

Research & Development

Penguin Book Cover

Brief Choice

Haruki Murakami's books and stories have been bestsellers in Japan as well as internationally. His writing is vivid, dazzling, experimental and imaginative and your cover design should reflect this.

Try to get your hands on a copy of the book in order to get a sense of the writing, this will only help to inspire your design.

The story is well known both in celluloid and print so it is essential to come at it from a fresh angle. It should appeal to a contemporary, enquiring and literary readership.

Try to design a new cover for a new generation of readers, avoiding the obvious clichés. Originality is key.

Your cover design needs to include all the cover copy as supplied and be designed to the specified design template (B format, 198mm high x 129mm wide, spine 25 mm wide). Please refer to the Submissions Details page for full details of the spec and how to submit your entry.'

Brief Choice

Norwegian Wood was written by Haruki Murakami in 1987. It being his first book to propel him into huge success. Infact 1 in 7 people in Japan have read this book. Its a cult classic worldwide, especially with a teenage and young adult following. This because of its relating themes such as mental health, societal norms and sexual exploration. I was very anxious to read this book because I am not the best reader and I do struggle to take in information. So I knew I would need to take lots of notes along the way which I did do. After reading the book I did feel quite accomplished and actually enjoyed it. I felt it was quite moving and a little hard to read sometimes. Some of the main themes I picked out were music, mental health and nostalgia. A big theme is suicide and the struggles that ensues for the people left behind. Theres a sense of disconnect from all the characters and that they are in a daze. That they're broken and can't be fixed. I didn't like the way it romanticised mental illness, painting the broken female characters as attractive I felt was a little diminutive. Although I would need to take in to consideration the time and geographical difference to my own plus the novel being through Turo's eyes. However this was defiantly an interesting read that had me thinking about situations in my own life.

After a couple days to think I wrote down the themes I felt were important and that I might want to explore. Ones that I felt quite strongly about was this sense of disconnect Toru had from everyone around him. That he was wondering through life in this daze trying to navigate life after this devastating event. Words like broken, loss and loneliness are things I would like to explore too. I feel they could really convey the novel and create an engaging outcome.



Existing Book Cover Research

I noticed a lot of reds and yellow firstly. I was confused with the wide amount of yellow used, if using colour theory yellow relates to enthusiasm, positivity, relaxation and opportunity. Things I would not say are heavily explored in the book. However red I felt made a lot more sense, standing for passion, urgency and relates to the Japanese setting from which the story originates from. I want to stay away from both these colour scheme as it seems to be a little over done. Instead I would explore different colours that I felt are better suited to the story and messages within. Another thing I don't necessary want to include is the use of trees and woodlands, it does relate to the story well. It references the walks through the woods where stories were told and its quite nice. However it is included in almost all of the adaptations of covers I've seen and I really want to explore something different in hopes of standing out. Something I enjoy about Arellano's cover art is the repetition of the wood circles. I take it as referencing the repetitive nature of his writing for instance the use of jazz music, mental health and nostalgic references constantly throughout. I really enjoy that subtle reference, its something I would like to explore as well.

I find the most recent cover of Norwegian Wood the most thought out however. The reversed flag for the setting of the book links back to the strong Japanese history represented in the writing. Along side the three pairs of legs which almost look like trees, this double reference I think is really clever. The legs also are spaced out perhaps referring to this disconnect from each character in the book had and how lonely they felt. Because of this its probably my favourite cover I've seen just purely for creating such depth in this simplistic yet stand out imagery.



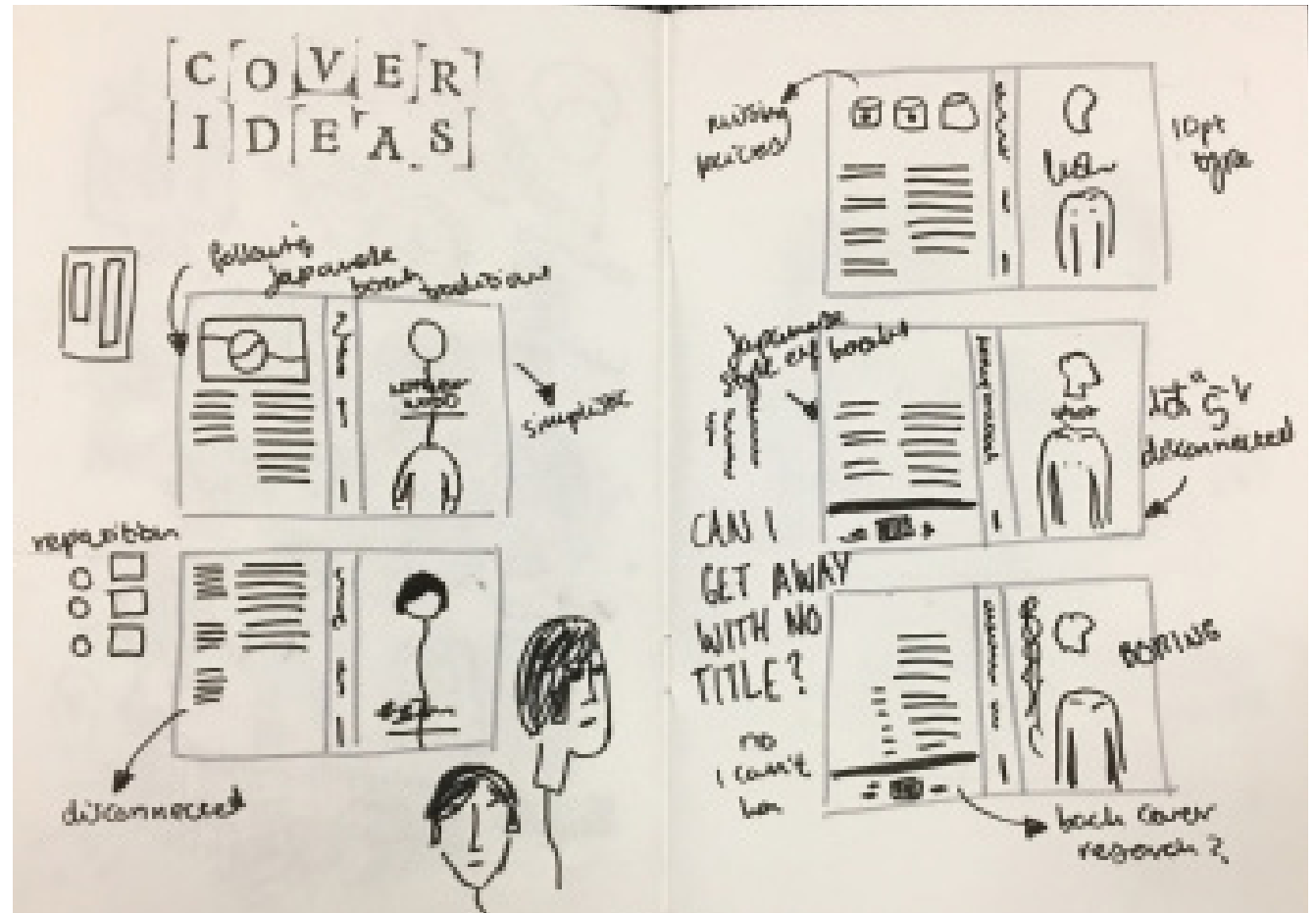
Idea Generation

I started creating some visual metaphors today and seeing where I could go with this book cover. As the book is told by Toru I thought about having him as the main piece and integrating some of the themes I had taken from the book. For instance lonely, loss and this disconnect from others. Using his silhouette was something I wanted to work with, then dispersing his head to show his disconnect and the way he is torn between two women. I like this idea but I think I wanted something different. I did do a few wood inspired sketches which I did like but thought were too simple and maybe a little overdone. I did however keep going back to this disconnected idea and thought about having Toru's head floating above him. Being up in the air disconnected from the situation. Like a balloon, his head still attached but not quite working correctly. I went forth with idea as I felt it was different maybe quite jarring to some people. It will hopefully grab some attention which is what I want from my outcome.



Idea Generation

After this I started on what will be my first iteration of my book cover. Firstly I wanted to think about colour as I think its quite important to a piece of work. '90% of snap judgements are made on colour', it can also really show emotion without being so direct about the subject. So using colour theory I chose pinks and purples for my book cover. Pink because it stands for compassion, love, immaturity and to admire. Its also used to fascinate which i'd like to have in my own cover. I chose purple to go with the pink because it stands for spirituality, compassion, sensitivity and mystery. Both colours I feel link to the themes of Norwegian Wood, for example the sensitivity of mental health and sexual exploration as a young adult.



Book Cover Research

Here are some book covers I like. The ones just below I enjoy for their simplistic nature. I find it clever the ways you can say so much with a subtle design. I love the *Against Happiness* book, designed by Rodrigo Corral, the yellow has such a punch and would defiantly stand out on a book shelf. It also has that use of communicating happiness which is one of the main subjects of the book. Combining that with the arched text its immediately recognisable as a sad face without the need for eyes. Its a clever way of incorporating text to seamlessly fit the imagery. I really enjoy it and its something I aim to do with my own project. I want to get to this level of professionalism in my own work. The second book I have here is *Witches of America* designed by Rachel Willey. I love the modern feel she takes to this quite old subject. It really fits the book subject of a modern journalist delving into the occult. The lack of colour follows the tone of the book and the contrasting gold ring I feel pays homage to the real witches of American, unlike the ones you might see in the movies. With the striking image of the dying crow it feels very ominous just like the book itself. I think its a really good representation of the writing inside. This level of insight is so important for creating a successful book cover. Its really inspiring to see such a clever yet subtle design.



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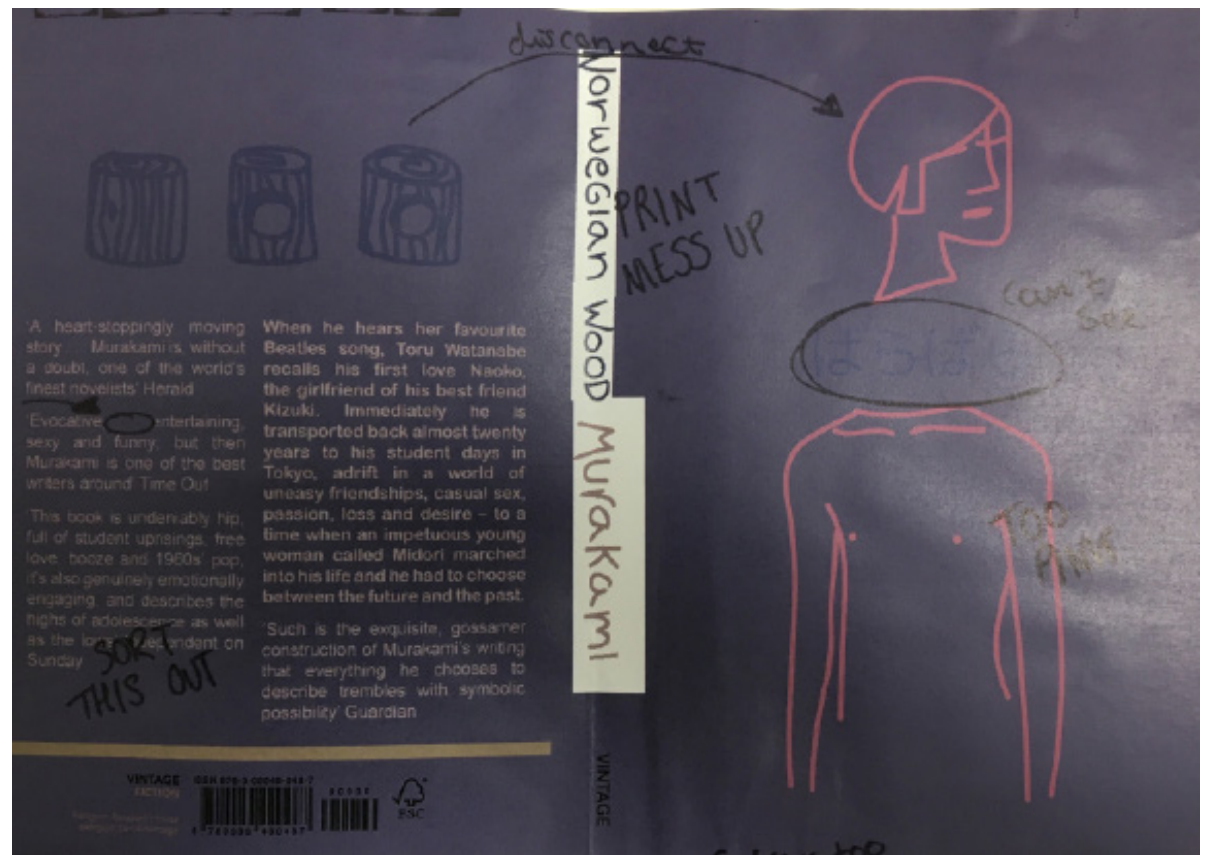
Sketch Ups

So after doing some more book cover research I feel inspired to start creating. Below was just a quick draft I created to show my ideas for the upcoming critique, I hadn't worked out the text but just input all the information. I started working with the image of Toru where he is decapitated. I used the original sketch because I like how it was organic, it feel more personal just like the book which is a personal account from Toru. This is also why I wanted him on the cover rather than one of the girls. I was going back and forth on the idea of having a string coming down from his head like a balloon to show his mind wondering but it didn't have as much of an impact. I want the cover to be quite jarring which will give an insight into the book. I also think keeping the cover simple will help to give the book a modern feel while also creating the negative space around Toru to show how disconnected he was from everyone around him. Lastly I quickly put in a little sketch on the back cover of three tree stumps to signify the three main characters. Two having a hole cut from them to show their loss and how they are broken.



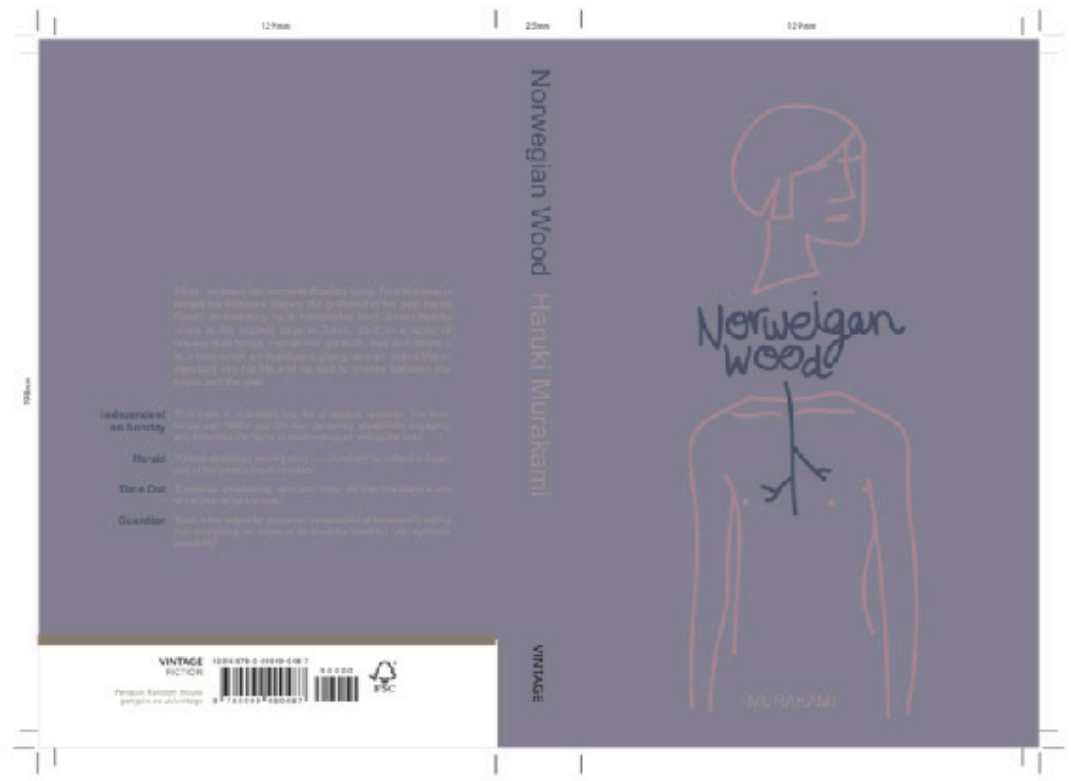
Mock Up

I was given some really helpful feedback from my peers. One of the first things that was said is that they love the colour scheme. It stands out from the other work and also gives this melancholy feel which is also throughout the book. They also liked the image on the front and said it was striking and represented the character well but could be played around with to make it look more refined. Also on the front is the type which they liked being in Japanese but I still needed to include the author and title. I wasn't sure where to put it when creating the draft so this is something I'll definitely have to figure out. My peers said it should be a bolder colour too as it doesn't stand out at the moment. Lastly my tutor said he didn't know about the back imagery. He said it felt disconnected from the front so I think I need to come up with something else. I want to keep consistently through the cover so creating something for the back should flow nicely. I'm super happy with how the critique went I have plenty to be getting on with.



Development

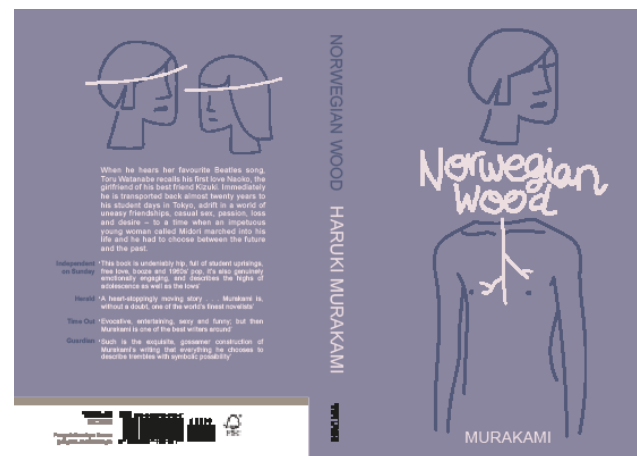
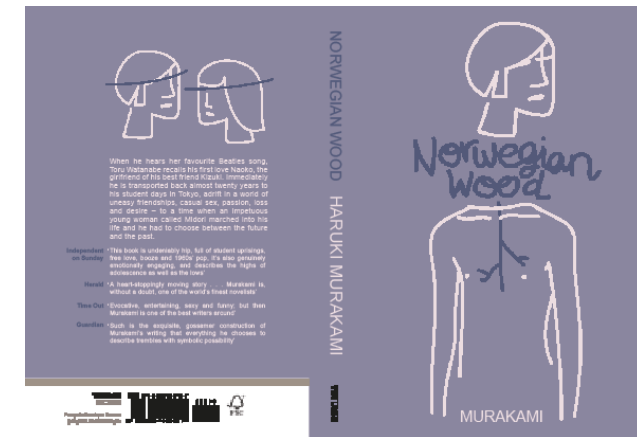
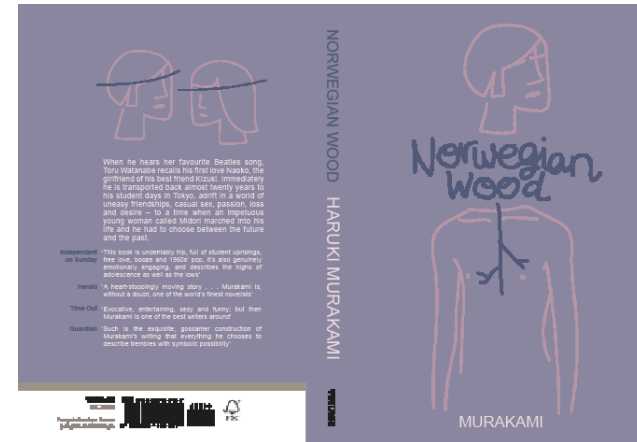
This is my updated book cover it has changed quite a bit from my draft. First change was the colour, after printing my draft I noticed the colour was very dark and not the colour I wanted. So I lighten it quite a bit, it feels a bit more emotive now. I then was thinking of how I can incorporate the title to the cover. I wanted something hand written as it feels personal, it could also reference the handwritten letters Toru writes to Naoko while she is in care. I created the title in Illustrator I wasn't sure whether I was going to keep it but my tutor said he enjoyed the imperfect nature it has as it encapsulates some of the characters in the book. I did however spell Norwegian wrong so I do need to fix that. Below the type I added a roots/veins to symbolise the reference to the wooden in the book but also it makes the body feel more human. The veins help blood to flow around the body keeping us alive and shows that Toru is alive and that he has emotions. It could be taken in a couple of different ways and I like that the audience could make their own reasons behind it. I changed the spine typeface to something more polished as it would be easier to read when the book is on its side. It's also more practical like this and matches the back bringing the cover together. Lastly I layed out the blurb and quotes on the back, making sure not to have an rivers. I took inspiration from the 1967 copy of Molecular and Cell Biology and had the names adjacent to the main body as a different way to separate them. I like the squared very neat nature it has, it reminds me of Japanese writings so I think it plays in to the theme of the book. Looking at it now I can see the type is too small to read so I think this could be put up a point or two and I should play around with the leading and tracking for a more unique look.



Development

We had our last critique today I managed to make the changes to my cover and incorporate a design on the back, which I feel does connect to the front. I'm liking where the cover is at this point but I still feel like it could be more refined. In my critique my tutor said he liked my overall cover and that it really encapsulates the mood and feel of the book. He said I could play around with the colour and swap them around to see if I like that better. My peers said I should include all three of the main characters on the back as it would make more sense. Plus having the same illustration on the front and back looks a little lazy so I want to change it up a bit. I didn't get too much feedback so I can focus on getting the cover to a really good standard ready for the competition deadline.

Below are two of the new colour ways I tried out. I think getting rid of the darker pink makes the cover stand out more. It also looks more refined which I wanted. I prefer Toru being the darker purple as its like he's a wall flower just watching the world go by, I think it represents his character well.



Outcome

Personally I didn't like Toru's head I didn't think it fit his body. I drew out a new head more in-style of the body and I like it so much more now. It still keeps the organic simplistic style but now looks like part of his body. I next moved on to the back illustration. I followed the same style as Toru and kept them simple. I changed their position to face forward's and kept the line across their eyes. It's there to show how they can be blind to the things around them and if they took a step back they might realise what's most important to them. Below is my final piece and I'm really happy with it. I think it is a good representation of the book without giving too much away. I really like the illustration it gives me confidence to maybe try this again on another project. I was quite daunted with the project as first but I have learnt a lot from it and I enjoyed it.

