

By Laura Stoll

“Call me Ishmael.”

“It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.”

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

Can you name the books with these famous first lines? Even if you haven't read them, you might know what they are just from these memorable words.

In September, we had a fun game at the Library to encourage patrons to check out new novels. We selected some books from our shelves, wrapped them up in brown paper, and wrote the first line on the wrapping. We posted the photos and invited patrons to borrow their books based only on what they could guess about them from their first line. We had quite a few replies, proving that a good first line can reel in a reader.

Below, I'll share the first lines from some new and popular books from the Kirkland Town Library shelves along with a brief summary. If any of them sound intriguing and you'd like to borrow them, contact the Library at 315-853-2038 or place a hold through the online catalog at www.kirklandtownlibrary.org.

“She was found on a January day in a field where the junipers grew, wound in a blue blanket with her name carefully stitched along the border with silk thread.” This prequel to a popular series traces a centuries-old curse to its source in the 1600s. Along with lessons about magic, our protagonist learns important lessons about love and life. (*Magic Lessons* by Alice Hoffman)

“The artist leaned closer to the decapitated head.” Researchers in Greenland discover a medieval ship buried far below the ice. Could it be Odysseus's ship on a detour from its ancient trip from Troy? This fantasy spans time, history, science, and legend. (*The Last Odyssey* by James Rollins)

“We'd been adrift for eight days when the ninny tried to eat the monkey.” If this first sentence makes you chuckle, imagine the humor that must follow. The book is a comic fantasy retelling of Shakespeare's “A Midsummer Night's Dream” but with the author's own imaginative twists and turns. (*Shakespeare for Squirrels* by Christopher Moore)

“The opposite of a hospice?” Is it a NICU? A maternity ward? The author contends that it's an emergency room, where everything is done to keep people alive. In fact, that's where the protagonist of this novel meets and falls in love with a man who disappears under mysterious circumstances. This thriller is about love and deceit that begins and ends in an adrenaline-filled emergency room. (*The Red Lotus* by Chris Bohjalian)

“I should have married money,” Ellen Fox said glumly.” The main character's disappointment at her life choices sets the stage for a fun story about a woman who sets out to complete a list of things she's never done before. Working through the challenge with a friend, our characters are reminded to live each day to the fullest. (*The Friendship List* by Susan Mallery)

“The orange gas giant, Zeus, hung low above the horizon, huge and heavy and glowing with a ruddy half-light.” A dream about life in new worlds turns into a nightmare when a galaxy-wide war erupts and Earth is in danger of annihilation. This is the first adult novel by the author of the popular *Eragon* series. (*To Sleep in a Sea of Stars* by Christopher Paolini)

“Ahmad was a ten-year-old boy when he was a ten-year-old boy.” You might have to read this first line a few times to grasp its meaning, which is that sometimes kids are forced to act older than they actually are. In this novel, Ahmad’s life changes from a typical childhood to a tumultuous adolescence and adulthood in revolutionary Iran. This is a historical tale with a dash of magical realism. (*The Immortals of Tehran* by Ali Araghi)

The old adage tells us not to judge a book by its cover. What about the first lines, though? Sometimes they can tell us a lot about the book we’re about to read.

P.S.: In case you are wondering, the first lines at the beginning of the article are from *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, and *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy.