp of approval after three years of classic picks

Television talk show host Oprah Winfrey has returned to selecting contemporary authors for her astoundingly successful book club. Before choosing *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey this September, she focused on classic novels for nearly three years. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Oprah said using contemporary authors allows her "the opportunity to do what I like to do most, which is sit and talk to authors about their work. It's kind of hard to do that when they're dead."

When her book club began in 1996, Oprah chose only contemporary novels and often interviewed the authors on her show. Then in April 2002, Oprah ended the club. She brought it back in 2003 after reading *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck, which she wanted to discuss. This time she made classic novels the book club's focus. These classics were received with noticeably less enthusiasm by readers, especially the three William Faulkner selections this summer.

Yet all of Oprah's picks increased their ranking on the best-seller list after being selected, even the Faulkner books. Formerly obscure authors such as Wally Lamb owe much of their success to publicity supplied by Oprah. Contemporary authors and their publishers are pleased to hear they once again have the chance of riding Oprah's express train to the best-seller list. Her recommendation regularly translates into hundreds of thousands of additional sales for the selected titles.

Several local bookstores plan to stock up on contemporary authors such as Frey because the Oprah's Book Club stamp on the cover indicates these books won't stay on shelves for long.

"Almost as soon as she posts the title on her Web site, we get a demand for the book."
— Doyne McKenzie

Rosemary Stevens, owner of Tiger Tales Bookstore and Espresso Bar, says the fact that sales for Oprah's chosen novel will increase following its announcement is a given. Stevens says she's already had requests for Oprah's newest selection.

Sales for Frey's book have increased at the University Bookstore as well.

"When Oprah recommends a book, those titles tend to do well," says bookstore spokesperson Michelle Froese. She says the

University Bookstore carries all best sellers and because all Oprah's Book Club picks have become best sellers, the store has always carried them. "Oprah does drive sales," she says.

Not all local stores have felt the touch of Oprah equally. Bill Oliver, a book retailer at 9th Street Bookstore, says the store sold *A Million Little Pieces* even before Oprah selected it. Sales haven't changed since the announcement. "It's an older book," he says. "It's not like it's brand new and current."

Even so, Oliver says if the store didn't sell an Oprah book selection beforehand, her announcement would probably prompt the bookstore to keep at least a few copies on hand.

Used bookstores such as Columbia Books, Inc., aren't affected as significantly as new bookstores by Oprah's club. Annette Kolling-Buckley, owner of Columbia Books, Inc., says most customers aren't looking for "pop culture books" in her store. Therefore, she doesn't even keep track of what books Oprah picks. However, Kolling-Buckley will order the books for customers who request them through her store and thus assumes that Oprah's selections will affect sales.

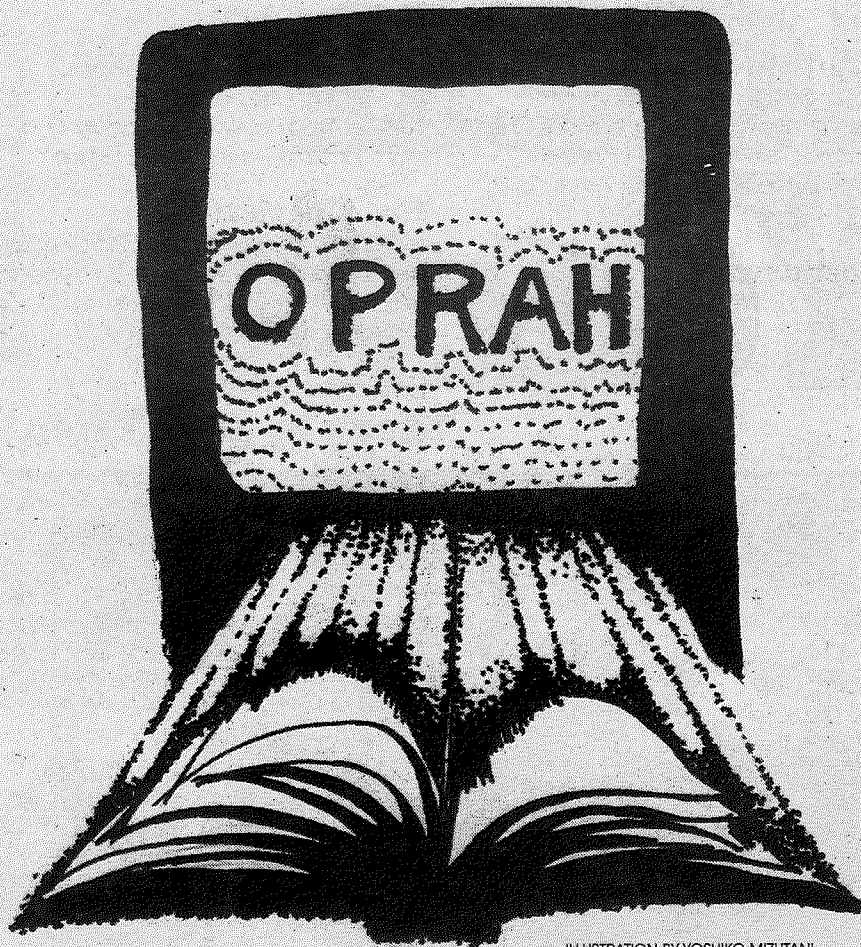


ILLUSTRATION BY YOSHIKO MIZUTANI

When Oprah chooses a book for her club, she doesn't just tell the audience of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*; she spreads the news in many ways. Often, promotion begins on the show, where authors are invited to discuss their work.

After seeing the book on the show, people come in immediately and request a copy, says Kathy Richmond, community relations manager for Barnes & Noble in Columbia.

Oprah's Web site, oprah.com, serves as a cross-promotion for the novel. "Almost as soon as she posts the title on her Web site, we get a demand for the book," says Doyne McKenzie, the collection development manager for Daniel Boone Regional Library.

The Web site offers a summary of the featured book as well as an excerpt. Web surfers can read a short biography of the author, rate the book and participate in worldwide book discussions. The Web site also includes "Reading Questions" that contain discussion ideas broken down by page number. The "Q & A" section provides a way for readers to ask the author a question directly.

Aware of her extensive influence, Oprah helps libraries across the nation keep up with

DEAD AUTHORS, LIVELY SALES

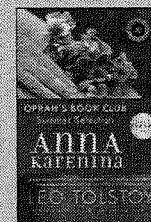
Even though Oprah's classic book club picks didn't sell as well as her previous contemporary choices, publishers still saw a jump in annual sales. A look at a few of her past selections reveals just what a difference an "O" makes.



2005 —
As I Lay Dying, Light in August and The Sound and the Fury
by William Faulkner
Before: 140,000
After: 900,000



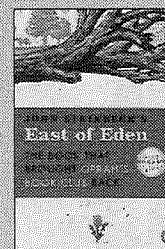
The O factor: **760,000 copies**



2004 —
Anna Karenina
by Leo Tolstoy
Before: 20,000
After: 960,000



The O factor: **940,000 copies**



2003 —
East of Eden
by John Steinbeck
Before: 45,000
After: 1,600,000



The O factor: **1,555,000 copies**

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the high demand for her book club selections by donating four to seven copies of the book to every library that is a member of the American Library Association, which includes the Daniel Boone Regional Library.

With more than 600,000 registered members of Oprah's Book Club, the public can't deny: There's just something about Oprah.

— NISA KORTE