

# Talented writers highlight int'l literary festival

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FOR CHINA DAILY

The Bookworm International Literary Festival, scheduled for March 4 to 18, held a promotional prologue event to draw attention to the upcoming festival. US authors Dave Eggers and David Sedaris generated buzz among the capital's literati by jump-starting the festival with celebrity fanfare.

Eggers, 41, showcased the latest issue of *McSweeney's*, his self-published quarterly literary journal, at a sold-out talk in Beijing on Jan 26 to launch this year's Bookworm International Literary Festival.

Eggers believes in thinking outside of the box. Cradling a cube designed as a human head, he lifted the lid to unveil a treasure trove of novellas, heat-activated books, artsy postcards and fortune-cookie scrolls.

"Print is far from dead. Even in this wintry economic climate, book sales last year were flat; they didn't go up or down," Eggers said.

"Any kid, even if they're *Twilight* fans, will say the book was better than the movie. If you give readers a choice, they will make that choice."

The writer-editor-publisher is perhaps best known for his debut work in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, which became a Pulitzer Prize finalist.

Eggers then transitioned into biographical novels: *What is the What* was based on the life of a south Sudanese refugee resettled in the US, while *Zeitoun* focused on the trials of a Syrian-American do-gooder in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Eggers used the proceeds from the latter book to set up a charity foundation to improve education in South Sudan.

"I like his writing and wanted to see him in person," said John Giszczak, who works for a non-governmental organization in China.

"It's unusual for a writer to be so active in social causes. If there were more people like him, the world would be a much better place."

Eggers is now working on a book with a small part set in China. He spent several days visiting factories in Beijing for research. Asked if he would consider writing a book about China, he said, "No way! I'd rather be on surer footing."

The following day was the turn of US humorist David Sedaris, 54, who read several short stories and sections from his diary to a packed audience.

Sedaris, who spent a week prior to his Beijing debut in Japan, said of Beijing: "If I had come from London I don't think it would have been so jarring. I've never been to China before and having only been in this area (Sanlitun) I thought it was all Apple stores."

He went on to regale the audience with the unique things he noticed upon arrival in Beijing.

"On the subway today I saw a lady on the phone," Sedaris laughed, "She had the phone in one hand and corn on the cob in the other."

An expat himself living in France, Sedaris is acutely aware of the humorous and often amusing life of the foreigner. He read a rejected short story about expat life and claimed one "can only understand it if you've lived abroad." The audience loved Sedaris and he smiled and laughed along with them throughout the evening.

Sedaris, who writes for NPR, *The New Yorker*, and *This American Life*, as well as producing a steady stream of novels and short story collections, has been on the New York Times Bestseller list and has over 7 million copies of his work in print, his most famous of which is *Me Talk Pretty One Day*.

The Bookworm International Literary Festival will launch March 4. For a full program of speakers, visit [festival@ChinaBookworm.com](http://festival@ChinaBookworm.com). Tickets on sale exclusively at the Bookworm.



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Pulitzer Prize finalist Dave Eggers introduces the upcoming Bookworm International Literary Festival 2011.