Strategic Collision
Innovative Teaching with Artists’ Books

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Background

- Baylor University has 6 distinct, physically separate special collections, each with their own curatorial staff and collecting focus
- Baylor Libraries staff are not always aware of the overlaps and connections between the special collections
- Classes for upper-level undergraduates are more likely to use special collections than those for new students
- Students are interested in artists’ books, but there is little critical or scholarly engagement with these works
Goals

- Increase collegiality among librarians and between librarians and professors
- Show how materials across collections are related
- Move beyond “show & tell” format to deeper engagement
Class: ENG 1304 (Thinking, Writing, & Research) with Prof. Kat Adams

How can showing artists’ books and “traditional” rare books together help first-year undergrads teach themselves about book history?
Class: ENG 1304 (Thinking, Writing, & Research) with Prof. Kat Adams

8. Jennings Collection of Medieval Music Manuscripts and Early Printed Music, nos. 4-5.
12. [Tibetan scroll]. Nepal: 1700s?
Class: ENG 1304 (Thinking, Writing, & Research) with Prof. Kat Adams
Professor buy-in is crucial for making classes successful

Intentional design of handouts and room arrangement can encourage deeper engagement with materials

Instead of automatically correcting misinformation, investigate why students think or infer something
Conclusions

- If you make space for it, students can draw conclusions on their own and explore new ways to engage with materials.
- Librarians often separate books in an artificial way, but these materials can and should be in active dialogue with each other.
- Not all constraints are negative!
New Steps & New Classes

- Keep inviting new participants
- Continue evolving and retooling: each class is unique
- What to do when classes don’t fit into the reading room?
New Steps & New Classes
Thank you!

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