Radio Days: A WebQuest


By Cynthia Matzat

[Introduction] [Task] [Resources] [Process] [Evaluation] [Conclusion]

Introduction

Back before there were televisions and computers, there was radio. Families of the 1930s and 1940s would gather around the radio and listen to their favorite programs such as Little Orphan Annie, Amos and Andy, The Guiding Light, and The Shadow. Millions of Americans tuned in daily to their favorite programs, just as today we tune in to our favorite television shows. Radio allowed the listener to create their own images of characters and settings, a luxury that we no longer have in these days of television. Take a journey back to the "Golden Age of Radio" as you learn about Radio Days.

The Task

You are an employee of a local radio station. Your boss, who grew up during the "Golden Age" of radio, has decided to add new programming to the station. He has assigned you and your co-workers the task of writing and producing a new radio drama. Your boss expects you and your co-workers to research the history of radio drama and use this knowledge to create a script for a new radio mystery/suspense series. He wants the script to contain references to sound effects as well as the actors' dialogue. In addition to the script, you and your team are to present a recorded demo-version of the play, complete with sound effects, that will be recorded on audio cassette.

The Process

Step 1:

Each person in your group is to select one of the following positions. A job description for
each position is included.

Playwright

It is the responsibility of the playwright to write the actual script for the radio drama. The other members of the group will provide creative input, but the playwright will be held accountable for actually writing the script on paper.

It is the responsibility of the Foley artist to create the sound effects for the radio drama. This person will be responsible for ensuring that all props are brought to the recording studio when needed. The Foley artist will make sure that the playwright includes all sound effects in the script.

It is the responsibility of the advertising executive to write the commercials for the radio drama. This person should decide where the commercials should be placed in the script and inform the playwright of these decisions.

All members of the group are expected to contribute in each area. The person in charge of each area will make the final decisions.

Step 2:

Once each group member has selected a job, you are to research the history of radio drama. Your boss believes that you can not create an effective radio drama without knowing some of the history of the art. She has assigned the group the task of creating a timeline showing the evolution of radio in comparison to major events of history. She wants you to focus on the time period of 1930 - 1945. Because you do live in the age of computers, the internet will provide you with much of the information you need. The following sites will assist you and your group in the construction of the timeline.

Old-Time Radio: The Golden Years

The History of Radio

Any Year in History

This site provides a table that shows the year that many radio programs began.

This site provides a series of articles that "includes some of the 'environment' surrounding the periods: examples of what folks of the time thought were important, and affected their lives."

Provides historic events and birthdays that occurred during a specific month and year in history.

All members of the group need to contribute to the construction of the timeline. Select one person to actually write the timeline on paper. Be creative. Feel free to add graphics or drawings to make your timeline more visual.

Click here to see some example timelines made by former students.
Step 3:

Each member of the team is to research his or her particular area. References for each area are included below.

**Playwright**

Format for a Radio Play Script

This page presents a sample format for writing a radio play script. Read through this page so you will be familiar with this format. This is the format you will follow when you write your own script. You might want to print this page and use it for reference when you write your own script.

**Vintage Radio Script Library Page**

Click on one of the scripts provided on this page. Read through the script to become familiar with what a real radio play script looks like. Pay particular attention to the story line, noticing how they present the setting, character, plot, etc.

**1938 "War of the Worlds" Radio Broadcast Waves**

Listen to some of the sound files on this page. Pay particular attention to how the actors read the script. When this broadcast was originally aired, people in the United States actually believed that Earth was being invaded by aliens. A copy of the script for this play can be found at http://members.aol.com/jeff1070/script.html.

**Foley Artist**

Sound Effects

Read through this history of sound effects in radio. Pay particular attention to the examples given of how to make particular sounds.

**The Art of Foley**

Read the section titled "What is Foley" and view the movie clips located near the end of the page. This should provide you a good definition of what Foley artists do.

**Movie Sound Effects**

Read through the Insights & Connections and the Vocabulary sections. This will add to your background knowledge of sound effects. You might also consider trying to do the Main Activity.

**Radio Sound Effects**

Read through the information in this site, focusing your attention on the section titled "Using Sound Effects."

**Advertising Executive**

Radio Sounds Showcase

Listen to the wav files for some of the 1930s era commercials. This will give you some ideas of how radio commercials were designed.


1/15/2009
Click on one of the scripts provided on this page. Read through the commercials in the script. Use this as a guide to writing your own advertisements for your radio play. Pay particular attention to where the commercial interruptions take place.

Step 4:

Once you have researched your particular area, get together with your group members and discuss your findings. This is the chance for all group members to give their input on script ideas, sound effects, commercials, etc.

Step 5:

After each member has contributed his or her ideas, you should write your part of the radio drama. When all parts have been written, all parts should be revised by the other members of the group. A final copy should then be written.

Step 6:

Rehearse your radio drama, including the commercials and sound effects. Make sure that you put a lot of emotion and feeling into your reading of the script.

Step 7:

Record your drama on audiocassette, or if you have the capability, create a podcast, and turn it in to your boss for final approval.

Resources

This is a list of all of the web sites linked to in this assignment.

Any Year in History (http://www.scopesys.com/year)
Format for a Radio Play Script (http://www.greatnorthernaudio.com/audio_theater/format.txt)
Vintage Radio Script Library Page (http://www.genericradio.com)
1938 "War of the Worlds" Radio Broadcast Wavs

Sound Effects (http://www.old-time.com/sfx.html)

The Art of Foley (http://www.marblehead.net/foley/)

Movie Sound Effects (http://www.newtsonapple.tv/TeacherGuide.php?id=1300)

Radio Sound Effects (http://www.greatnorthernaudio.com/audio_theater/Sound_Effects.html)

The Radio Sounds Showcase (http://www.earthstation1.com/radio.html#Commercials)

Evaluation

Each member of your group will be given an individual grade and a group grade.

You will be graded individually on your part of the final script (i.e. playwright - script, Foley artist - written description of the sound effects/effectiveness of sound effects, advertising executive - written commercials).

Your group grade will be based on your actual performance of the radio play as well as the overall effect of the script as a whole. It will also include your timeline, which will be evaluated on accuracy as well as creativity.

The individual grade and the group grade will each be worth fifty percent of the total grade.

To see a grading rubric, click here.

Conclusion

The "Golden Age of Radio" is an important part of the history of our country. It provided people with news of wars, messages of encouragement from our leaders, and was a source of entertainment to the masses. It had the power to persuade as well as to entertain.

After completing this WebQuest, you hopefully have a better understanding of the history of radio drama and have a better understanding of what it takes to create a radio drama.

To learn more about old-time radio, visit Old Time Radio or The Original Old-Time Radio WWW Pages. To learn more about the War of the Worlds broadcast, visit War of the Worlds.

E-mail any questions or comments to cynthia@thematzats.com