

# RA in a Half Day: Readers' Advisory Secrets Revealed!

By Jenny Fry and Dana Horrocks.

The [BCLA Readers' Advisory Interest Group](#) held their first annual "RA in a Half Day" event - "Readers' Advisory Secrets Revealed!" - on October 24, 2012 at City Centre Library in Surrey, BC. It was a tremendous success, unexpectedly sold-out, and we now know that we need a much bigger room for next year.

Many thanks to UBC SLAIS student Dana Horrocks for live blogging the event. Keynote speaker [Sean Cranbury](#) was warmly received - he talked about why libraries are uniquely positioned to "be in the place, where people are, who are interested in the things you do." Libraries have physical spaces, internet access, local connections, and expertise on great books. They can use blogs as hubs, and then target their audiences through channels like Facebook and [Twitter](#). Sean emphasized how valuable these tools are because they can provide opportunities to measure online activity and interaction. So, share openly and globally, provide opportunities for interaction and archive! He issued this final challenge: can libraries host robust and civil online discussions on books and reading with policies to support this?

Tara Matsuzaki from West Vancouver Memorial Library and Heidi Schiller from North Vancouver City Library led the session on online bookmarking and promoting Readers' Advisory. They covered [Library Thing](#), [Fantastic Fiction](#), [Amazon](#), [Good Reads](#), and [NovelList](#). These sites are great because they harness crowd-sourcing and have users create lists and tags, as well as containing the more traditional booklists and read-alike tools. They also talked about:

- [NextReads](#) (e-newsletters which allow patrons to sign up for monthly booklists based on their favourite genres; this link is for Surrey Libraries' version of NextReads)
- North Vancouver City Library's blog "[The Top Shelf](#)" - an excellent example of a blog which has short chunks of information and is visually appealing. It features Community Reader Profiles which connect community members to the library through a peek at their favourite reads

- [Pinterest](#) which allows them to create visually delightful booklists with cover images and short reviews and link them all back to their catalogue
- [BiblioCommons](#) is not new to some, it has real value in terms of integrating the catalogue with what is referred to as the "social discovery layer"
- [Facebook](#) continues to be a place for librarians to be where their users are, promote readers' advisory resources or services like Seattle Public Library's "Your Next 5 Books"

## Speed-dating Through the Genres

The next five presenters gave short and exciting talks about six different genres - aimed at those of us who secretly quake in our boots when asked to suggest a great book in genres that we may be quite unfamiliar with.

*Romance- Desiree Baron, Vancouver Public Library*  
The romance genre is defined by a developing love relationship around which the plot is based. And happy endings of course! Romance books are a massive industry with several subsets and incredibly prolific readers. Think about using author readalikes to help readers branch out but be careful to listen to patron's preferences within the genre. This genre has become very popular in the ebook world with more genre blurring and connectivity.

*Mystery- Christine Miller, West Vancouver Memorial Library*  
The vital elements of a mystery are of course a murder and the ability of an intelligent investigator to get to the bottom of it. There should be a sense of fair play by the author and the reader is often delighted and satisfied by the ingenious ways in which the crimes are solved. There are several subsections in mystery books and it is important to focus on what appeals to the patron. In this way librarians can match books of similar appeal in theme, setting, character, and plot to the patron's next read. Christine suggested using popular mystery websites like [Stop, You're Killing Me](#) and [Fantastic Fiction](#).

*Science Fiction and Fantasy- Stephanie Kurmey, Surrey Libraries*

There are several classics or pioneers in science fiction and fantasy to be aware of based on subsections like sword and sorcery, myths and legends, humour and urban fantasy. Readers of this genre tend to be serious about their series and some tools which can help you keep up to date include [Fantastic Fiction](#), [NPR's Top 100 Science-Fiction](#), [Fantasy Books](#) and various science fiction and fantasy award websites.

*Thrillers- Olivia Anderson, Greater Victoria Public Library*

Thrillers are a relatively new genre, compared to some of their literary contemporaries, but are rapidly gaining popularity among readers. They involve a great deal of cross-over with other genres but are defined by a fast pace and high level of excitement as the author throws challenges at both the protagonist and the reader. They can be villain-driven and often contain flat or less dynamic secondary characters, but at the pace you're reading who cares?! Some resources for recommending thrillers are [The Big Thrill](#) and [Halifax Public Library's Guide to Thrillers](#).

*Western Stories- Paul Hayes, Vancouver Public Library*

When Paul first asked the crowd "Who reads Westerns?" he received a luke-warm showing of a few tired hands. A genre that is plagued by

misconceptions, Paul explained Westerns are stories which take place during the settlement of new frontiers. There are several notable examples of books as frontiers expanded across North America (and other lands!) These books contain themes like the lack of and then establishment of law, cultures in conflict, unlimited opportunities and a sense of pervading optimism. Within westerns there are neowesterns which mark the end of periods of settlement as well as weird westerns which integrate the best (and worst?) of other genres like aliens, magic and technology! So when Paul asked again "Who reads Westerns?" the whole room seemed to be able to recall a read which took them to a new frontier.

### Join us!

For more information about RAIG, go to our [webpage](#) and sign up to our [listserv](#), and check out our [blog](#).

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