Tips for Interpreting the Covers

You might find the following tips useful when you are interpreting your book covers.

Feature: What I'm looking for	Tips for Interpreting Book Covers
Depicting the world of the book	
What can you see on the cover: • people and/or animals • objects • words? What are the people and animals doing?	• Is there any pattern to the people, animals, objects and words that you see? • What sorts of things are they doing? • Is there evidence of diversity in the covers you looked at? • Are these things a part of your own everyday world? Are they familiar at all? • Do you have any questions based on what you see?
Conveying relationships & emotions	
Based on shot types, how close are the main people shown, e.g. • close (close up & filling the cover) • short distance away (mid shot) • far away (long shot)?	• What sort of distance is being set up between the people/animals/objects and the reader: intimate, close, social, distant/far apart? • Why do you think this is?
Are the main people, objects etc shown front on or from an angle?	• If shown front-on, you are being invited to feel like a part of the world depicted. • If shown from a side-on angl, you are being encouraged to see yourself as an observer and not a part of the world depicted.
Are the main people, objects etc shown as if the viewer is looking up or down at them?	• If it seems like you are looking up at particular people/animals/objects, then you are probably being invited to think of those people etc as being dominant, having power of you and others. • If it seems like you are looking down at particular people/animals/objects, then you are probably being invited to think of those people etc as being inferior, submissive, having less power than you and others.
Are people or animals looking directly at or away from the viewer, i.e. what is the gaze?	• If looking at you, the person/animal is inviting you into their world, making a demand on your attention, confronting you. You are drawn directly into the world. Sometimes, this type of gaze is used as if you are looking into a mirror, i.e. what you see is a reflection of you.

Feature: What I'm looking for	Tips for Interpreting Book Covers
	• If looking away from you, you are positioned as an observer, not a direct participant in the characters' world.
Do facial expressions on people and animals depict then as: happy, sad, surprised, angry, scared…something else?	• What is the overall feeling that emanates from the page? What emotions might be important in the story?
What are the predominant colours, i.e. • warm (red, orange, yellow) • cool (blue, green aqua)?	• Does the use of colours invite you think about the world as warm (and possible inviting), or cool (and possibly inviting, even chilly)?
Do the images contain: • lots of colour, fairly intense (suggesting familiarity with the time, place, characters etc) • little or no colour (suggesting the viewer is more removed)?	• Are you invited to consider the world of the novel familiar and relateable, or distant, removed and unfamiliar/distant? • How does this tie in with the use of other features such as shot types, angle (horizontal and vertical) and gaze?
Organising the image	
How is the cover organised overall? For example: • a main central image (or words) surrounded by other images (or words) • mainly vertically – something in the top and bottom halves • mainly horizontally – something on the left & right hand sides of the cover • a combination of the above? something else?	• In a centre-margins organisation, the thing/s in the centre are the most important, what attention is drawn to. • With a top-bottom organisation, what is in the top is the ideal, what can be aimed for, whereas in the bottom section is usually what is the real and grounded. • With a mainly left-right organisation, what is on the left is usually what is assumed as already known, familiar, taken-for-granted. What is on the right is generally what is assumed to be new and less familiar. • Given the organisation, how are you invited to think about the world – and how does this relate to the use of other visual resources?