

# Women's Studies: On Stage

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## Lever de rideau sur les Études de la femme

Une troupe théâtrale fait la tournée des écoles secondaires et des collèges en Ontario pour présenter aux étudiants comme aux professeurs des spectacles féministes.

'I never knew history could seem so real. It's so much more exciting to see it than just to read about it.' Those were the words of a grade eight student who had just seen a performance of our dramatic reading *Two Persons Called Sarah: A Canadian Woman Meets Her Heritage*. Bringing Canadian history to life has been our goal ever since the summer of 1976, when we learned that the new Intermediate History Guideline for Ontario would include special emphasis on the role of women in Canadian history.

At that time Tomorrow's Eve Theatre Company had been in operation for two years as a feminist theatre company, dedicated to performing plays by and about women. Three of us had been teachers, and we all had a special interest in Canadian history. Out of our association with Tomorrow's Eve and our teaching experience came an idea: to give students a look at their own history right in the classroom, through drama, and to provide a resource for teachers who were coming to the new Guideline with little or no preparation for the teaching of Women's History. One grade ten history textbook in use in Toronto in 1976, for example, covered a thousand years of Canadian history, mentioning only eight women.

*Two Persons Called Sarah* was the result of three months of reading and research. Diaries and first-hand accounts were our richest sources of inspiration. We found plenty of heroines, both women who made outstanding contributions to Canadian society, and quieter, unnamed figures from our day-to-day past. Our presentation is intended to help teachers take a new direction in the teaching of history; to focus not just on battles, dates, kings, and prime ministers, but on the lives of everyday people as they were shaped by the events and leaders of their time.

Our play opens in New France in 1663 with a scene between Marguerite Bourgeois and a homesick Daughter of the King. Later, we present the hardships of the crossings from Europe to North America, and we also show how women coped with the loneliness of early pioneer life. Moving through the centuries, we portray women who, as much as men, felt the

lure of adventure and new opportunities in the Great West, and women in the West and North who joined together to promote the great social causes of temperance, the vote for women, and later the women's peace movements.

Integral to our presentation is the discussion which follows it. We invite questions about the material, and lead the students to recognize the strength, determination, and character of the people who built this country. We point to the challenges that women faced in the past, and ask the students to consider their own roles as men and women in today's society. Are they really free to choose what they want to do or be? What pressures and obstacles will they have to face? What sex-role stereotypes operate against both men and women today?



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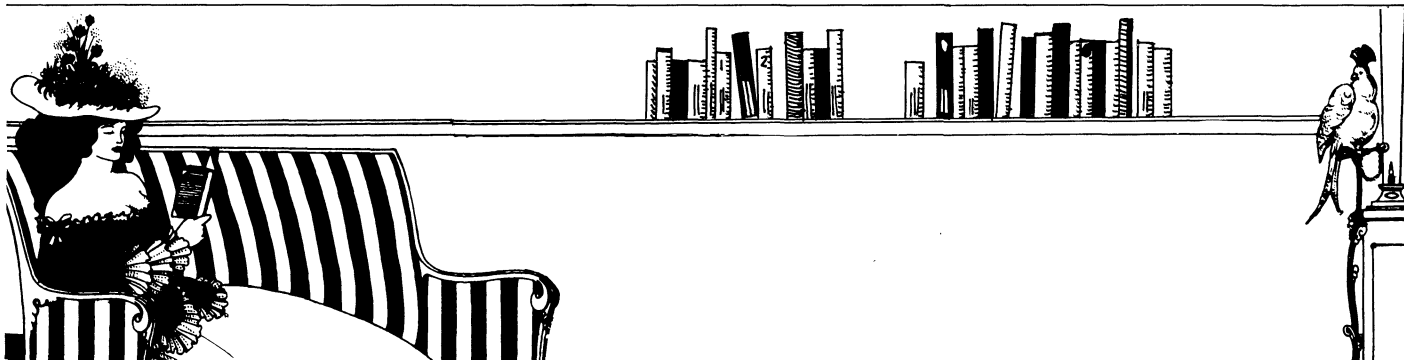
'Two Persons Called Sarah; A Canadian Woman Meets Her Heritage'  
Mary Giffin, Marion Gilsenan.

In one very spirited discussion like this, we found ourselves pitted against a group of grade thirteen boys who had already acquired all the attitudes of the 'macho male'. Afterward, the leader of the hecklers came up to us quietly and confessed, 'Logically, I understand that women deserve equal rights, but how can I change the way I act with girls? The other guys would laugh at me.' Spurred on by comments like this from students, we will be extending our coverage of Women's History with two new presentations this year. One explores the lives of pioneer women. The second spans the period from suffrage to the present, including the problems of sex-role stereotyping as they are found in society today.

*Two Persons Called Sarah* has been seen by five thousand teachers and students (grades eight-thirteen) in the Toronto area. Audiences have also included community-college classes, and teachers of History, Women's Studies, Social Studies, Theatre Arts and Family Studies. We have performed for Federation of Women Teachers groups and for the annual convention of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in Ottawa. Scenes from the play have also been presented on CBC television. During the 1978-9 season, *Two Persons Called Sarah* will be available for touring to schools and libraries around Ontario through Prologue to the Performing Arts.

## What Libraries can do for Women's Studies

Sherrill Cheda



### Le Rôle des bibliothèques dans les programmes d'études de la femme

L'auteur nous renseigne ici sur l'apport possible des bibliothèques aux programmes d'études de la femme. Son article comprend aussi une courte bibliographie féministe annotée qui fournirait une base utile aux professeurs.

We often talk about curricula, methodology, students, teachers, and criteria, without considering back-up resources. Nevertheless, it's fairly difficult to develop a theory, plan a course, make an assignment, show a film, or even find an address without resources, resourceful people, and access to these resources.

Women's Studies cannot be developed and taught without books, magazines, bibliographies, films, and other audio-visual materials; consequently, the librarian is a key individual in any Women's Studies planning. I would like to discuss here how an ideal resource back-up might work and I expect readers to pick and choose those situations which would be applicable to them.

There are three basic positions from which to start:

1. The librarian has to create the demand for the materials.
2. The librarian meets the needs of the teachers and students.
3. Both teachers and librarian develop the resources together.

(These three positions can also be seen as three distinct steps in sequential order). This article of course, predisposes that Women's Studies is a positive force meeting the needs of the student population on different levels for a variety of reasons.

Before creating the demand for Women's Studies materials, the librarian has to build up a collection in this area; consequently, it helps if she is a specialist in these materials or has an interest in the subject and is willing to read and use the bibliographic tools for collection-building. In either of these processes her consciousness will have been raised. A second step might be making the collection known. Hundreds of books on a subject may be in the library, but if the users aren't aware of them they can easily be overlooked. Displays of books are one way libraries have of bringing books to their users' attention, and displays of books by women or about women's issues guarantee their circulation and use. Usually books are snapped up from these displays so quickly that it is necessary to have a good back-up selection of even more titles. Other public-relations techniques are bookmarks listing recent Women's Studies books or 'pathfinders', short annotated booklists on specific subjects such as women's bodies, women and the law, feminist criticism, or any other topical issue such as rape, abortion, or wife battering. These are of great assistance to students who are working on debates or research papers. Suggesting these topics to them if they are undecided is another way to create a demand.

An active vertical file chock-full of clippings and pamphlets on women's issues will be well used in any library if the material collected is relevant. One idea for making it even more useful is to clip pertinent community information to the front of the file. For example, the person writing a term paper on rape would find a listing of rape-crisis centres with phone numbers on top of the file. The birth-control file would list planned-parenthood offices and numbers as well as hassle-free clinics in the area. This makes it possible for a student to have access to community information without having to ask for it.