

# Cover Study: A Multipurpose Technique

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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## Introduction

Studying the covers of books with students is a useful activity for a teacher librarian. The cover is one of the most commonly used selection tools by students when choosing a book to read. A careful study of the cover reveals much information about the book: characters, setting, plot, and genre, information about the author and series, and reviews of the book. However, these features need to be highlighted for students and they require occasions to practice studying book covers. An inventive teacher librarian can adapt cover studies to fit many different purposes.

## Examples

### Genre

When doing book talks for groups of students, a cover study works well. This is also a successful way for large numbers of students new to the library to find a novel they are interested in reading. To do book talks for several classes of students in a short amount of time, the teacher librarian selects many appropriate novels and sorts them on tables by genre. Instead of book talking individual books, introduce authors, mention series, and highlight several books in each category. Students then browse these displayed books by genres that appeal to them. Once they choose a book, they fill in a cover study chart (Appendix 1). As a follow up activity, students can survey their classmates to tally the number of students reading each genre and create a bar graph.

### Conflict

A cover study can be a pre-Remembrance Day activity. Display a selection of novels featuring characters in war torn settings at table stations. Students study the cover of a book, examining all the different aspects mentioned in the article in this issue, *You CAN judge a book by its cover*. Pay special attention to finding out what conflict was affecting the main character and the setting, both time and place, of the novel. The session finishes with students sharing this information orally. A cover study is a quick way to acquaint students with many books on a common theme.

### Native Studies

A cover study offers help in a high school Native Studies class. Students glean a research topic or question relating to aboriginal culture from a self-selected novel or non-fiction book. To facilitate student selection, the teacher librarian displays a number of resources containing appropriate content. (Appendix 2 is not a comprehensive or ideal list but reflects the books currently in the collection at the author's school.) A guided cover study assists students in choosing a book (Appendix 3). This method enables a large number of students to efficiently select from amongst the available resources without requiring the teacher librarian to book talk every book.

## World Literature

A similar procedure can be followed if an English teacher wants to provide independent study novels for a grade twelve world literature class. The teacher librarian displays books about young people growing up in various cultures in the world. (Appendix 4 is not exhaustive but simply reflects what was available to the author in her school collection.) The reading and maturity level of these books varies greatly to accommodate diverse student needs. Students browse the books and confirm their choice with a cover study chart.

## Life Transitions

Students in a Life Transitions class follow the same procedure when choosing novels in which the main character faces a challenge, changes, and matures. In all these examples, a cover study focuses student attention, helps them confirm their choice and indicates that they have considered their selections carefully.

## Conclusion

Possible applications of this technique are endless. Need to recommend the attractive new fiction books in your library to students but haven't found the time to read them yet? Another ideal occasion for a cover study! Invite a class of students to preview them and complete a cover study. Add the following question to the cover study the dilemma is solved:

*Describe the kind of reader who would enjoy this book. In your description, mention the reader's gender, age, reading level, habits, interests and taste in reading.*

Cover studies are a versatile and worthwhile technique for teacher librarians to have in their instructional repertoire.

# APPENDIX 1

## You CAN Judge A Book By Its Cover Book Selection by Genre - A Cover Study



Student \_\_\_\_\_

Record the feature in column one.

Comment on the feature in column two.

Cover Feature	What do you notice about this feature? What about it catches your attention? What do you learn about the book from this feature?
Title:	
Author:	
Series:	
Genre:	
Cover illustration or design: (photo, drawing, design)	
Chapter titles: (numbers or words)	

Back cover “blurb” or summary (on flyleaf of a hardcover book jacket)	
Main character names	
Setting (time and place)	
Reviews quoted	

## APPENDIX 2

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### Novels And Nonfiction For Native Studies Class

#### Fiction

Alexie, Sherman	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i>
Bastedo, Jamie	<i>On This Ice</i>
Boyton, Joseph	<i>Three Day Road</i>
Brezenoff, S.	<i>Burning Secrets</i>
Brooks, Martha	<i>Bone Dance</i>
Brown, Chester	<i>Louis Riel</i>
Bruchac, Joseph	<i>Codetalker</i>
Bruchac, Joseph	<i>Wabi A hero's tale</i>
Bruchac, Joseph	<i>Skeleton Man</i>
Bruchac, Joseph	<i>Return of the Skeleton Man</i>
Carvell, Marlene	<i>Who will tell my brother?</i>
Culleton Beatrice	<i>April Raintree</i>
Luiken, Nicole	<i>Frost</i>
Johnson, Harold	<i>Backtrack</i>
Johnson, Harold	<i>Charlie Muskrat</i>
King, Thomas	<i>Medicine River</i>
King Thomas	<i>Green Grass Running Water</i>
Kusugak, Micheal	<i>The Curse of the Shaman</i>
Loyie, Larry	<i>Goodbye Buffalo Bay</i>
Maracle, Lee	<i>Will's Garden</i>
Mikaelson, B.	<i>Touching Spirit Bear</i>
Mikaelson, B.	<i>Ghost of Spirit Bear</i>
Murray Jill	<i>Break on through</i>

Noel, Michel	<i>Good for nothing</i>
Olsen, Sylvia	<i>Middle Row</i>
Olsen, Sylvia	<i>Yellow Line</i>
Olsen, Sylvia	<i>White Girl</i>
Olsen, Sylvia	<i>Girl with a Baby</i>
Olsen, Sylvia	<i>No time to say goodbye</i>
Ravel, Edeet	<i>The saver</i>
Richards, Dave	<i>Soldier Boys</i>
Robinson, Eden	<i>Monkey Beach</i>
Slipperjack, Ruby	<i>Dog Tracks</i>
Slipperjack, Ruby	<i>Weesquachak</i>
Smelcer, John	<i>The Trap</i>
Smith, Cynthia Leitch	<i>Rain is not my Indian name</i>
Sterling, Shirley	<i>My Name is Seepeetza</i>
Storm, Jennifer	<i>Deadly Loyalties</i>
Taylor, Drew Hayden	<i>The Night Wanderer</i>
Taylor, Drew Hayden	<i>Fearless Warriors</i>
Wagamese, Richard	<i>Keeper n' me</i>

## Nonfiction

Ahenakew, F. and others	<i>Native Voices</i>	808.042 NAT
	<i>Awasisuk Powwow</i>	PROF 394.2 AWA
Barkwell, L. and others	<i>Metis Legacy II</i>	971.004 MET
Barkwell, L. and others	<i>Metis Legacy I</i>	PROF016.971 MET
Batten, J.	<i>The Man who ran faster than everyone</i>	796.424 BAT
Billington, Keith	<i>House Calls by Dogsled</i>	610.73 BIL
Bouchard, D.	<i>An Aboriginal Carol</i>	811.54 BOU
Bouvier, R.	<i>Papiyahtak</i>	811.54 BOU

Brown, Chester	<i>Louis Riel</i>	971.051
Bruchac, J.	<i>The Native American Sweat Lodge</i>	391.64 BRU
Cuthand, Doug	<i>Askimwina</i>	971.004 CUT
Dumont, M.	<i>Initiations</i>	810.8 INI
Fleury, N. and others	<i>Stories of our people: A Métis Graphic Novel Anthology</i>	741.597 STO
Fournel, Kelly	<i>Great Women from our first nations</i>	305.488 FOU
Fournier, S.	<i>Stolen from our embrace</i>	971.004 FOU
Four worlds development project	<i>The Sacred Tree</i>	970.004 SAC
Hungrywolf, A.	<i>The Tipi</i>	970.004 HUN
Lelooska, Chief,	<i>Spirit of the Cedar People</i>	398.2 LEL
Maracle, B.	<i>Back on the Rez</i>	971.004 MAR
Mercredi, M	<i>Morningstar: A Warrior's Spirit</i>	362.83 MER
National Museum of the American People,	<i>Native American Dance Ceremonies and Social Traditions</i>	394.3 NAT
Olsen, S.	<i>Just Ask Us</i>	305.235 OLS
Owusu, Heike	<i>Symbols of Native America</i>	302.222 OWU
Quan, H.	<i>Native Chiefs and Famous Metis</i>	971.2 QUA
Schilling, Vincent	<i>Great athletes from our First Nations</i>	796.092 SCH
Schilling, Vincent	<i>Men of courage from our First Nations</i>	970.004 SCH
Tyman, James	<i>Inside Out</i>	971.004 TYM
White, J.	<i>The Powwow Trail</i>	394 WHI
Zenko, Darren	<i>Native Ghost Stories</i>	398.2 ZEN

# APPENDIX 3

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## Native Studies Book Selection

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Text Feature	What Do You Notice About This Feature That Connects To Your Native Studies Course?
Title	
Cover Illustration or design	
Chapter titles	
Back cover “blurb”	
Character names	
Setting	

Author's note, dedication, acknowledgements, prologue, afterward	
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From looking at these books, what questions do you have about aboriginal peoples?

Title of book you have selected \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you choose this book?

## APPENDIX 4

### Global Teens - Stories Of Young People In Various Cultures

Author	Title (Call number is listed if not fiction)
Abdel-Fattah, Randa	<i>Does my head look big in this?</i>
Beah, Ishmael	<i>A long way gone</i> 966.4 BEA
Choy, Wayson	<i>The Jade Peony</i>
Choy, Wayson	<i>All that Matters</i>
Coetzee, D. M.	<i>Disgrace</i>
Collins, Pat	<i>The Fattening Hut</i>
Crew, Linda	<i>Children of the River</i>
Draper, Sharon	<i>Copper Sun</i>
Ellis, Deborah	<i>I am a taxi</i>
Ellis, Deborah	<i>The Breadwinner</i>
Ellis, Deborah	<i>Mud City</i>
Ellis, Deborah	<i>Parvanna's journey</i>
Ellis, Deborah	<i>Our story, our songs: African children talk about AIDS</i> (362.708 ELL)
Ellis, Deborah	<i>Lunch with Lenin</i>
Flacco, Anthony	<i>Tiny Dancer</i> 362.197 FLA
Filipovic, Z.	<i>Zlata's Diary</i> (949.742 FIL)
Garcia Marquez, Gabriel	<i>Love in the time of cholera</i>
Galloway, Steven	<i>The Cellist of Sarajevo</i>
Gibb, Camilla	<i>Sweetness in the Belly</i>
Gilmore, Rachna	<i>A group of one</i>
Golden, Arthur	<i>Memoirs of a Geisha</i>
Hagi, Rawi	<i>De Niro's Game</i>
Hidier, Tamuja	<i>Born confused</i>

Hirsi Ali, Ayaan	<i>Infidel</i>	949.207 HIR
Hosseini, Khaled	<i>The Kite Runner</i>	
Hosseini, Khaled	<i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i>	
Kamara, Mariatu	<i>The bite of the mango</i>	966.404 KAM
Khadra, Yasmina	<i>The Swallows of Kabul</i>	
Khan, Rukhsana	<i>Wanting Mor</i>	
Kingsolver, B.	<i>The Poisonwood Bible</i>	
Lahir, Jhumpa	<i>The Namesake</i>	
Latifa	<i>My Forbidden Face: growing up under the Taliban</i>	305.42 LAT
McCormick, Patricia	<i>Sold</i>	
Napoli, Donna	<i>Bound</i>	
Rippin, Sally	<i>Chenxi and the Foreigner</i>	
Satrapi, Marjane	<i>Persepolis I and II (graphic novels)</i>	
Selvadurai, Shyam	<i>Swimming in the Monsoon Sea</i>	
Skrypuch, Marsha Forchuk	<i>Daughter of War</i>	
Staples, Suzanne	<i>Shabanu</i>	
Staples, Suzanne	<i>Haveli</i>	
Staples, Suzanne	<i>Under the Persimmon Trees</i>	
Stratton, Allan	<i>Chanda's Secrets</i>	
Stratton, Allan	<i>Chanda's War</i>	
Walters, Eric	<i>Shattered</i>	
Walters, Eric and Adrian Bradbury	<i>When Elephants Fight</i>	
Whelan, Gloria	<i>Homeless Bird</i>	
Wiszowaty, Robin	<i>My Mansai Life</i>	305.896 WIS
Wong, Jan	<i>Beijing confidential</i>	915.115 WON
Yang, Gene	<i>American Born Chinese (graphic novel)</i>	
Ye, Ting-xing	<i>Mountain Girl River Girl</i>	

Ye, Ting-xing

*Throwaway Daughter*

Ye, Ting-xing

*My Name is Number 4*

951.05 YET

Yep, Lawrence

*Cook's Family*