

# Canadians Reading Winners: Are book buyers influenced by literary awards?



# Introduction

In the fall of 2013, BookNet Canada embarked on an initiative to determine how literary awards impact book-buying behaviour in Canada. As part of our continued research into Canadian book-buying behaviour<sup>1</sup>, we conducted an online survey to collect data from a representative Canadian panel. Respondents were English-speaking residents of Canada, aged 18 years or older, who had purchased a minimum of one book, regardless of format, in the prior month. The panel included participants from all regions of Canada.

**20%** of  
respondents bought  
a winning or  
nominated book in  
the prior month

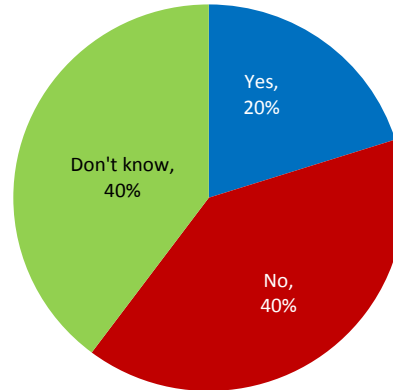
In addition, BookNet conducts research every awards season using our SalesData system, which tracks 85% of English-language print book sales in Canada. To get a sense of what to expect during the award season, and to help nominees with stock and demand planning, we create a trend analysis of the previous year's shortlist and winner, as well as a comparison in sales and stock position of the winners year-over-year.

The awards that BookNet Canada studies all have fairly consistent trends. There is a small increase in sales immediately following the shortlist announcement for every nominated title. Then sales for all nominees continue to increase after the winner is announced, but the winning title (usually) outsells the shortlisted titles. We find that cross-promotion of two nominated titles can have a mutually beneficial impact on the sales for both titles. Crossover in shortlists may also have a positive impact—titles nominated for multiple awards often see a larger bump in sales.

With this survey being conducted during the peak of literary award season, one of its most poignant findings pertains to the number of book buyers who were unsure if they had purchased a nominated or winning book. Corresponding to this, we found that many respondents did not know what constituted a literary award, some mistaking *The New York Times* bestseller list for an award.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on BookNet Canada's consumer research, please visit [www.booknetcanada.ca/consumer-studies](http://www.booknetcanada.ca/consumer-studies)

**HAVE YOU RECENTLY PURCHASED A BOOK THAT HAD A NOMINATION  
OR WON A LITERARY AWARD?**



Question: Have you recently purchased a book that had a nomination or won a literary award?  
(Scotiabank Giller, Canada Reads, etc.) (N=400)

The fact that 40% of respondents did not know if they had purchased a nominated or award-winning book in the past month indicates that there may be issues with discoverability or awareness. If you are a reader and don't know anything about literary awards, where do you go for that information?

# How Literary Awards Influence Book Buyers

BookNet Canada took a look at whether literary awards are important to book buyers. It is important to emphasize that the focus of this work is not to review literary awards, as we know that they all recognize different kinds of titles, provide benefit to writers, and shed light on great pieces of literature, but rather to assess consumers' awareness of award-winning or nominated content.

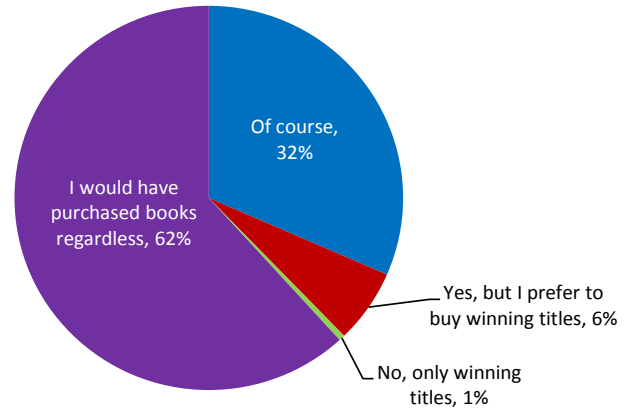
**62%** of book buyers tend to make their purchase regardless of an award win or nomination

We asked the 20% of respondents who reported buying a nominated or winning title how much of a factor the award win or nomination played in their decision to purchase that book. It was a selling feature but not the main reason for purchase for 44% of respondents, while only 21% said that it was the main reason.

The remaining 35% would have purchased the book regardless of any award nomination or win. When we looked at some of the comments that consumers made regarding their purchase motivation, many people attributed their book-buying behaviour to subject, author, and personal recommendations over literary award wins or nominations.

The graph below looks at the level of importance book buyers place on winning titles compared to nominated titles. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly from what we know about winning titles outselling their nominated competition, a very small percentage (6%) of respondents reported preferring to purchase winning titles. The largest percentage (62%) responded that they tend to purchase books regardless of a win or a nomination, indicating literary award status may not have as much influence on the consumer as other factors.

**DO YOU (OR WOULD YOU) PURCHASE BOOKS THAT HAVE BEEN NOMINATED FOR AWARDS BUT HAVE NOT WON?**



Question: Do you (or would you) purchase books that have been nominated for awards but have not won? (N=400)

44% of male respondents reported being influenced by award nominations or wins, compared to 39% of female respondents.

# Perceptions of Award-Winning/Nominated Books

When we were looking at who was influenced by literary award status when purchasing books we wondered why some people were influenced and not others. We examined how book buyers perceive literary awards and the books that are nominated or win them. Most comments were positive, with respondents thinking that it was important to acknowledge authors (Canadian authors in particular) and impressive works of literature. One respondent wrote,

*“They’re still new to me. I never used to be into books and neither was my 15-year-old daughter but she has recently inspired me to read more. I saw something on TV about Canada Reads that caught my attention. I hope to learn more about it.”*

There were also respondents who felt negatively about literary award-winning or nominated books. Most of these respondents felt that awards were not as important as the subject of the book and therefore didn’t pay attention to them. However there were others who felt that awards “aren’t always right” or even felt that award-winning titles often cost more.

We also asked respondents, when thinking generally about their book-buying behaviour, how significant award wins or nominations are to their decision to purchase a book. We found that respondents ages 25–34 are the most swayed by a book’s award status, with 47% responding they are “greatly” or “somewhat” impacted by award wins or nominations when deciding to purchase a book. This compares to only 28% of respondents ages 55 and older who were moderately to very impacted.

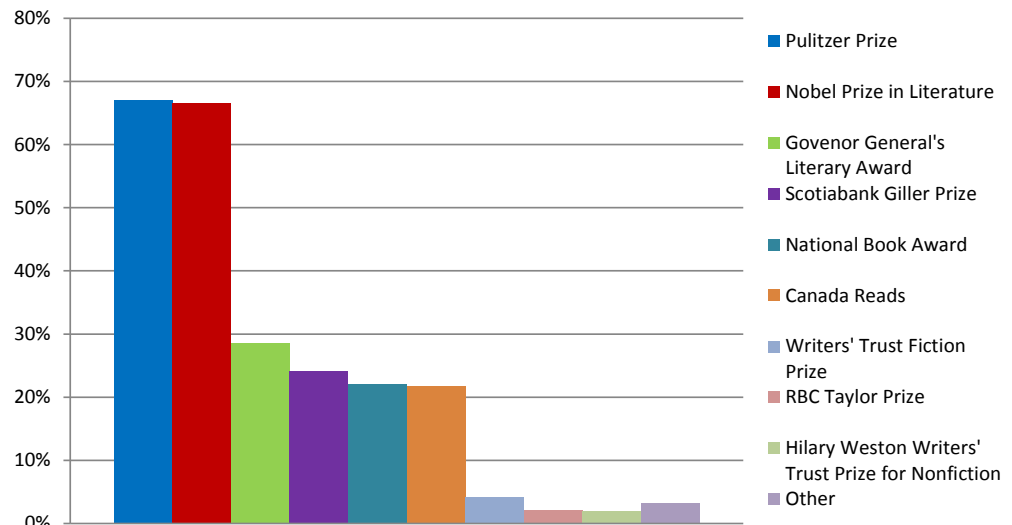
# Discoverability of Award-Winning/Nominated Books

If 40% of book buyers don't know if they have recently purchased a book that was nominated for or won a literary award, where are they finding information on literary awards? Are Canadians aware of our homegrown awards, or are they more familiar with high-profile international awards?

When we conducted our survey, during literary awards season, some book buyers commented that they wanted awards to be advertised more because they “don't know much about them” or “only know of a couple of awards.” One respondent put it best when they said, “I am not sure how or where to follow which books receive which awards.” Happily, of the 40% that did know whether they had recently purchased a book that had a nomination or won a literary award, most praised literary awards as great ways to discover new authors and said that awards could be helpful when choosing titles.

In order to get a better idea of which literary awards book buyers were aware of, we gave them a list of both Canadian awards and international awards. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the international book awards were the most widely known, with 67% of respondents reporting that they had knowledge of them. This is likely due to the media attention for those awards. When we asked respondents who selected “other” as an option to specify, many of them cited the Man Booker Prize. Other respondents were unsure of what constituted a literary award, confusing bestseller lists for awards.

WHICH LITERARY AWARDS ARE YOU MOST AWARE OF?



Question: Which literary awards are you most aware of? (Select up to 3) (N= 400)

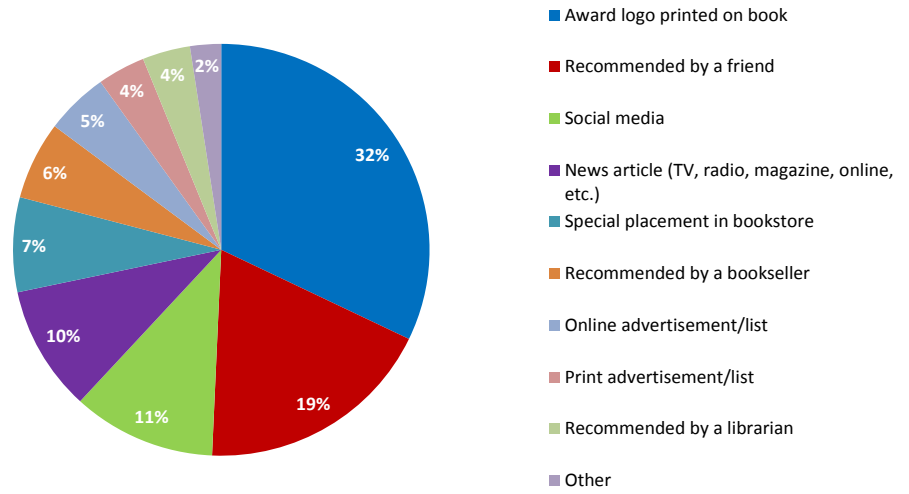
**32%** noticed that a book was an award winner or nominee because of a logo printed on the book

In order to explore discoverability of literary awards, we asked respondents who purchased an award-nominated or winning title when and how they heard about that title. In total we had responses from 81 book buyers, representing 20% of the panel. While this is not an incredibly large number of responses, most demographics are represented equally across those 81 respondents and we feel that the data is representative enough to generalize about some trends and areas of interest.

21% of these respondents heard about the title they purchased during the shortlist period, while 16% heard about it following the award announcement. The remainder of respondents heard about the book they purchased prior to any announcement or cannot remember when they became aware of it. Without checking some of the literary awards' websites it can be difficult for the average book buyer to find out which titles might be nominees or winners.

We followed up by asking these respondents how they noticed that their book was nominated or won a literary award. 32% of respondents reported noticing an award winner or nominee because of a logo printed on the book.

HOW DID YOU NOTICE THAT THIS TITLE WAS NOMINATED OR WON?



Question: How did you notice that this title was nominated or won? (N= 81)

## Conclusion

Literary award–nominated and winning authors, especially the Canadian ones, should be well known to the general book buyer as well as those who work in the book industry. The award to the author should not only come in the form of a prize but also publicize their extraordinary literary work.

In this study, BookNet Canada followed up on SalesData research that is conducted every award season for the nominees. The findings from those studies indicate that while literary award nominations improve sales for everyone, the winner experiences the greatest increase in sales.

While this may be the case, with more awareness of these nominated or award-winning titles, perhaps those sales could increase even more. Researching the impact that literary awards have on sales also found that some awards have more of an impact than others and cross-award nominations can be very beneficial. This may be due to some literary awards having more overt marketing strategies to get the word out about the award itself, or the media taking notice of an award and creating buzz around the books involved. We must also consider that many factors can influence a book’s sales—availability, price, media attention, reviews, competing titles—and it can be difficult to isolate which factors have had an effect when sales increase or decrease.

# Acknowledgements

## ABOUT BOOKNET CANADA

BookNet Canada is a non-profit organization that develops technology, standards, and education to serve the Canadian book industry. Founded in 2002 to address systemic challenges in the industry, BookNet Canada supports publishing companies, booksellers, wholesalers, distributors, sales agents, and libraries across the country.

BookNet Canada's services and research help companies promote and sell books, streamline workflows, and analyze and adapt to a rapidly changing market. BookNet Canada sets technology standards and educates organizations about how to apply them, performs market research, and tracks 85% of all Canadian print book sales through BNC SalesData.

Industry-led and partially funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, BookNet Canada has become, as The Globe and Mail puts it, "the book industry's supply-chain nerve centre."

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund (CBF) for this project / *Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du gouvernement du Canada par l'entremise du Fonds du livre du Canada (FLC) pour ce projet.*



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ISBN 978-1-927655-10-8

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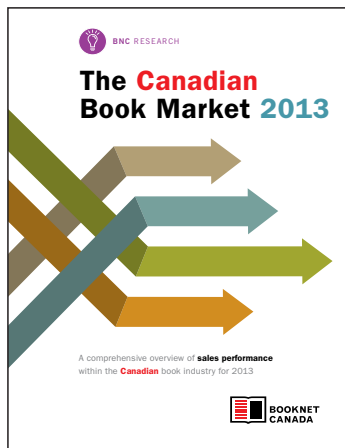
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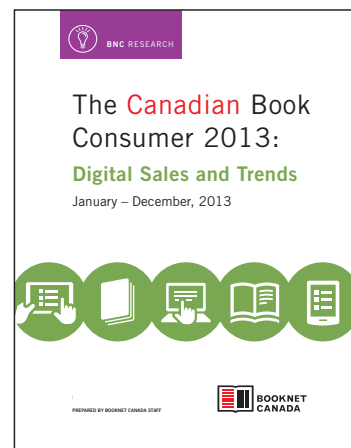
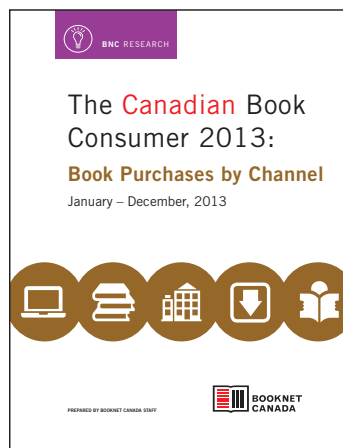
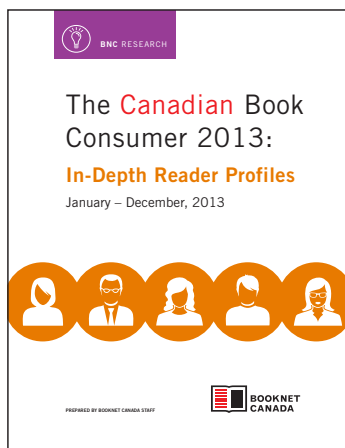
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