

# From NewsCasts to Fireside Chats and V-J Day

*Second course, Fourth grading period, Week 1*

Through radio's earliest transmissions, we can follow the major stepping stones that have shaped our times through coverage of events brought to life in America's living rooms, kitchens and cars by alert and astute journalists. Radio has provided us with vivid descriptions of the explosion of the Hindenburg and unspeakable conditions in the concentration camps of World War II. Radio has given us world leaders — in interviews and speeches — as well as the perspective of the common man. In this lesson students will research one event, write a script, secure illustrative clips and produce 8-10 minute shows, or they will plan and present six-minute taped presentations using three audio clips from a class-produced series, Great Moments in Radio.



## Enduring Understanding

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In the archived recordings of important broadcasts we can achieve a clearer perspective of our history, our culture and who we are as a people.



## Essential Question

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In what ways might the events captured by radio and the individuals recorded in international and national arenas provide a "first draft of history?"



## Objectives and Outcome

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- Through this interdisciplinary activity, students will become familiar with early radio broadcasters and the development of news broadcasting.
- Students will gain a perspective on certain historic events that were reported from the field by radio journalists.
- Students will become acquainted with the use of radio by U.S. presidents to speak directly to the public.
- Students will hone their organization, scriptwriting and editing skills or their public speaking skills.



## Suggested Time

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One week



## Resources and Materials

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March of Time ([www.otr.com/march.html](http://www.otr.com/march.html))

Museum of Broadcast Communication ([www.museum.tv](http://www.museum.tv))

The A.C. Nielsen, Jr. Online Research Center and archives have 4,000 radio programs and oral histories of broadcast pioneers.

NPR's Sound Library Directory: Next Generation Radio Training Projects ([www.npr.org/about/nextgen/howto/sound\\_library.html](http://www.npr.org/about/nextgen/howto/sound_library.html))

The Authentic History Center ([www.authentichistory.com/audio/1930s/history/19330304\\_FDR\\_1st\\_Inaugural.html](http://www.authentichistory.com/audio/1930s/history/19330304_FDR_1st_Inaugural.html))

The 70th Anniversary of FDR's Fireside Chats ([www.museum.tv/exhibitionssection.php?page=79](http://www.museum.tv/exhibitionssection.php?page=79))

The 60th Anniversary of D-Day ([www.museum.tv/exhibitionssection.php?page=83](http://www.museum.tv/exhibitionssection.php?page=83))

Hillard, Robert and Michael C. Keith, *The Broadcast Century and Beyond: A Biography of American Broadcasting*. Focal Press, 2005



## Procedure

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1. Since the 1920s radio has captured events that are now considered historic milestones and cultural signposts. Developments in technology influenced the ability to capture, transmit and broadcast events, but it was the reporters who covered the events, often in the field, who brought these events to life in the homes of average Americans.

Phillip L. Graham, publisher and president of *The Washington Post*, in the 1960s called the newspaper the “first rough draft of history.” Discuss this concept with students.

- In what ways has radio also presented a “first rough draft of history?”
- In what ways is that draft different from those on the written page?
- What effect does audio of the material covered have on a recipient? For example, a reporter is covering a war. What are the differences among print — reading about a battle with accompanying photographs; radio — hearing the reporter, ambience and actualities from the battlefield; and television — hearing the reporter and seeing motion pictures from the battlefield?

2. News and short news documentaries were not part of the very first radio programming. Technology was not developed for live recordings and most listeners would have thought hearing the news read was boring. Teachers may introduce students to the beginnings of radio news broadcasts to set the stage for students’ research and program productions.

The involvement of *Time* magazine, Henry Luce and Roy Edward Larsen, and competition with Lowell Thomas, make for an interesting beginning of *The March of Time* on radio:

- In 1928, *NewsCasts*, 10-minute newsbriefs, were heard on 33 stations.
- In 1929, *NewsActing* was added, 10-minute dramatizations of the news.
- Later in 1929, the two were combined into a 15-minute show of news releases and dramatized news that were free to stations in return for broadcasting ads for *Time* magazine.
- Lowell Thomas came on the airwaves, providing competition on NBC radio.
- From 1931-1945, *The March of Time*, ran Friday nights on CBS with a narrator and dramatized news. Reader/actors were carefully selected and at times listeners thought they were hearing the voices of actual newsmakers. Actors Agnes Moorhead, Art Carney and Orson Welles were among those who got their start in these newsacting scenes.
- In the same period, Lowell Thomas was sharing eyewitness accounts and Edward R. Murrow was broadcasting with reporters around the globe. Daniel Schorr reported from Holland in 1939 when the dikes broke (See [npr.org](http://npr.org) for *The Essential Journalist: Daniel Schorr*).

3. Teachers might want to focus on how U.S. Presidents used radio. This will provide a strong interdisciplinary tie to history and government classes.

If a group of students have selected Franklin Roosevelt and his “Fireside Chats” for a research topic, you may suggest that the group include the first bulleted material (below) in their presentation, then wait to present the comparison/contrast suggestions until after these students have completed their “Fireside Chat” presentation to the class. Another approach would be for teachers to model the presentation style and content they expect from students, using Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats.

Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke directly to the American people from the beginning of his presidency in what became known as “Fireside Chats.” He broadcast from the Diplomatic Reception Room in the White House ([www.whitehousehistory.org/](http://www.whitehousehistory.org/)). Every Saturday, American presidents continue this tradition of going directly to the public. The opposition party’s representative responds with its perspective after each broadcast.

- Listen to FDR’s first “Fireside Chat.” What is his topic? Why was it important for the President so early in his presidency to talk to the American public?
- Listen to an archived presidential radio broadcast of another president to compare and contrast with FDR’s style and approach. Analyze the topics selected for presidential conversation with the public. How does the style of writing differ?
- Listen to the most recent presidential radio talk and the opposition party’s response. Compare and contrast these to FDR’s style, approach and subject matter. Compare and contrast the current broadcasts to each other in substance and style. Does the American public benefit from this communication?

We have included “Presidential Firsts and the Media” in this lesson. It might be used in several ways. The answer sheet includes Web sources of the correct answers. You might list these resources for students to use in a Web hunt for the correct answers. Students will have to read the resources to find which questions each source answers. This approach will give students practice in using the Internet for research, meet technical skills integration requirements of many school systems, acquaint students with some reliable sources and give them a challenge to see who will be first to get all the answers correct.

4. Provide students with a copy of “Good Evening, Everybody,” a list of key events in radio news coverage and historic events covered by radio that is included in this lesson. Ask students to select one of the listed individuals, series of programs, events, or broadcast companies to research. [The title for this handout comes from radio pioneer Lowell Thomas. Thomas was the first reporter to enter Germany following World War I, bringing back eyewitness accounts. Between his standard opening—“Good evening, everybody”—and his closing—“So long until tomorrow”—people were assured they were hearing a voice of authority.]

To meet and re-enforce academic standards in your school system, students could prepare an annotated bibliography of the sources used.

We suggest that students be asked to do the following:

- A. Summarize the event, broadcast career of the individual, company history or individual’s career and use of radio.
- B. Locate three to five :15 to :30 clips from the recordings to share with the class in their productions or oral presentations. These clips should illustrate the program’s approach and subject matter, the individual’s breadth of coverage and broadcast career, a broadcast company’s programming decisions or use of the media to communicate with the American public.

- C. State the significance of the broadcast from the following perspectives:
- Meeting expectations of broadcast owners and producers
  - Establishing expectations and setting standards for other reporters/presidents/companies to follow
  - Making an immediate impact on the public
  - Placing that event and this recording in the perspective of international or national history or culture.
- D. Describe the approach used by the reporter or speaker: painting a picture through sound and words or primarily stating important information and using actualities.
- E. In what way did this particular broadcast influence future radio (and television) content and method of coverage?

5. Students are to research their topics, select three to five audio clips to illustrate their points, and write a script for a six- to eight-minute program that they will produce and present as part of a class-produced series, Great Moments in Radio. Students should name their segments of the series. As an alternative to the taped presentation, students could prepare eight- to 10-minute oral presentations that include spots for three to five audio clips.

Teachers, please note the Resources and Materials section at the beginning of this lesson. These on-line and print sources provide most of the information, including audio, that your students will need for a foundation in their topics.

6. Teachers may wish to meet with students after two days for a report on their progress, including the clips that they plan to share with the class. Teachers can also plan the order of presentations after these meetings.

7. Students present the programs that they have written and recorded on CDs. If teachers chose to assign the oral presentation approach, students will orally present their programs as if before a live audience with their audio cued and ready for a smooth, organized presentation.

These presentations should give students a sense of history unfolding, personalities and stations emerging, and radio news coverage's development.

The best of these reports might be broadcast as a series on the student radio station, podcast on the school's Web site or shared with members of the history and journalism/broadcast departments.



## Homework

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Conduct research of the selected event, persons, companies or programs and time period. Complete an annotated bibliography. Students plan and write the script (including selected taped clips) for a 6-to -8-minute program to be produced for class presentation and possible broadcast or plan and practice an 8-to-10-minute oral presentation that includes spots for three to five audio clips.



## Assessment

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Students have completed research and provided an annotated bibliography.

Students have exhibited critical thinking in selecting audio clips to illustrate the event, person or company, and included all requirements of the assignment.

The final product exhibits proficiency in editing with smooth transitions from script to audio clips and back to script if teachers assign the taped presentation.

The final product of the oral presentation option should be recorded and critiqued for public speaking skill as well as organization and content.



## Academic Content Standards

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Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. (Standard 8, NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts)

Uses electronic media to gather information (e.g., databases, Internet, CD-ROM, television shows, cassette recordings, videos, pull-down menus, word searches). (McRel, Language Arts, Writing, Standard 4, Grades 9-12, #4)

Determine the accuracy and truthfulness of one source of information by examining evidence offered in the material itself and by comparing the evidence with information from multiple sources (DCPS English Language Arts, 12.I.4)



## Industry Standards and Expectations

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[Media archives] “preserve, present, and examine the records created through a radio microphone and a television camera lens — records that tell the stories of America, its history, its culture, and its people.” (Bruce DuMont, founder/president & CEO, The Museum of Broadcast Communications)

# Good Evening, Everybody

*Radio has provided us with a vivid descriptions of the explosion of the Hindenburg and unspeakable conditions in the concentration camps of World War II, interviews with world leaders and prominent citizens, the speeches of public personalities and the day-to-day news of the nation and the world.*

*From this list of key events in radio news coverage and historic events covered by radio, select a person, series of programs, or broadcast company to research.*

1923 — Armistice Day broadcast by Woodrow Wilson

1928 — NewsCasts are broadcast daily on 33 stations

1930 — Lowell Thomas begins a daily newscast on NBC

1931 — March 6, The March of Time first broadcast on CBS radio

1933 — March 4, Radio covers the first inauguration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt

1933 — March 12, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first "Fireside Chat"

1934 — October 5, March of Time covers Lindburgh baby kidnapping

1937 — May 5, Herbert Morrison describes and records explosion of the Hindenburg

1940 — August 24-September, BBC and CBS air London After Dark war reports

1941 — December 7-8, radio coverage of Pearl Harbor bombing, Presidential response

1944 — June 6, D-Day and liberation of Europe coverage

1945 — April 12-15, Death and funeral of Franklin Delano Roosevelt

1945 — April 15, Edward R. Murrow reports from Buchenwald concentration camp

1945 — May-August, From V-E Day to the dropping of atomic bombs to V-J Day

# Presidential Firsts and the Media

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Check your knowledge of American presidential firsts related to the media. A President may have more than one "first."*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. First newspaper publisher elected President
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. First President to have a telephone in the White House
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. First President to be interviewed by a female reporter
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. First President to install a radio in the White House
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. First Presidential Inaugural Ceremony to be broadcast by radio
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The first televised inauguration was for this President
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. First President to give a speech live over radio
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. First presidential nomination to be disseminated by telegraph
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. President who held the first presidential press conference at the Executive Offices of the White House and regular news briefings
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. First President to appear on black & white television
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. First President to broadcast a radio address from the White House
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. First President to give a televised address from the White House
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. First President to appear on color television
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. First televised presidential debate participants
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. First radio broadcast of the President's State of the Union Address

## Extra Credit

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- \_\_\_\_\_ A. President who hosted a televised tour of the renovated White House with news reporter Walter Cronkite
- \_\_\_\_\_ B. First President to host a senior prom in the White House



# Answers — Presidential Firsts and the Media

1. Warren G. Harding, 29th President (1921-1923) was editor and publisher of an Ohio newspaper ([www.ipl.org/div/potus/wgharding.html](http://www.ipl.org/div/potus/wgharding.html)).
2. Rutherford B. Hayes, 19th President (1877-1881). His phone number was “1” ([www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org)).
3. John Quincy Adams, 2nd President (1797-1801). American journalist Anne Royall knew that President Adams often swam nude in the Potomac River at 5 a.m. Since Adams had refused an interview many times, Royall went to the Potomac, sat upon Adams’ clothes and would not move until the interview was completed. Adams was also the first president to be photographed, but this took place in a more proper setting ([www.ipl.org/div/potus/jqadams.html](http://www.ipl.org/div/potus/jqadams.html)).
4. Warren G. Harding, 29th President (1921-1923). On Feb. 8, 1922, a radio was installed ([www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/jb/jazz/radio\\_1](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/jb/jazz/radio_1)).
5. Calvin Coolidge, 30th President (1923-1929) was the first President to have his inaugural speech broadcast on the radio on March 4, 1925 ([www.americaslibrary.gov](http://www.americaslibrary.gov), [www.radiotv.house.gov](http://www.radiotv.house.gov) — Milestones).
6. Harry S. Truman, 33rd President (1945-1953). The telecast took place in 1949 ([www.archives.gov/](http://www.archives.gov/)).
7. Warren G. Harding, 29th President (1921-1923) on June 14, 1922, at the dedication of the Francis Scott Key Memorial at Ft. McHenry in Baltimore, Md., on WEAR ([www.bcpl.net/~etowner/ww1\\_2.html](http://www.bcpl.net/~etowner/ww1_2.html)).
8. James Knox Polk, 11th President (1845-1849). “Since the Democrats were in convention in Baltimore, Samuel B. Morse informed members of Congress of the ‘darkhorse’ presidential nomination of former House Speaker James K. Polk.” ([www.senate.gov/vtour/morse.htm](http://www.senate.gov/vtour/morse.htm)).
9. Woodrow Wilson, 28th President (1913-1921), ([www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org))
10. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 32nd President (1933-45). He was televised at the opening ceremonies of the New York World’s Fair on April 30, 1939 ([www.ipl.org/div/farq/POTUSFARQ.html](http://www.ipl.org/div/farq/POTUSFARQ.html)).
11. Calvin Coolidge, 30th President (1923-1929) on Washington’s birthday, 1927 ([www.olderadio.com](http://www.olderadio.com), [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org) — Technology & Communication)
12. Harry S. Truman, 33rd President (1945-1953) on October 5, 1947 ([www.ipl.org/div/farq/POTUSFARQ.html](http://www.ipl.org/div/farq/POTUSFARQ.html))



13. Dwight David Eisenhower, 34th President (1953-1961) on June 7, 1955, at the 40th reunion of his class at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point ([http://novia.net/~ereitan/rca-nbc\\_firsts.html](http://novia.net/~ereitan/rca-nbc_firsts.html)), and June 17, 1955, on NBC's Home Show. President Eisenhower gave the first televised presidential news conference in 1955 ([www.whitehousehistory.org/](http://www.whitehousehistory.org/) — Technology & Communication).
14. Senator John F. Kennedy, the Democratic nominee, and Vice President Richard M. Nixon, a Republican, debated on Sept. 26, 1960 ([www.museum.tv/archives/etv/K/htmlK/kennedy-nixon/kennedy-nixon.htm](http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/K/htmlK/kennedy-nixon/kennedy-nixon.htm)).
15. Calvin Coolidge, 30th President (1923-1929) on Dec. 6, 1923, aired on 22 stations (<http://radiotv.house.gov> — Milestones). The first televised broadcast of the State of the Union took place on Jan. 6, 1947. The President was Harry S. Truman.

### Extra Credit

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- A. Harry S. Truman, 33rd President (1945-1953) hosted Cronkite in 1952 ([www.whitehousehistory.org/06/subs/06\\_b04.html](http://www.whitehousehistory.org/06/subs/06_b04.html)).
- B. Gerald R. Ford, 38th President (1974-1977) for his daughter, Susan.