



**CALIFORNIA STATE SCIENCE FAIR  
2005 PROJECT SUMMARY**

<b>Name(s)</b> <b>Rebecca K. Miller</b>	<b>Project Number</b> <b>J1714</b>
<b>Project Title</b> <b>Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover - Or Should You?</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Abstract</b></p> <p><b>Objectives/Goals</b> My objective is to determine whether or not people do judge books by their covers.</p> <p><b>Methods/Materials</b> Informed consent was obtained from 100 people (25 men, 25 women, 25 boys, and 25 girls). Five unambiguous and five ambiguous book covers with title and author redacted were shown for 30 seconds each to the person being surveyed. After each picture, subjects answered survey questions about what genre they thought the cover represented, and why they came to that conclusion. The subjects also listed their preferred genres, from favorite to least favorite. There were 21 questions on the survey. Each answer was recorded by book genre, type of subject tested, and the subject's genre preference. The results were tabulated using an Excel spreadsheet. Materials included 10 book covers, 100 questionnaires, 1 watch, 5 three-hole punch folders, 50 clear plastic folders, 1 computer, 1 pair of scissors, 1 packet of construction paper, and 1 copying machine.</p> <p><b>Results</b> The majority of all subjects tested recognized the unambiguous fantasy, science fiction, historical, and romance book covers. On average, 77% of the time people correctly identified the genre of the unambiguous cover. The short answers confirmed that people based their answers on easily recognized symbols. The exception was recognition of the mystery genre. The short answers revealed that people were confused by other symbols in the mystery picture. With regard to ambiguous book covers, test subjects had difficulty correctly identifying a book's genre. On average, people gave correct answers only 23% of the time. People were most likely to choose the genre of ambiguous books based on their two favorite or two least favorite genres. The range differed for women (88%, 88%, 60%, 56%, and 52% for the 5 different genres), boys (84%, 80%, 52%, and 16%), girls (64%, 64%, 56%, 48%, and 44%), and men (60%, 60%, 42%, 16%, and 8%).</p> <p><b>Conclusions/Discussion</b> People are highly likely to identify correctly the genre of books with covers that have well-known symbols, using the principle of the representativeness heuristic. Judgments about ambiguous book covers are based on people's familiarity with the genres they prefer or least prefer, using the principle of the availability heuristic.</p>	
<b>Summary Statement</b> My project examines the type of "snap judgments" people make about the genre of a book based solely on the cover picture, and whether the basis of the judgment changes if the picture is unambiguous or ambiguous.	
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