Celebrate Rad Women

Oakland Public Library

Children

|

Tweens (10-12)

|

Teens

|

Young Adult

|

Adults

Celebrate Rad Women

Oct 7, 2016

$501-1000

$$$
Byline
Amy Sonnie, Literacy and Lifelong Learning Librarian, Oakland (Calif.) Public Library

It all started with a book, "Rad American Women A-Z," featuring profiles of 26 diverse women: artists and abolitionists, scientists and suffragettes, rock stars and rebels. Before long, Oakland Public Library staff came to work dressed as the Notorious RBG, astronaut Sally Ride and activist-author Angela Davis.

A few months later, we made Celebrate Rad Women the theme for the library's Women and Trans History Month, with storytimes, displays, a book list and some eye-catching posters.

As the new book, "Rad Women Worldwide," reaches shelves in September 2016, there are new chances for libraries to make the world a little more rad.

Advanced Planning

Before "Rad American Women A-Z" debuted at No. 5 on the New York Times bestseller list, Oakland Public Library snapped up copies and started planning a book talk with the authors — two local teachers, Kate Schatz and Miriam Klein-Stahl.

Why? In a world where gender stereotypes still dominate media, "Rad American Women A-Z" is a long overdue and welcome addition to any library collection. It is a powerful book, not just for who it celebrates, but also for what it asks of readers:

> *X is for the women*
>
> *whose names we don't know.*
>
> *...For the women who aren't in the history books, or the Halls of Fame, or on the postage stamps and coins.*
>
> *...The women who made huge changes and the women who made dinner.*
>
> *... X marks the spot where we stand today.*
>
> *What will you do to make the world rad?*

Good question! Just before Halloween, Schatz penned an article with costume ideas inspired by the book. While my niece excitedly planned her Patti Smith outfit, I thought: Library staff should do this! What better way to share this new book with

patrons of all ages?

Two weeks later, 22 library workers (from aides to administrators, from almost every branch) dressed up as rad women and transgender trailblazers. Naturally, then, we kept things rad for Women's History Month, too.

Part 1: Costume Contest

Our Halloween contest came together quickly. First, I sent an email to colleagues with the idea. A few people responded immediately and enthusiastically. With a core group of eight people in place, word spread and more staff joined. I created a simple Google spreadsheet for people to name their chosen heroine. **(View the spreadsheet under Attachments at right.)** In keeping with library values and the spirit of the book, we planned our costumes with some stated principles in place:

1. Choose someone you relate to and admire.
2. Respectfully honor women and transgender leaders who took a strong stand for social justice and broke barriers.
3. Be sensitive to avoid cultural appropriation when it comes to race/ethnicity, queer/transgender representation and disability. (More on this here.)

To get ready for the big day, we asked staff to choose a specific image of their heroine to emulate, find a colorful backdrop, and get ready to strike a pose in costume.

Can't wait? See all of the costumes now.

A note about inclusion: Transgender women are women, with no adjective needed to qualify their inclusion. However, we included the word "transgender" in our marketing to set a tone that was explicitly inclusive of trans women, butch women and gender-fluid changemakers. The book is inclusive as well. Just another reason we love it.

Part 2: Women's History Month Programs

In December, we began planning for Women's History Month. We knew we wanted to build on the momentum from Halloween and use the Halloween photos for a poster. Beyond that, staff were free to contribute program ideas that fit their interests and capacity. Programming options are plentiful, and that's part of what

makes this idea so great. With the book as inspiration, celebrating rad women can happen at scales both big and small. You could:

- Adapt your storytimes to highlight strong girls through songs and books
- Have teens create comics/wikis/videos about local heroines
- Invite a feminist author or gender studies scholar
- Create a scavenger hunt focused on local women's and trans history
- Invite local artists to design a mural featuring rad women

At Oakland, our Women's History Month events and displays came together in a decentralized way. I sent reminders out a month in advance and set a deadline for final calendar entries by the end of January.

A challenge we faced, as one colleague noted, is the gap in pre-K read-a-louds about the women featured in this book. Some solutions: Talk about who the women are and then read a book related to their cause or contributions to art, science and music. Or, have older kids read the book and make a five-minute puppet show to present for younger kids.

We also prepared a Rad Reads list of books, music and films. This was also a challenge due to the lack of children's books profiling many of these women. More books like "Rad Women" are surely needed. Still, the final list is quite long and includes great selections for teens and adults. We shared this with staff to help them prepare displays and we created an easy link for the public to remember: http://tinyurl.com/rad-list. **(View the list under Attachments at right.)**

Marketing

We knew we wanted to use the costume images as our starting point for promoting the monthlong series. We used Canva.com to create a large color poster with simple text and a link to series info on our website. These were posted at all branches and in storefronts across town.

Canva provides free, easy templates. A paid version of the Canva account also allows you to instantly resize your design. We did this to create additional images for Instagram, Facebook and a postcard. With such a visual campaign, social media was easy. We saw the most shares and engagement on Facebook.

We also created a series of fliers, with a similar look, in Canva. Individual fliers were created to promote three of the author events. Fliers were emailed to community contacts and posted at our branches. We also issued a press release for the series as well, which earned several calendar listings and one article in a local paper.

Without the costume contest, libraries could just as easily get permission to use art from the book, or use public domain images and book covers.

The real success: The young girl who asked if she could take two posters home. One for her bedroom. One for her classroom.

Budgeting

The biggest cost for this series was printing for the 11-by-17 posters, fliers and postcard in March. As part of the city, printing happens in house. If we contracted a printer, we estimate costs would have been about $700 for the posters (quantity 100) and postcards (quantity 750) and about $100 for the various fliers.

Additional costs included:

- $13/month for Canva Pro subscription
- $300 combined for the various author events
- $50 total in art supplies for displays

Day-of-event Activity

Part 1: Costume Contest

On Halloween, staff took photos at their locations and emailed them to a central address. I downloaded the font used in the "Rad American Women" book (I asked the author to tell me its name — it's Castor One) and set up a free account in the online collage app Fotor.com to make a uniform set of images. I created the text aspect of the images (“Z is for Zora”) in Microsoft Word and saved them as jpegs. This allowed us to create our very own A-to-Z photo album, which we shared on Facebook, Dropbox and Twitter using the hashtag #RadLibrariesAtoZ. On Facebook,

staff and patrons alike commented with additional info about the women and links to favorite books or websites.

All day we talked to visitors, young and old, about our costumes and the changemakers who inspired them. Some participants chose women from the book. Others honored personal heroines like June Jordan and our beloved Deputy Director, Jamie Turbak. Of course, we also won the library's costume contest, and a pizza party.

Part 2: Women's History Month Programs

In March, our Women's History Series unfolded over many days. The most common day-of preparation included printing the Rad Reads list to share and setting up a book display.

Program Execution

Across the board, staff furthered the mission of the book and started great conversations about the women we chose and why we admired them.

Specific program highlights:

- Staff hosted storytimes spotlighting famous women and stories about bravery, strength and being yourself. One librarian adapted lyrics for a children's sing-a-long ("Molly Works with One Hammer") and read Firebird by Misty Copeland. No cost.
- We invited authors Kate Schatz and Miriam Klein-Stahl for a reading and live art demo. We also set up a digital photo booth for social media posting. Supplies needed: colorful poster board, decorations of your choosing, books as props and a camera phone. Cost: $200 for authors; photo booth was free with materials on hand.
- We hosted Alex Gino, author of George (Scholastic, 2015), an award-winning middle-grade book giving voice to a transgender heroine named Melissa. Cost: $100 miscellaneous.
- A reference librarian researched and presented on the Women's Club Movement for a rousing local history talk. No cost.

- Oakland’s African American Museum and Library had two events planned that fit the theme, so we co-promoted those as part of the series. One event honored local author Jewels Smith who wrote "(H)afrocentric," a feminist version of "The Boondocks," and an exhibit celebrating Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement. Budgeted separately.

Advice

- Get your coworkers involved. Make it easy for them to participate. Provide some easy costume options and invite them to generate program and booklist ideas.
- Keep it rad, as in radical. Have conversations about social justice, feminism, inclusion and equity. Make sure your programming and costumes include diverse women and trans leaders who are role models for challenging injustice and taking a stand for social change.
- Encourage participation from your community. Ask people who else they want to see books about and find creative ways to start sharing those stories.
- Creative programming, especially for children, may be the best way to celebrate diverse women where books aren't available. Meanwhile, we can also support the efforts of We Need Diverse Books.
- Go global! With the release of "Rad Women Worldwide" we have dozens of new women to learn about, and a chance to celebrate international feminism.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Document
a_to_z_booklist.pdf
Document
costume_contest_planning.pdf
Download this Program as a PDF

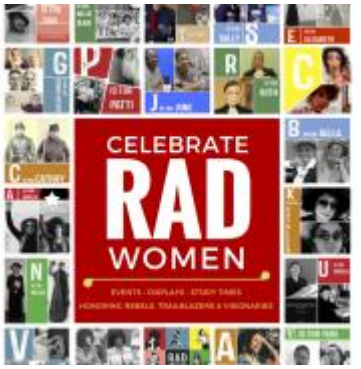
- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images









Image







More Programs

Oct 21, 2014
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ |
Image



National Women's History Month

Audiences:

Audience
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Feb 8, 2016
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ |
Image



Women's History Month: Inspiration

Audiences:

Audience
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Jun 25, 2015
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ | □□
Image



That's What She Said (Display)

Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
Aug 18, 2016
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ | $
Image



Strong Girls School

Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)