

# A feast for readers

It felt and looked a little like a medieval fair, with happy crowds thronging the white tents, called “pavilions,” that soared over the grassy expanse of the National Mall in Washington, DC, on October 4. But instead of jugglers and fire eaters, the third annual National Book Festival featured more than 80 authors, illustrators, poets, storytellers, and other talented people involved somehow with combining words in marvelous ways. Admirers waited in long lines to get an autograph and a friendly word from favorite authors, and tentfuls of listeners sat enthralled as writers talked about or read from their work. Literature was featured, of course, but so were nonfiction, the world of entertainment, and even practical subjects such as home décor, cooking, and gardening.

One stated aim of this year’s festival, organized by the Library of Congress and hosted by Laura Bush, was to encourage people to take advantage of their local libraries. It may have been a case of preaching to the choir; the estimated 70,000 attendees were obviously avid to buy books, see and hear their favorite authors in person, and learn more about writers new to them. The offerings were abundant, but so was the appetite, and with up to 10 different presentations going on at any given time, people often had to choose between more than one attractive prospect. So it should be welcome news to every book lover who can make it to Washington next fall that the fourth festival will be held October 8–9, 2004—a double portion, for those who can never really get enough, of a public feast devoted to the many and varied marvels containable between the covers of a book. ■



**Clockwise from top: An artist demonstrates traditional Korean calligraphy; book lovers of all ages stroll the National Mall; cookbook author Jacques Pépin charms a packed house; father-and-son team Christopher Myers (left) and Walter Dean Myers sign books for admirers.**



Text and photos by Matt Freeman.