

## SOUNDBITES ACTIVITY #3

### AUDIO STORYTELLING

# WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT RADIO?

#### SET-UP:

**GUIDING QUESTION:** What makes radio different from other mediums, like print and video?

#### TOOLS:

- Audio/Video: Ability to watch and listen to video and audio stories on the internet
- Writing materials: Something to write with and something to write on

#### VOCABULARY:

- **Medium:** A means for storing or communicating information. Could include television, radio, print, and more.
- **Cadence:** The rhythmic flow of a sequence of sounds or words.
- **Format:** The way a message is constructed, including the creative components that are used in putting it together.
- **Active listening:** The skill of concentrating one's full attention and focus on the content they are engaging with.

#### INTRODUCTION

Radio producers like to say that “radio is the most visual **medium**.” How can that be? In this activity, you’ll explore three stories and the question: What makes radio different from other mediums, like print and video?

## SOUNDBITES ACTIVITY #3

### FREE WRITE

Let's begin with a free write! Set a timer for three minutes. Write for the full three minutes, responding to the two prompts below. In a free write, you don't need to worry about spelling or grammar, or even if your writing makes sense. The only rule is that you keep writing for the full three minutes.

#### FREE WRITE PROMPTS:

1. When you listen to the radio or to a podcast, what do you hear?
2. What makes radio different from other mediums, like print and video?

### WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT RADIO?

In your free write, you might have identified some of the things that make radio special— it's one of the oldest forms of media, it's portable (you can take it with you), you can do other things while listening, it allows you to use your imagination, it's intimate, it feels like you are talking to a friend, you can hear the emotion and tone in someone's voice, and so on.

Now we'll listen to three stories: 1) an interview with a radio producer, 2) a youth-produced non-fiction audio story, and 3) a fiction audio story. We invite you to practice **active listening**, or the skill of concentrating your full attention and focus on the content you are listening to. Find a comfy space to listen, maybe even a space where you can close your eyes and not be interrupted. Bring something to write with along with you.

As we listen to these stories, we'll keep asking the question: "What makes radio special?"

### LISTENING #1: THIS IS RADIO — GLYNN WASHINGTON

Our first piece is an interview with radio producer Glynn Washington. Glynn is the executive producer of [Snap Judgment](#), a radio show and podcast distributed by WNYC Studios in New York City. Snap Judgment produces "real stories with killer beats." In this video, you'll hear clips from Snap Judgment stories mixed in with Glynn's interview. **As you listen, think about what catches your ear. What makes you want to keep listening?**

This video comes from a 2014 video series about people who make radio called [This is Radio](#) by producer Andrew Norton for Transom.org.

[> WATCH: THIS IS RADIO — GLYNN WASHINGTON \(5 min\)](#)

## SOUNDBITES ACTIVITY #3

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: THIS IS RADIO — GLYNN WASHINGTON

- Glynn begins the video by saying, “Every person speaks with a **cadence**, thinks with a cadence. You hear the rhythm of the person as they speak, and you get into their world.” What information can we learn about someone by hearing their voice?
- What were some of the other quotes from Glynn that caught your ear? Why did those quotes jump out at you?

### LISTENING #2: NINE PEOPLE, ONE BEDROOM

Now listen to *Nine People, One Bedroom*, an eight-minute youth-produced audio story from [Radio Rookies](#), the youth radio program at WNYC in New York City. *Nine People, One Bedroom* is a true story, produced by a teen named Jairo Gomez in 2014. This story is a first-person account of the very real choices that kids growing up in poverty have to make every day.

Radio producers often say that “radio is the most visual medium.” **As you listen, take note of what images or scenes you can “see.”**

[> LISTEN: NINE PEOPLE, ONE BEDROOM \(8 min\)](#)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: NINE PEOPLE, ONE BEDROOM

- What are your initial reactions to this story?
- What do you think radio as a medium brought to this story?
- Describe a moment in this story that you could “see” while listening.

Here’s how other students responded to the discussion question, “What do you think radio as a medium brought to the story *Nine People, One Bedroom*?”

*“It brought a voice, a personal connection, a human contact. If I was just reading it on paper, this story would be easy to overlook because you wouldn’t have the same emotional connection with this person. The human voice is something people can relate and respond to.”*

*“When he was describing his bedroom, and he said to get out of there you had to walk heel to toe, I think that was way more powerful than just getting a video shot of the bedroom. If you saw it, you would be like, “Wow, that’s really cramped.” But with him describing it, you can picture it in your mind, and that makes it so much more powerful.”*

*Continued on the next page.*

## SOUNDBITES ACTIVITY #3

*“When he was describing his bedroom, and he said to get out of there you had to walk heel to toe, I think that was way more powerful than just getting a video shot of the bedroom. If you saw it, you would be like, “Wow, that’s really cramped.” But with him describing it, you can picture it in your mind, and that makes it so much more powerful.”*

Want to add your response? Connect with us on social media using the hashtag #RASoundBites.

### LISTENING #3: CAN YOU HELP ME FIND MY MOM?

Our final story is a fictional story from the podcast [The Truth](#), which is part of the [Radiotopia](#) podcast network. The Truth is a podcast that “makes movies for your ears.”

In this ten-minute story, a girl is lost and can’t find her mom. Why won’t anyone help her? This story was written by Diana McCorry in 2015. Content note: This story deals with Alzheimer’s disease. **As you listen, think about why this story works so well as a radio story.**

[> LISTEN: CAN YOU HELP ME FIND MY MOM? \(10 min\)](#)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: CAN YOU HELP ME FIND MY MOM?

- What was going on in this story?
- What do you think radio as a medium brought to this story?
- What creative techniques (types of sounds, music, dialogue, story structure, etc.) were used to hold your attention in this story?

### RETURN TO OUR FREE WRITE

Now that you’ve engaged with three stories, return to your opening free write. Is there anything you’d like to add to your list about what makes radio special? **How do you think about radio differently after participating in this exercise?**

### MORE ABOUT WHAT MAKES RADIO SPECIAL

- [Inside the Podcast Brain: Why Do Audio Stories Captivate?](#) (The Atlantic)
- [What’s so special about radio?](#) (BBC)
- [The journey from print to radio storytelling](#) (NPR Training)