

From the Stacks
By Julie Orf
Dunklin County Library

A beautiful friend has visited the library offices several times, and she has remarked about this gorgeous coffee table bird book several times. The proud juvenile egret with his wispy white plumes and blue legs begs for attention with his gold eyes on the cover. This huge book alphabetizes the presentation of birds with a flying bald eagle spanning the two center pages. The expression “don't judge a book by its cover” is used to discourage people from using something's outward appearance to make assumptions about what it is like on the inside.

Sometimes it is perfectly acceptable to judge a book by its cover. A book cover usually indicates the book's genre or at least some of its core components, whether through character representations, setting visuals, or thematic cues. Particular styles of book covers are typically associated with certain genres, romance novels being a prime example. If one were to envision the cover of a romance novel, one may picture the main couple prominently featured, either illustrated or photographed, against an appealing backdrop.

When perusing a bookstore or library for new reading material, the cover can provide crucial information. This eliminates the need to approach a book blindly, without any understanding of its potential enjoyment. A book cover streamlines the process for romance enthusiasts to locate their preferred reads, while also making it easier for those interested in other genres to recognize that a particular book might not be to their liking.

Authors are deeply involved in approving and guiding the cover art. This means a cover can subtly reflect the author's personality or values. Even small details, like a cover being in black and white versus color, or an illustration versus a photograph, can hint at the author's intended audience. If a cover does not resonate with your style, it could be a deliberate signal that the book is aimed at a different audience. And, if a cover immediately grabs your attention and you enjoy the book, it is likely no accident. You were probably the target audience, and the author and creative team successfully reached you through that initial visual impression.

When looking at cookbooks, the prettier the plate of food on the book's cover, the greater the likelihood that a reader will pick it up. One of the prettiest cookbooks in the Dunklin County Library collection is *Eating Local: The Cookbook Inspired by America's Farmers* published by *Sur La Table* magazine with the brightly colored fresh garden vegetables on the cover. However, the most used cookbook in my home is a locally published *PCA Cookbook* from 1982 with my mother's scribbles, notes, and extra

recipes written in the back. This white cover has small farming illustrations inside a postage stamp design with the phrase "Farming is everyone's bread and butter."

Book covers significantly influence a book's success, determining whether it captures attention or remains unread. These covers are the result of hundreds of deliberate choices, as they form your crucial first impression of a book. Therefore, while it is generally ill advised to judge individuals by their appearance, there is no need to feel guilty for letting a book's cover guide your selection.