

READERS' GUIDE

Cover Art by Vanessa Westermann

INTRODUCING *Cover Art*

Charley Scott is thrilled to be running a summer pop-up gallery in cottage country. Returning to the lakeside village, not on vacation but as an artist, she's determined to turn her hobby into a career. Joined by two other artists, including her childhood friend Kayla, the *Cover Art* Exhibit is a dream come true.

But, beneath the surface of this peaceful town, darkness lurks. There's a history.

Local chocolatier, Matt Thorn, is struggling to come to terms with his father's recent death and his legacy of deception. As Matt plans to expose his father's secrets, Kayla's husband is found dead, the result of eating Matt's boutique chocolates.

The homicide investigation threatens to make Charley's pop-up gallery a failure before it even begins. Luckily, art is all about perspective and she's always had a keen eye. Can she see past the obvious and find the killer?

IMPORTANT THEMES

Creative Freedom – Charley wants to prove herself as an artist despite self-doubts, Kayla's husband dismisses Kayla's art as a pointless hobby and discourages her from painting. Both Charley and Kayla rely on art to express their inner desires and to connect with others, though they struggle to balance their passions with the other circumstances of their realities, such as critics and financial realities.

Truth and Secrets – Charley investigates the murder to help her friend, despite being cautioned otherwise. Matt digs into his parents' past and his mother's death, and opens many old wounds. Both Charley and Matt are driven to uncover the truth behind false appearances and deception, just as other characters are driven to keep their secrets buried at all costs.

Family and Friendship – Charley returns to her grandmother's cottage and reconnects with her old friend Kayla. Matt grapples with his father's recent death and leans on his family friend, Jeffrey. Both Charley and Matt re-evaluate their relationships to their family and friends as old secrets are brought out to light.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Charley moves from Toronto, a big city, to Oakcrest, a small town with a vibrant cottage culture. How do these two cities and the lifestyles of people who live here differ from each other?

2. Compare and contrast Charley and her sister, Meghan. In what ways do Charley and Meghan differ from each other? In what ways are they similar?

3. Charley returns to her grandmother's cottage and describes her old room as "frozen in time" (Chapter 2). Matt sorts through his deceased father's office and compares it to "a mausoleum, frozen in time" (Chapter 3). How have these places stayed the same over time? How have they changed? What do these places say about the characters who occupy them?

4. Matt was taught how to cook by Jeffrey, a family friend. How do food and chocolate connect the characters in this book?

5. Many characters discourage Charley and/or Kayla from pursuing a career in the arts due to its perceived instability and frivolousness. Even Charley has some self-doubt about her artistic ability. How do these doubts affect the choices Charley and Kayla make in this book?

6. The murder suspects in *Cover Art* each had a motive to go after the murder victim. Notably, they each had a history with the victim that began as a partnership, before something went wrong. What was the breaking point that turned each of these relationships sour?

7. By the end of *Cover Art*, was Charley right to not tell Matt about Jeffrey's secret?

8. There is the old saying: "Don't judge a book by its cover." In *Cover Art*, Vanessa Westermann writes: "Book covers charm and they make a promise" (Chapter 16). What do you think she means by this? Do you find this to be true?



ABOUT VANESSA

An avid reader of mysteries, Vanessa Westermann is a former Arthur Ellis Awards judge, holds an M.A. in English Literature, as well as a Bachelor of Education, and has taught creative writing. Her debut mystery, *An Excuse for Murder*, was published in 2019. At the heart of all of Westermann's stories are strong female protagonists inspired by the heroines in her own life. She currently lives in Ontario.