

Romance in the Stacks

This week is Valentine's Day so there is no better time to pick up a romance novel. Plus Nova Scotia winters are cold and gray and curling up with a cozy read is a nice way to pass the time. Romance novels are definitely cozy, but not in the way you might think! The defining characteristic of romance novels is that they feature main characters who fall in love and experience a "happily ever after." So when the weather is dreary, something that makes the reader feel light and happy is a nice break.

Romance is not a new genre by any means and Jane Austen is probably one of the best-known writers of romantic novels of all time. There are many variations or subgenres of romance so chances are there is something for everyone. Contemporary romance is anything set after World War II while historical romance is anything set prior to World War II. Paranormal romance blends fantasy and reality and often features vampires or werewolves. Romantic suspense combines mystery and thriller novels with romance and western romance often features cowboys, ranches, and rodeos.

Romance novels can also vary by their levels of "spice." Erotic romance tends to contain more graphic descriptions of sexuality and has been popularized in the last few years by the bestselling *50 Shades of Grey* trilogy. At the other end of the spectrum is inspirational romance, which is often centred on Christian themes and chaste relationships.

Romance novels have gotten a bad reputation over time. In my opinion, this is undeserved. While there are many so-called "old-school" romances that feature broody heroes and damsels in distress, there are many authors, such as Sarah MacLean, whose books feature smart and capable female characters who are by no means weak and helpless. Plus authors of color like Brenda Jackson are featuring characters of color and there are more books featuring LGBTQ characters than ever before. Romance is proving itself to be a very diverse genre. Gone are the days of covers adorned by women with heaving bosoms and Fabio dressed as a pirate, cowboy, or what have you. But the fact is no one should ever feel guilty about reading something they enjoy. So if you are a fan of the more traditional romance authors like Kathleen Woodiwiss or tried and true Harlequins, that is great because you will find lots of books at your local library branch.

In addition to being Valentine's Day, February 14 is also International Book Giving Day. To celebrate, PARL branches will be giving out free children's books courtesy of the Adopt-a-Library Literacy Program. Stop in during regular branch hours to bring home a new book.

February 18 is NS Heritage Day and this year's honouree is artist Maud Lewis. Among other events, PARL will be hosting three Tuesday night showings of the film *Maudie*, with funding support from the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage. *Maudie* will be shown in the Pictou Library on February 12th at 6:30pm, on February 19th at 6:00pm at the Westville Library, and on February 26th at 6:30pm in the New Glasgow Library. We will be also offering an online, Facebook Live presentation, "Channelling Maud Lewis: Art for Heart's Sake" – with local artist Anne Camozzi, broadcast from the Antigonish Town & County Library on February 19 at 1:00pm. All are welcome to listen in, from home. Anne will speak briefly about how Maud Lewis influenced her own art especially as a distraction from pain and winter. She will show her own paintings of Maud, talk about principles of how art and creativity help the brain demonstrations of simple drawing colouring and painting ideas for relaxation that anyone can do with cheap materials. And Anne will give an introduction to a proposed plastic mosaic community project and how everyone can help from home and eventually putting the project together.

For more information on upcoming library programs, special events and services, please drop by your local library branch, follow us on *Twitter*, find us on *Facebook*, or visit us online at www.parl.ns.ca.