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Title:

A week of NPR: a lesson for Journalism 1 classes

I. Overview and Rationale

This lesson is developed to be part of the study of media frameworks during an introductory Journalism class. It should expose students to quality journalism and how in-depth coverage is used effectively. It should inspire students to think comparatively about news programming and how radio measures up to print. It is also meant to show students how a serious news organization can have fun in reporting, as well as getting students excited about current events.

This weeklong lesson uses the model of a flipped classroom. Students are expected to independently listen to NPR for six hours (minimum) before the week of the lesson, and then are expected to listen to at least an hour daily of NPR during the week. This lesson therefore is malleable based on current events. It is also student directed—students must provide input based on what they hear on the radio.

II. Goals for understanding

Students should be able to explain the basics of NPR and the programming available. Students should gain understanding of current events, be able to explain how format shapes content, and be continually exposed to quality reporting.

III. Essential Questions

1. What is National Public Radio (NPR)?
2. Why does NPR matter to journalism students?
3. How does knowledge of current events impact the study of journalism?

IV. Critical Engagement Questions

1. What are the goals of NPR, and how are they reflected in the coverage?
2. How do radio reporters compensate for the lack of visuals?
3. What are the current events of the week, and how have they been covered on the radio?

V. Overviews and Timeline (Time needed: five days with 40-minute class periods)

For this lesson to work properly, students must listen to their local NPR affiliate before the beginning of the weeklong unit. In the weeks before the unit, the teacher must give radio listening assignments where students only need to listen to the radio.

Day 0 (several days before the start of this lesson): The teacher should have a day of NPR listening where the teacher turns on the radio and explains “how” to listen properly. The teacher should provide links to valuable programs on the class website. Students should also be encouraged to follow NPR news (@nprnews) on Twitter.

Day 1: What is NPR?

This day begins with a “ticket in the door” (worksheet attached). Give students ten minutes to complete it. Then use what the students wrote as a basis for discussion. Have each student tell the class one thing he/she heard on the radio (their answers from the first question). As students bring up certain programs or events, the teacher should ask the class if other students know anything about each or if they have something to add. This discussion should last 10-15 minutes.

The rest of the class will then be used to discuss the history of NPR and how it’s funded. First the teacher should let students share their knowledge based on their time listening. The teacher should explain the meaning of “public radio,” the similarity between NPR and PBS, and membership drives. This discussion should take about ten minutes. The teacher should then give students the day one resources (the history of NPR from npr.org and the NPR fact sheet) to read. Students should read each. The remaining class time will be used to discuss each. If there’s not enough time left, these will be assigned as homework.

Day one’s homework: listen to Morning Edition for that date (online)

Day 2: Morning Edition

(Note: for this lesson, the teacher will need several copies of the local newspaper. The teacher also needs speakers.)

For the first 5-10 minutes of class, the students will discuss what was discussed on Morning Edition on the previous day. Once the teacher decides everything has been discussed, she will then hand out the front section of the local paper from the previous day. Students will then work in pairs (for 3-5 minutes) to find stories that were covered on the radio. They will highlight them. The class will then discuss together (for 5-10 minutes) the comparisons: What stories were the same? What stories weren’t included? Did the inclusion of pictures in the paper help the reader?

Then students will decide a specific story to compare (the teacher may also choose).

This story should have some sort of package with a picture(s) and possibly some alternative copy. Students will read the story. The teacher will then play the corresponding story from Morning Edition. As the story plays, students should take notes on the following questions: What stayed the same between each story? What is different? How does the radio broadcast express visuals?

The class should end with a discussion of the comparison between coverage.

Day two’s homework: listen to All Things Considered for that date

Day 3: All Things Considered

(Note: for this lesson, the teacher will need several copies of a national newspaper. The teacher also needs speakers.)

This day will follow the same format as the previous one. In pairs, students will discuss the content of the previous day’s All Things Considered and then compare it with a national newspaper from the same date (for ten minutes). The teacher will then bring the class together for a short discussion summing up the differences. The class will then think about differences between programs they have studied, using the comparison worksheet (see attached). Students should take ten minutes to complete it using what they know and what they can find on npr.org. The end of class will be used to discuss the handout.

Day three homework: listen to the radio anytime before/after school, explore the variety of programs available on local NPR (ex: <http://www.wbez.org/programs>)

Day 4: Audience and programming

For this class, students will look beyond NPR's reporting of hard news. First, we will discuss NPR's audience. Some questions for students to discuss in pairs: What are the stereotypes of NPR listeners? Who does NPR "want" listening? How does NPR advertise? This discussion should take about ten minutes. The teacher should then have students think about what the audience expects from local coverage compared to national, as well as the other types of programming (This American Life, RadioLab, World View, On the Media, etc.)

The end of class will be used to think about talk radio and on-air discussions. The format of this should follow a show that welcomes audience members to call in and share their opinions. First the teacher will play a short segment of local show. Then one student will volunteer to be host and students can "call in" one by one to share their thoughts. The host should come up with a controversial topic for student journalists, i.e. local news doesn't matter, students can't make a national impact, or all student-produced media should be free. Students will be given points for following the format and not interrupting. The teacher should leave a few minutes before the bell for students to discuss what it was like to be on a "talk show" and the newsworthiness of opinions.

Day four homework: choose a short segment (2-7 minutes) from any program to share with the class, prepare for current events quiz (if needed)

Day 5: Your NPR program / Current Events Quiz

(Note: for this lesson, the teacher needs speakers.)

For the first 10-15 minutes of class, students will take their current event quiz. This quiz will be short answer and based on ten major events, local and national, from the past week.

For the remainder of class, students will "present" the segment of a program, each giving context (if needed) and explaining why they choose it. The class will listen to each one together. At the end, they will vote on what was the best. Hopefully this will spark controversy and discussion. Students will be given points for choosing a segment that's appropriate in length and giving enough justification for why they want to share it.

VI. Assessment

Students will be given points on their entry and exit slips. The current event quiz will be the same format as those given throughout the year and will be graded for points. Students will not have an end of unit NPR test, but will be expected to know important facts about it for their media framework test.

Day One: Ticket in the door

Name _____

1. What have you heard on NPR in the past week or so? Be specific: list programs, content, and people. Give at least four examples.

a.

b.

c.

d.

2. How is NPR funded?

3. What is different about listening to the news instead of reading it?

Day One Resources:
 Overview and history: <http://www.npr.org/about-npr/192827079/overview-and-history>
 NPR Fact Sheet (from http://www.npr.org/about/images/press/NPR_Fact_Sheet_6_13.pdf)

NPR FACT SHEET

DATE OF NPR, INC. INCORPORATION	February 26, 1970		
FIRST SHOW BROADCAST	<i>All Things Considered</i> , May 3, 1971		
DC PRODUCTION CENTER	1111 North Capitol St. NE, Washington, DC 20002		
NPR WEST PRODUCTION CENTER	9909 Jefferson Boulevard, Culver City, CA 90232		
NPR NEW YORK	11 West 42nd Street, 19th Floor, New York, NY 10036		
NPR DIGITAL SERVICES	25 Thomson Place, 5th Floor, Boston, MA 02210		
President and CEO	Gary E. Knell	<p>AWARD HIGHLIGHTS</p> <p>Since 1971, NPR and its journalists and programming have won hundreds of awards including 34 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, 59 George Foster Peabody Awards, 79 awards from the White House News Photographers Association, 23 Webby Awards (which includes nine Webby "Peoples' Voice" awards) and 20 awards from the Overseas Press Club of America.</p> <p>ABOUT NPR</p> <p>NPR is a nationally acclaimed, non-profit multimedia organization and the leading provider of non-commercial news, information and entertainment programming to the American public. Launched in 1970 as a radio network by a group of public radio stations, today NPR is among the most successful news organizations in America and a growing presence in digital media including podcasting, mobile applications and social media.</p>	
Number of Employees	840¹		
News Division Stations Broadcasting NPR Programming	more than 366¹		
Stations Broadcasting NPR Programming	987²		
NPR Member Stations	835²		
Non-Member Stations Airing NPR Programming	129²		
Total Weekly Listeners for all NPR Stations	34.8 million²		
Total Weekly Listeners for NPR Programming and Newscasts	27 million²		
NPR.org Average Unique Visitors Per Month	21 million³		
Average Monthly Downloads of NPR-Produced Podcasts	32 million⁴		
Average Monthly Unique Visitors for NPR Digital Platforms	23 million³		
NPR, Inc. Operating Budget, FY 2013	\$174.7 million		
FOREIGN BUREAUS (17)		DOMESTIC BUREAUS (16)	
Beijing, China	London, Great Britain	Atlanta, GA	NPR New York
Beirut, Lebanon	Mexico City, Mexico	Austin, TX	Orange Beach, AL
Berlin, Germany	Moscow, Russia	Boston, MA	Philadelphia, PA
Cairo, Egypt	Nairobi, Kenya	Chicago, IL	Portland, OR
Dakar, Senegal	New Delhi, India	Dallas, TX	Salt Lake City, UT
Islamabad, Pakistan	Rome, Italy	LA Bureau/NPR West	San Francisco, CA
Istanbul, Turkey	Sao Paulo, Brazil	Menlo Park, CA	Seattle, WA
Jerusalem, Israel	Shanghai, China	Miami, FL	Tucson, AZ
Kabul, Afghanistan			

¹ As of October 2012.

² ACT 1 based on Arbitron Nationwide, Fall 2012, Persons 12+, based on program broadcast times, Mon-Sun Midnight-Midnight.

³ Google Analytics, 3-month average, March-May 2013.

⁴ Splunk, 3-month average, March-May 2013.

Day Three Handout: Morning Edition vs. All Things Considered

1. List what you know about the history of All Things Considered.
2. Compare the two programs. Feel free to add anything about each you think I missed.

Morning Edition

All Things Considered

Type of Content
Tone
Sources Used
Length of Segments
Time on air
How much overlap?
Your opinion: Which do you prefer and why?