

SOUNDBITES ACTIVITY #9

AUDIO RECORDING

MAKE A SCENE

SET-UP:

GUIDING QUESTION: What is a scene, and how do you make a scene in an audio story?

TOOLS:

- Internet connection
- Smartphone or computer and speaker (for playing audio/video)
- Smartphone or other digital audio recording device (for audio recording)

VOCABULARY:

- **Scene:** In an audio story, a scene takes the listener to a place where some sort of action is happening. A scene is usually comprised of **ambiance** and **active tape**. The goal of a scene is to create an audio soundscape that allows the listener’s mind to recreate whatever is going on.
- **Ambiance (also known as “nat sound”):** The pervasive sound at a location. These are the sounds that help transport the listener to a particular place. Examples include the buzz of a drill at a dentist’s office, a moo at a cattle ranch, or the late bell at a school.
- **Active tape:** The close-up sound of people doing things. If you’re recording a person baking bread, the active tape might be the person saying “And now I’m going to add some flour.”

INTRODUCTION

A **scene** is a moment in an audio story that takes the listener into the center of the action using sound. You can make a scene without leaving your house!

In this activity, you’ll record **ambiance** and **active tape** to make your own audio scene.

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WHAT'S A SCENE?

In an audio story, a **scene** is a combination of sounds, usually including **ambiance** and **active tape**, that transport the listener into the center of the action. For example, in a story about a farm, a scene might include the sounds of a cow mooing, a farmer calling to her chickens, or the farmer's boots squishing in the mud. A scene includes action. In a scene, something is happening. The sounds of a scene helps the listener "see" what's going on.

Here's a video from the youth radio program [Radio Rookies](#) about how to make a scene:

> [WATCH: How to make a scene](#) (3 min)

Next we have a story from [NPR](#). As you listen, write down the different sounds you hear. What pictures can you see in your mind as you listen? What sounds make you want to keep listening?

> [LISTEN: To Decode Elephant Conversation, You Must Feel The Jungle Rumble](#) (7 min)

FEEL THE JUNGLE RUMBLE DISCUSSION:

You can write your answers down, discuss them with a partner, or think through them in your head.

1. What different sounds did you hear in the story about elephants in the jungle?
2. What different scenes do you remember from that story?
3. How did the reporter's narration bring you into the scene?
4. What are the elements of a compelling scene?

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RECORDING YOUR OWN SCENE

Now it's your turn! Today's challenge is to record a scene.

Recording with a smartphone: *If you're recording with an iPhone, use the Voice Memos app. On Android, there are many free recording apps you can download. Hold the bottom of your phone (that's where the microphone is) close to your mouth or the sound you want to record, about four inches away. For more info on smartphone recording, see [SoundBites Activity #2](#).*

Step 1: Choose a moment in your day to record. It might be going to the mailbox to get the mail, or reading to your younger sibling, or helping your parent make dinner. Plan to record for about three minutes.

Step 2: Start recording.

Make your scene great with these tips from the [Radio Diaries DIY Handbook](#):

- **Set the scene:** Tell us where you are, who you're talking to, the date, the time, what's happening. Be the listener's eyes and ears. Be a play-by-play announcer.
- **Show, don't tell:** We like to say that radio has the best pictures. It's actually a very visual medium. It helps to give listeners something to "look" at—with their imagination instead of their eyes. If you're doing narration, describe what's in front of you, with lots of details. You can actually point to objects, like: "Over there on the sidewalk is a big orange dog." Even though the listener can't see the dog, a space is created in our imagination where the orange dog will be.
- **Collect good sounds:** If you want people to really "see" your story, record all the sounds in your environment: dogs barking, doors slamming, the radio being turned on, the sound of the blender. Be creative. Use the microphone the same way you would a movie camera: get close up, medium, and wide shots.
- **Be there:** Record in the moment, instead of telling us about it later. As a listener, it's exciting to hear things unfold in real time. That way the audience can experience things as they happen.

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RECORDING YOUR OWN SCENE DISCUSSION

You can write your answers down, discuss them with a partner, or think through them in your head.

1. What type of sounds did you record for your scene?
2. How was recording active tape and ambiance different from recording yourself talking?
3. If you were going to record another scene, what would you do differently next time?

SHARE YOUR RECORDING WITH US

We would love to hear your recording! If you share your audio recording with us, we may feature it on kuow.org.

To share your audio recording, email it to us at radioactive@kuow.org with the subject line "SoundBites Activity #9 - Make a scene."

MORE EXAMPLES OF AUDIO SCENES

- [The unlikely friendship of Peanut and Ranger, a baby donkey and orphaned puppy in Sammamish](#) (RadioActive Youth Media, 5 min)
- [Eyes Off the Goal: When Sports Rule and School Suffers](#) (Radio Rookies, 7 min)
- [Dog Sledding Without Snow](#) (New Hampshire Public Radio, 5 min)
- [Regan's Neighbors](#) (Home of the Brave, 18 min)