



Tushar Varma  
Class of 2023  
Raleigh, NC

Tushar Varma

**T**he *Greatest Bookscapes* is a documentary project that centers on the irreplaceable value independent bookstores bring to their communities to highlight the importance of supporting these businesses. Supporting small businesses allows one to provide jobs to friends and neighbors, coordinate services meant to platform community members, and facilitate meaningful connections—the list could go on. But I believe that most people don’t care to hear the numbers or data. What we desire is coincidentally what you can find at your local bookstore— a good story . Through real stories and faces, *The Greatest Bookscapes* captures the state of bookstores across the country and the ways they engage with their communities.

Continued

Multiple Cities, USA



# The Greatest Bookscapes

For this project, I interviewed 25 independent bookstores, visited a total of 85 bookstores in 35 states, and drove over 15,000 miles with three close friends. Leaving home was not particularly difficult at first . I have a restless, wandering soul and the idea of driving across the country to all of these bookstores excited me to no end. However, as the



end of the trip neared, I was unexpectedly exhausted and wanted nothing more than to be home and sleep for a few weeks. Nonetheless, I completed my journey with a renewed understanding of how to be patient with myself. I had to continuously remember that I was not a professional videographer with years of experience. In the end, the journey truly mattered more than any one destination.

With almost 300 pages of dialogue transcripts, *The Greatest Bookscapes* includes diverse



perspectives from the independent bookselling industry across America. From these conversations, I learned that indie bookstores fit into one of these three categories:

- 1) *Sanctuaries*: bookstores whose main priority is to be a cozy environment with a welcoming, inclusive, and alluring charm.
- 2) *Beacons*: stores that pride themselves on being a light for their communities and present services, attitudes, and environments to develop their store into a community hub.
- 3) *Landmarks*: bookstores that have stood the test of time and act as historical institutions within their communities.

There's also much to say for the Amazon's negative impact on the independent bookstore industry today. I was delighted to speak with some important people in the independent bookstore industry that are

eagerly fighting against unethical bookselling practices, through raising awareness in their community and litigation. I would say this experience of meeting new people encapsulates what I took away from this project. We have numerous stray ideas that float through our mind on any given day. We owe it to ourselves to pursue



these ideas, however ambitious they may seem, and let them snowball. The pursuit of knowledge to satisfy our curious minds is incredibly rewarding outside of the classroom— in the conversations we have with people who lived an experience different than ours. I can’t wait to share the conversations I had through *The Greatest Bookscapes*.

