

# You CAN Tell a Book By Its Cover!

Presenter: Jayme Lyons

Reader's Advisory Conference 2011 Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library

"The Edge" 10:15-11:00

## ➤ Introduction:

- Jayme Lyons: Bookmobile for 13 years. Elementary Ed. Degree. Learned on the job. Bookmobile helps because we talk to borrowers when they choose, check-out, and return materials.
- Why I thought of this: I noticed people getting books that looked similar. One lady had 5 books; all were light blue and beige with houses on the front. When I mentioned this to her she hadn't noticed!

## ➤ Font:

- My first program was "You Can Tell a Book by Its Font!" I did this for my dept. co-workers and we had a great time with it. This refers to the style of the type used mostly on the spine and for the title, but includes other writing on the cover. How it looks--not the actual words!
- Bold/Intense:
  - Books with block letters are almost always suspense thrillers or intense, gritty mysteries. Ex: **Arial Black, Berlin sans FB, Haettenschweller & Impact!**
- Curly/Slanted:
  - Girly books with romantic themes usually have the title in some kind of script.
    - The Curlier, the more romance. Ex: *Edwardian Script, French Script, Vladimir Script*
    - More handwritten looking titles tend to be more women's issues or off-beat romances. Ex: *Brush Script MT, GIGI,*

- **Serif = Legal/Historical:**
  - For some reason legal thrillers and mysteries like those of John Grisham always have a Serif Font. Sometimes they are fairly plain but often they look like the chiseled lettering on monuments. This is for modern day novels. **Legal Ex:** Baskerville Old Face, **Elephant**, Franklin Gothic Medium & Times New Roman.
  - Historical works almost always have serif fonts and the more ornate the type generally the farther back in time the story is set. Westerns, American historical fiction, military fiction and even fiction set in ancient times usually adhere to this rule. Plus you can glean a lot about the type of story by how straight forward or fanciful the title font is. **Historical Ex:** ALGERIAN, CASTELLAR, **GOUDY STOUT**, Old English Text, Playbill, Rockwell Condensed
  
- **Modern or Strange:**
  - Modern topics or unusual treatments can have wildly different fonts or combination of a font with illustrations and colors that seem weird or difficult to interpret. **Ex:** **Bauhaus 93**, *Curly*, *Jokerman*, *Kristen & Rage Italic*.
  
- **Fantasy:**
  - Fantasy fiction runs the gamut from very intense “historical” treatments to dreamlike “magical” themes. The font can help here!
  - “Historical” **Ex:** **Britannic Bold**, **Eras Bold &** Hightower Text
  - “Magical” **Ex:** *Blackadder*, *Callonna*, *Harrington & Papyrus*
  
- **Sci-fi:**
  - Fonts here give you a feel for the mood of the story as well. Are the Robot Overlords coming? Or are we discovering worlds and helpful technologies?
  - **Negative Ex:** OCR A Extended, Tw Cen MT Condensed
  - **Positive Ex:** *Magneto*, Eras Demi ITC, MS Mincho, **Bauhaus 93**

➤ **Color:**

- **Can tell you a lot about a book and is easy to spot quickly!**
  
- **Red/Black/Dark:**
  - **The “Black & Red Books”, sometimes with a dash of white or deep blue are the most intense and potentially violent, disturbing books out there! Couple this with a Bold Block font and you have something intended to keep you up all night! Thrillers, Suspense, Conspiracy!**
  
- **Pale Blue/Beige:**
  - **These colors usually mean a relaxing read. It may have some disturbances in the calm lives of the characters but they will almost always end happily. Think a walk in the country!**
  
- **Brights:**
  - **Usually these books are modern, fast paced and humorous. Irreverent, quirky and witty. From genre mysteries to travelogues. You’ll leave them laughing.**
  
- **Jewel Tones:**
  - **Deep colors denote intense feelings.**
  - **Simmering romances**
  - **Opulent settings**
  - **Exotic characters**
  - **Rich language.**
  
- **Sepia:**
  - **Historical books & Westerns are very often a parchment or worn leather color palette.**
  - **If the type is brown too, it got to be history!**

➤ **Picture:**

- Once you have a few titles to look at, chosen by the font and general colors; take a look at the cover art.
- **Illustration content:**
  - What are the actual images? Houses, people, animals, machines? This will validate (or not) your initial impression of what the story is about.
- **Illustration style;**
  - Modern, Deco, Rustic, Photo, Ornate. There are many styles of art used on covers today from “Old Masters” to Black & White Photos. Does the style of art represent a certain time or class? Is it edgy or pastoral?
- **Portrait of the Author:**
  - When you check out lots of books you get to look at a lot of author pics! Especially those authors who are popular enough to get their pictures on the back cover. Look at their dress, pose, what animal they are holding etc. You can get one more clue to what kind of writer they are!

➤ **Your Ideas?**

- Think about what you consistently see people choosing and checking out.
- Come up with your own “things to look for”.

➤ **It's not only what books you like, but why:**

- **Different Reader's “Hooks”.** Brief discussion of other unconventional ways we help people find books they will really like.
- **Writing Style:**
  - Can't get this from cover or cover notes! I met a woman who figured out why she was not happy with many of the books she chose. She was using the cover notes as a guide when the most important thing about a book for her was the writer's style. Now she just starts reading the first page and has much better luck.

- **Reader (Life) Style:**
  - **We can really help those who have trouble finding things they like and can stick with by taking into consideration how they live and what situations they are trying to read in.**
    - **Large Print**
    - **Paperback**
    - **Quick read /Tome**
    - **Electronic formats can make all the difference to busy people.**
  
- **Reader Experience:**
  - **For those who have trouble finding things that hold their attention or have little time to read?**
    - **YA-No Michener here!**
    - **Short stories! Anthologies. Abridged Versions (Classics)**
    - **Poetry-for all kinds!**
    - **Electronic, again! Read on the go. Listen while you work.**
  
- **Sure you can:**
  - **Look at reviews online (if my computer is online and not busy checking in or out).**
  - **Read Book Page (I actually do this and suggest them to Readers!)**
  - **Best Seller/Other Lists (Not bad. Only good for finding name of what the reader is looking for!)**
  - **Have them take the first 3 to 5 titles on the shelf that they haven't read! (Actually met a lady who does this! Says she does just as well as when she spent a lot of time looking at every book!**
  
- **But the “You CAN Tell a Book by Its Cover” methods are faster (except for that last one!) and I think more Fun!**

➤ **Scavenger Hunt: Put the ideas into practice!**

- **Each Group has a “New Borrower”; one of 5 cards with description of borrower and what they want. Ex: Murder & Mayhem: Loves fast paced, suspenseful mystery. Modern setting w/“True Crime” feel. Forensics and psychology.**
  - **Each group goes to the Fiction Sections and gathers 3-5 books for the borrower using only the cover as a guide.**
  - **“Hunt” Instructions:**
    - **On your honor that you will:**
      - **Stick to just the cover (not even the inside the jacket notes).**
      - **Not pick authors you know.**
      - **Not pick titles that are on a display that gives you “Extra” information about the content.**
    - **Time limit 10 minutes including; reading card with group, getting to the sections and getting back up here.**
    - **Each group shows their books and explains why they chose them.**
    - **We all discuss the books using cover notes and excerpts to determine the accuracy of each groups finds.**
    - **All vote for winning group.**
  - **The winners get Buttons stating “I Can Tell a Book by Its Cover!”**
- **I ask for suggestions & evaluation to improve my/our RA skills for next time someone says, “Got any good books?”**