Winter 1974

Feminist History Exam

The Feminist Press

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Have you ever thought of using a slide show to dramatize the findings of a feminist project you’ve been working on in your own community? If so, you probably wondered how much time was involved, how much it would cost and what special skills you might need to make one. We asked these same questions last year when we considered making slides for our Community Workshops on Children's Books in Mt. Holyoke, Mass., Baltimore, Md. and Westbury, N.Y. Ultimately, two of the Workshops decided to go ahead and make slides on stereotypes in local children’s book collections. Though there are several slide shows which deal with the subject, we wanted to produce shows about particular books in our communities. We’d like to share with you what we learned from those experiences.

If your project can be examined pictorially, and you want your audience to be dramatically involved, why not consider doing a slide show? Our Workshop groups chose to use slides because they make such strong visual statements, and because the children’s picture books we were analyzing made an ideal subject for color slides. Although we worried at first about the technical skills required, we soon found there was no mystique involved in producing a slide show. The basic techniques are simple enough, and you probably already possess the materials and skills you’ll need to come up with a satisfying product.

In planning a slide show there are three stages of work to consider. First you must determine your focus and collect your materials. During several lively discussions in the Westbury Workshop we decided which sex role stereotypes occurred repeatedly in books and organized them into the basic themes we wanted our show to emphasize. Then we looked for the most appropriate pictures, photos and drawings from children’s books to illustrate these themes graphically. The selection procedure takes the most time, as you argue one theme vs. another; one picture instead of another, and somebody has to drop a favorite point because it doesn’t fit the overall scheme. But all this is important since it gives you a clear idea of what you want to say, and how you want to illustrate it. When you’ve picked your illustrations, you’re ready to shoot the slides.

You’ll need a camera, one or two fairly heavy pieces of window glass and lighting adequate to take a clear picture indoors. You may either shoot your pictures by placing your material between two plates of glass, propping it upright on a table and leaning it against a wall. Or you may shoot your material from above by placing it flat on the floor with one plate of glass covering it. The glass is necessary to photograph pictures from magazines or books which will not lie flat without something to hold them down. A tripod is a good idea too. Do count on several camera sessions right from the start. After all, nobody’s perfect and you’re bound to want to reshoot some of your slides. When they’ve been developed, look at them carefully and discard any that are fuzzy or out of focus or that don’t project well. You may want to photograph some replacements or even new material that someone has just found.

Now comes the difficult task of integrating the slides with your comments about them. This may take several rewrites and will need patient work with the slides and the projector to insure the clearest possible presentation. By the way, it’s a good idea to show it to some friendly preview audiences for comment which will help you in your revisions.

Set up a date for the first showing and be prepared for requests for additional showings before other community groups. The cost will be about $35 for approximately 70 slides, including film, developing and reshooting. You may want to charge a minimal fee for presenting the show to groups who have budgets for speakers. The additional investment in terms of time and commitment is very high—but you probably wouldn’t have embarked on your project in the first place without knowing that beforehand anyway. And once you see a local audience watching your work, you’ll know it’s worth it.

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