

Romance Fiction Genre Study
Contemporary Romance
Lisle Public Library
June 7, 2018

Assignment:

1. Read a book from two different authors (two books total). Choose from the authors listed below. Preferably, both authors should be new to you.

- Rochelle Alers
- Sonali Dev
- Colleen Hoover
- Brenda Jackson
- Julie James
- Christina Lauren
- Linda Lael Miller
- Susan Elizabeth Phillips
- Alisha Rai
- Jill Shalvis

2. Read about the discussion of diversity at the RITAs and RWA. It's still unfolding. Here's where you can get started but feel free to add more sources.

- [Ripped Bodice Diversity Reports](#)
- [RWA Statement on Commitment to Inclusivity](#)
- [Smart Bitches Trashy Books: RWA Board Addresses Inclusivity in RITA Awards and Finalists](#)
- [The Guardian: Romance so white?](#)
- [Bestselling Author Naima Simone Talks Sales in the Diverse Books Movement](#)

Much of the conversation is happening on Twitter. Follow authors and advocates who are leading the discussion: @Tuphlos, @courtneymilan, @AlisahRai, @authorMsBev. Additional handles to consider: @helenkaydimond (current head of RWA), @romancewriters, @SuleikhaSnyder, @AlyssaColeLit, @TheRippedBodice, @WoCInRomance, @MostlyBree, @Sonali_Dev, @DrenzPen.

Discussion of Diversity Issues:

-Romance suffers from a white cycle of publishing-white agents, white editors, white sales and marketing, white publishers

-Ripped Bodice Bookstore was the first to publish a study on diversity. Librarians and bookstores have more power than we realize.

-According to the [State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing](#) (by Ripped Bodice), 2017, only 6.2 books (per 100) are written by people of color.

-RWA's Statement on Commitment to Inclusivity: were we surprised that a person of color has never won a RITA award? No.

- Less than 1% of nominees were people of color; authors must pay to apply for consideration for the award.
- Beverly Jenkins initially paid to enter her novels, but after several rejections, she stopped entering her novels
- RWAs board needs to change; with more POCs on the board, maybe change will come.
- Journals need to review more POC authors. Kirkus requires a payment for a review. One participant mentioned that she reviews for Booklist and Booklist specifically asked for people to review diverse romance, but did not have much response.
- Sonali Dev suggested that librarians should put their reviews on Amazon, however someone mentioned that Amazon is taking down reviews from people who didn't buy the book from Amazon.
- [Naima Simone's article on diverse books](#): covers matter, covers with a white character sell more than covers with a black character
 - A black person on the cover makes some people think the book will be about race
 - Readers can't relate to African American stories, but they can relate to vampire stories?
- Do we not buy books by POC because they don't circulate?
 - We buy them, but at many libraries they don't circulate. Some keep these books longer than they would other titles for diversity purposes.
 - When doing displays, show variety, include titles by POCs
 - Are we stuck in a loop where we don't buy books by POCs because they don't circulate, and POCs don't come into the library because they think there is nothing for them?

Contemporary Romance:

- set from 1950 to the present that focuses primarily on the romantic relationship (RWA)
 - a story set in the present day and the characters and their journey is what drives the story and the hero and heroine towards their happily ever after (Carly Phillips)
- Archetypes:** actress/celebrity, alpha, athlete, bad boy, best friend, billionaire, cowboy, royalty, spy/assassin, etc. (see [slideshow](#) for full list)
- Tropes:** amnesia, blackmail, bodyguard, childhood sweethearts, enemies to lovers, marriage of convenience, small town, workplace, etc. (see [slideshow](#) for full list)
- *Novelist now offers searching by themes such as captive hearts, childhood sweethearts, marriage of convenience, etc. (see [slideshow](#) for full list)

Authors We Read:

Rochelle Alers

- The Inheritance*: interracial relationship, cover does not indicate POC, NOLA setting, social class issues, history, mild heat
- Cavanaugh Island series*: old fashioned tone, very consensual, mild, little conflict, feel good and charming, food focused
- Home to Wickham Falls*: heroine does it all, food is a big aspect

Sonali Dev

- Bollywood Bride*: serious issues but very upbeat, cultural details, romantic tension drawn out, likable characters, very good audiobook
- A Distant Heart*: meaty topic, somewhat predictable, good tension, crime drama, class distinction, childhood friends
- Bollywood Affair*: fun, funny, disliked because main character was naive and helpless
- *her stories can have heavier subjects but all have happy endings

Colleen Hoover

- Slammed*: not well written, angsty
- Maybe Someday*: angst, love-triangle
- It Ends With Us*: good depth, not typical romance
- November Nine*: cover looks like a horror novel
- Confess*: RomCom, meet-cute, angst, dual perspective
- *her novels tend to lean toward New Adult; New Adult and Romance can be connected but aren't the same thing.

Brenda Jackson

- One Night With a Wealthy Rancher*: enjoyable, misunderstanding trope, narrator of audio was not great
- Seized by Seduction*: a lot going on, enjoyable, romantic suspense, very hot
- Forged in Fire*: romantic suspense, likeable characters

Julie James (Chicago author)

-*The Thing About Love*: Chicago setting, crime story, main characters are equal, strong female with good job, settled, owns property, doesn't need a man, pretty steamy

Christine Lauren

-*Roomies*: marriage of convenience, NYC setting, light, somewhat credible plot, mildly steamy, RomCom, New Adult, good read-alike for Sophie Kinsella

-*Beautiful Boss*: relatable dialogue, likeable female character, relatable, fun, a lot of sex

-*Dating You, Hating You*: New Adult, office romance, light, angsty, sexy

Linda Lael Miller

-*Forever a Hero*: cliched, hero saves the girl, characters not appealing, writing not great

*some of her books are better than others

Susan Elizabeth Phillips

Match Me If You Can

Heroes Are My Weakness: silly, funny

*fun books, playful, progressive, good for book discussions, respectful sex, "sure bets"

Alisha Rai

-*Hate to Want You*: Romeo and Juliet trope, family angst, good characters, strong females, men don't need to save the girl, serious issues, not relaxing, very hot

*her books typically feature complicated relationships, compelling issues, relatable, fast-paced, body positivity, steamy sex; also writes *Pleasure* series (erotica)

Jill Shalvis

-*Lucky Harbor* series (*Simply Irresistible*, *About That Kiss*, *One in a Million*): very big series, bad dialogue, series is too long, not a lot of substance, hard to distinguish characters, light

-*Sweet Little Lies*: good chemistry between characters, good supporting characters, predictable, humorous, community/chosen family is a big part

Next Meeting: August 2, Glenview Public Library, 2-4pm

Topic: Historical Romance

Assignment:

Read at least two historical romance books, each set in a different historical time and, preferably, written by an author new to you.

You can use the following lists to help you pick your historical romances, but feel free to use other resources of your choice:

- [ARRT's Historical Romance Suggested Author List](#)
- [Book Riot's 100 Must-Read Historical Romances](#)
- [Smart Bitches Trashy Books Historical Romance List](#)
- [Women of Color in Romance Fiction List](#)
- [Jen Reads Romance List](#)

Questions to consider while reading:

–Why did you choose a book set in this particular time period?

–Did the book live up to your expectations?

–Did the book feel historically accurate and authentic? Was much historical research involved?

–What were the book's main tropes/themes?

–Would you read another romance book by this author/in this series?

If you have questions or need help in choosing your historical romance books, email us at sc@arrtreads.org.