

## The Word on Books

### Collecting first editions

Newsweek

Jan. 26 issue - You don't have to scour the world for a Gutenberg Bible to start a collection of first-edition books. A passion for a theme and \$100 will do. If you dug "The Da Vinci Code," by Dan Brown, start with that. Collect first editions from 1979, Toni Morrison's greatest hits or books about Michigan—whatever you love. Some tips for beginners:

**Learn the lingo.** A first edition is the original version of a book released to the public. A first printing refers to books created in the first run of the presses, before any fixes or changes are made. First edition, first printings are usually the most desirable.

Thomas Paine's "Common Sense," published in January 1776, is worth \$200,000; the March 1776 printing can be had for about \$40,000.

**The nuts and bolts.** Check the publication date on the copyright page. Find the printing by looking at a code called the number line. Every publisher has its own system—Random House marks first editions with the number two (go figure). To crack the codes, try **collectbooks.about.com**. A typo can also be a clue. First editions of "The Great Gatsby" read "sick in tired" on page 205 instead of "sick and tired."

The condition of a first edition is almost as important as its pedigree. Ripped covers or soiled pages make a book less valuable. On the flip side, an author's signature can increase the value, as can a famous previous owner.

**The price is right.** Many people collect 20th-century books because they're relative bargains. Try minor works by major authors, such as John Steinbeck's "The Moon Is Down," or collect first editions of your favorite contemporary authors as they publish.

**Resources:** Check out **abebooks.com**, **baumanrarebooks.com** or **alibris.com** to learn more and start buying.

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—Raina Kelley

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