

a study and discussion guide for the film **Period Piece**



This guide is designed for use in a variety of disciplines such as:

- **Women's Studies**
- **Sex Education**
- **Psychology**
- **Sociology**
- **Health Education**
- **Women's Centers**
- **School Nursing**
- **Counseling Groups**
- **Adolescent Psychology**

We hope the moderator will look over the guide and choose the topics which best suit the viewers' needs.

Description of the film

Period Piece is a 30 minute documentary focusing on *menarche*--a girl's first menstrual period--which is a fundamental experience in every woman's life, yet one that is rarely celebrated. This film explores the general discomfort around the subject of menstruation, and the pain girls experience as they negotiate relationships with their bodies and their culture. By concentrating on the menarchal experiences of ethnically diverse women in America, the program provides insight into our culture's attitudes about menstruation: overt condemnation of menstruating women no longer predominates, but an unacknowledged menstrual taboo still exists in the more subtle forms of silence and shame. This silence has impaired communication between generations of mothers and daughters, and the intergenerational transmission of shame has affected many young girls' developing sense of self. In many families the subject of menarche is never discussed. Rather than celebrate this coming of age, we hide it and women are advised to deodorize, sanitize, and remove the evidence. Women aged 8-84 and from diverse cultural backgrounds tell their first menstruation stories with candor and humor. Their poignant stories reveal feelings about womanhood, family dynamics and society's complicated attitude toward menstruation.

Old educational films are revisited in new ways adding humor and historical perspective.

To order additional copies of the video or discussion guide
call 1-800-343-5540 or go to: www.jayrosenblattfilms.com

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Topics for discussion are listed in the order that they occur in the film

The Curse

This section introduces menstruation through some of the euphemisms used for menstruation.

- What is a euphemism, and why do you think they are used in reference to menstruation?
- List the euphemisms you've heard and/or used in reference to menstruation. Are these ways of referring to menstruation positive or negative ?
- Discuss the possible origins of these euphemisms. For example: in' the segment called "Hide Your Shame" the old woman explains how she made her menstrual pads by tearing up old bed sheets. The euphemism "on the rag" originated from the days when the menstruating woman was literally using rags for pads.

You Can't Swim

The women in this section mention briefly the myths or false information surrounding menstruation. Some of these myths have their source in the rituals and belief systems of other cultures. (For more information about the origin and meaning of menstrual myths, you will find the books on the suggested reading list helpful).

- Are any of the myths that the women mention true?
- What false ideas about menstruation have you heard?
- How do you feel when you hear false ideas about menstruation?

I'd be wearing my white pants

In this section the women discuss how they anticipated their first period--their expectations and their fears.

- Before you had your first period, what were your expectations about how it would be to menstruate?
- What were your fears?
- Discuss how your expectations and fears were influenced by family ~ friends, school, society, and the media.

Locker Room Talk

This section is about relationship with peers around the issue of menstruation.

- Did you discuss menstruation with your friends?
- Was there any competition with your friends or peer pressure about who would get their period first?

Are you there God?

This section deals with the preparation and/or lack of preparation for menarche that girls receive from school and family.

- How were you prepared by your family for the advent of menstruation?
- How were you prepared by school for the advent of menstruation?
- Do you feel you were adequately prepared to get your first period?
- Were you emotionally prepared for your first period? If so, how? If not, what was missing?

For girls only

This section addresses the educational films that were used in school to teach girls about menstruation.

- Were the films about menstruation that you saw in school helpful?
- What kinds of discussions did you have after the films?
- Discuss your opinions on whether or not boys should have been allowed to see those films also.

First period

In this section several women share the story of their menarche. Background information: the second woman in this section says that her mother slapped her when she told her that she was bleeding. The slap that she refers to is a Jewish tradition in which the mother lightly and lovingly slaps her daughter's face when she learns of her daughter's menarche. This ritual is meant to put color in her face and keep her looking healthy despite the fact that she is bleeding.

- Do you remember getting your first period? How did you feel about it?
- Can you relate to any of these women's experiences?
- Would you describe your first period as a positive or negative experience?
- Discuss the different factors that could go into making a young woman's first period a negative experience or a positive experience.

Hide your shame

This section addresses the shame girls and women feel around issues of menstruation.

- Discuss the possible sources or causes of the shame that the women in this section talk about.
- Discuss society's role in reinforcing shame about menstruation.
- Did you ever feel any shame or similar feelings about menstruation? If so, what aspects of menstruation did you find shameful? Was there shame in your family around the issue of menstruation? If so, how did it manifest?
- Are the men in your family comfortable with menstruation?

Pubic places

This section discusses the biological changes that accompany maturation and menstruation. The women in this section discuss their thoughts and feelings about these changes, and the connection between getting their period and sexuality.

- How did you feel about the biological changes that occurred in your body as you went through puberty and getting your first period?
- Was there a connection for you between menarche and sexuality?
- One woman mentioned that there was fear in her family that once she got her period, she would begin to have sex. Discuss this fear and it's possible implication in society's attitude to menarche.

Rite of passage

This section deals with the emotional meaning of menarche, and the transition from girl to woman. Background information: Many cultures provide rites of passage that clearly acknowledge a girl's transition into womanhood. For more information on these rites of passage, you will find the suggested reading list helpful.

- Are there any rites of passage for girls in America? If so, what are they, and which subcultures include them in their methods of raising children?
- Was your menarche acknowledged with a ritual or rite of passage? If so, how was it done, and was it meaningful for you? If no ritual or rite of passage accompanied your menarche, do you wish that there had been?
- Discuss the emotional meaning that your first period had for you.

Mother

The women in this section discuss their mother's response to their first period.

- What response did your mother have to your first period?
- Did your mother ever talk about her first period, and if so, what was her experience?

Father

The women in this section discuss their father's response to their first period and to menstruation in general.

- What response did your father have to your first period?
- Do you agree with the woman in the film who says that part of how a girl feels about herself as a woman has to do with how her father treats her around the issue of menstruation? Discuss this.

A great force

The women in this section discuss our society's view of menstruation.

- Discuss society's views of menstruation and/or attitudes toward it.
- Discuss how society's attitudes toward menstruation could affect the self esteem of girls and women.
- Do you agree with the woman in this section of the film who says that menstruation is invalidated by society because society is run by men?

When I have a daughter

In this section the women imagine how they would like to prepare their daughter for menstruation.

- Before viewing this film, had you thought about how you would like to prepare your daughter for menstruation?
- Has watching this film changed your ideas about how you would like to be involved with your daughter around the subject of menstruation?
- How will you prepare your daughter, or other girl children close to you, for becoming a menstruating woman?

Suggested Activities

- Have students collect magazine advertisements and video tape television commercials related to menstruation. Do these ads perpetuate shame? Discuss the portrayal of menstruation by the media.
- Ask students to interview family members (mother, grandmothers, and sisters) about their first periods. Are there generational differences?
- Ask students to survey their peers and compare their first period experiences.

Suggested Reading:

(of the following list, the first book Blood, Bread, and Roses is the most highly recommended)

Blood, Bread, And Roses
How Menstruation Created The World
by Judy Grahn
Beacon Press, 1993

The Woman In The Body
A Cultural Analysis Of Reproduction
by Emily Martin
Beacon Press, 1989

Red Flower
Rethinking Menstruation
by Dena Taylor
The Crossing Press, 1988

The Wise Wound
Myths, Realities, And Meanings Of Menstruation
by Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove
Bantam Books, 1990

The Mismeasure Of Woman
Why Women Are Not The Better Sex, The Inferior
Sex, Or The Opposite Sex
by Carol Tavris
Touchstone Simon & Schuster, 1993

The Curse
A Cultural History Of Menstruation
by Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, Emily Toth
Dutton, 1976