



Teaching True Stories

WNYC Radio Rookies Curriculum Guide



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youth voice

student engagement

critical thinking

media literacy

dialogue

teen perspectives

citizenship

true stories

WHAT TEACHERS SAY ABOUT RADIO ROOKIES

I use Radio Rookies documentaries for listening comprehension and note-taking exercises. When the tests come around, my students are better prepared.

- Michael, Middle School English Teacher, Brooklyn, NY

The stories just reach out and grab the kids because it's about them, their stories. They can all relate to something in these stories. Once you start using them it's hard to go back.

- John, High School Speech and Language Teacher, Brooklyn, NY

Audio enhances the personal attachment to the whole process. Audio is so powerful. You can envision it even though it's not visual.

- Renee, Professor of English Education, New York, NY

Radio Rookies appeals to English teachers because we don't have a textbook so I create texts with Radio Rookies stories.

- Justianna, High School English Teacher, Brooklyn, NY



ABOUT RADIO ROOKIES

Radio Rookies stories offer serious, sometimes playful, and always thoughtful perspectives on some of the most complex issues facing teenagers – relationships with friends and parents, negotiating identity and cultural difference, surmounting obstacles and inequities, and succeeding in education and in life. The range of themes addressed over ten years of programming give voice to teenagers and ensures that culture and politics can be explored from the perspectives of youth.

Radio Rookies® is a New York Public Radio® initiative that provides teenagers with the tools and training to create radio stories about themselves, their communities and their world. Since 1999, Radio Rookies has been conducting workshops with teenagers, training young people to use words and sounds to tell true stories. Rookies' documentaries air on local and national airwaves and are available online as podcasts.

Radio Rookies documentaries represent what young people are truly facing, thinking and saying through stories related to the following topics:

- Culture, the Arts and Media
- Dreams and Ambitions
- Education
- Family
- Health and Mental Health
- Immigration and Diversity
- Loss
- Teen Issues

The complete archive of Radio Rookies stories can be found at:
http://www.wnyc.org/radiorookies/stories_archive.html

How to Best Use Radio Rookies Education Materials

The Teaching True Stories Curriculum Guide provides a basic overview of how and why to use audio in the classroom, as well as suggested guidelines for listening and follow-up activities. You should feel free to use this Guide as a template from which to base your own lesson plans tailored to the specific needs of your classrooms and subject areas. In addition to the *Curriculum Guide*, Radio Rookies has detailed lesson plans for five stories, covering the topics:

Obesity
Academic Tracking
Teen Suicide
Guns in the Community
The N-Word

These lesson plans are for use in content areas such as social studies, English language arts, and science. These materials also support teaching in advisory classes, after school activities, and other youth development programs where young people need opportunities to express their ideas, explore multiple learning styles, and develop a sense of active engagement and influence in their education.

The Radio Rookies Curriculum Philosophy

WNYC and the Radio Rookies team believe that youth produced radio documentaries are valuable curriculum resources because youth voices are too often excluded from mainstream teaching materials. The Radio Rookies approach places youth voice at the center of issues-oriented instructional programs. Radio documentaries foster academic engagement by capturing the interest of students and inspiring them to question and share their beliefs and perspectives about contemporary issues. Students are pushed to ask themselves:

What do I think about this issue?

What has been my personal experience with this issue?

What about my experience leads me to agree or disagree?

Such personally situated inquiry is the first step to engaging learners, which can lead to more complex questioning and thinking about important ideas.

Integrating Radio Rookies documentaries into educational programs allows youth to do more than simply hear the opinions and viewpoints of other teens. Through listening, discussion and debate, and writing about the issues presented in these stories, students learn to share opinions and articulate their own perspectives. Ultimately teen listeners learn to validate the power of their own voices and stories to influence other people's ideas about the important issues affecting our local, national, and global communities.

While considering multiple perspectives and expressing their own lived experience are essential, students must also learn strategies to grapple with contemporary problems using critical thinking skills. Radio Rookies materials facilitate the deep inquiry that is required for the preparation of logical thinkers, analytical readers, persuasive writers, and ultimately engaged citizens. As radio producers, Rookies research and create stories that examine their schools and neighborhoods and pose questions about the quality of their lives and communities. Through in-depth investigation, your students will learn the media literacy skills to analyze and critique these stories as a step towards informed and creative civic participation.



Why Use Radio Documentaries?

Essential to the Radio Rookies philosophy are the following core values about teaching and learning that make the radio documentaries useful across many subjects and educational settings:

Multi-literacy: Preparing Readers and Writers

Literacy is a primary focus of Radio Rookies lesson plans. Documentaries are available as audio podcasts with written transcripts encouraging students to listen, read, and write in order to comprehend, synthesize, and respond to information. The audio and textual formats allow teachers to individualize teaching approaches to meet diverse student needs. Instructional activities reinforce basic skills in grammar, note taking, story telling, and editing and build comprehension of vocabulary and themes.

Visualization: The Power of Audio

The process of visualization is a powerful literacy strategy that aids in the ability to comprehend texts. Listening to audio supports students who struggle with this crucial cognitive thinking skill. Audio plays on the magic of storytelling uniquely and differently from reading written texts. Listening to a story inspires active engagement as students break down the elements of a scene. The background noises and sounds demand an instantaneous leap, forcing listeners to imagine the surroundings. Voice, inflection, dialect, and dialogue all help to foster intimate connections with the narrator that draws students in and makes them want to hear more as the story unfolds.

Making Connections Through Stories

An important critical thinking strategy is the ability to make connections to texts by drawing on background knowledge and prior experience to help increase understanding and learning. *Radio Rookies* documentaries bring compelling and interesting youth stories into the curriculum offering spaces for reflection so that students can make connections between their own lives and the historical events, literature themes, and science issues in the formal curriculum.

The Power of Youth Voice to Support Student Engagement

Most formal school curricula lacks the presence of authentic and contemporary youth voices, which may leave students uninterested and disengaged with schoolwork. Radio Rookies documentaries offer true intimate portraits of teens that young listeners can relate to, serving as motivation for youth to ask questions about the larger world and tell their own stories.

Personal Engagement

Some Radio Rookie documentaries are emotional stories about personal or family issues in a teenager's life. Youth listeners may connect with these problems, showing them that they are not alone. Youth radio helps students communicate about the issues that they face, take risks to share private stories, broaden perspectives about others' experiences, and maybe even feel capable of change.

Civic Engagement

Many Radio Rookie documentaries are about important issues relevant to the larger world that inspire civic dialogue and debate. The considered examination of one teenager's position on a political issue can encourage youth listeners to talk to others, ask questions, share personal experiences, and eventually take action.

Introducing Audio

It can be a challenge to engage students with audio since it requires focus and attention, and they are often more accustomed to images and text. While transcripts are available for all audio documentaries, we recommend that students listen first without the written text in front of them. Provide a transcript after an initial hearing to assist with comprehension.

These seven simple steps will help guide classroom use of any radio documentary so that students develop skills for active listening, critical discussion, and writing. Each step includes questions to be used as discussion or writing prompts. It is not necessary to follow these steps in order, however, inexperienced listeners will benefit from starting with visualization and building up to the more complex analysis involved in analyzing and critiquing audio. All suggested activities are easily adaptable across any subject in elementary, middle school and secondary grades.

Note: Future Teaching True Stories curriculum guides will provide directions to teach students how to create audio of their own.



VISUALIZE

Step 1: Describe the narrator

Students will use their own words to describe the narrator and then listen for details from the story to describe her personality, what she cares about, or even what she looks like.

Questions for discussion and writing:

- *Listen to the narrator's voice. What can you guess about the narrator just by listening (i.e. gender, nationality, race or ethnicity).*
- *Now listen for details. What does the narrator say about him/herself? What else do you know about the narrator based on what is said?*
- *Draw a sketch that describes some aspect of the narrator.*

Step 2: Describe sounds and background noise

Students will describe sounds in the background to identify place, time, and setting.

Questions for discussion and writing:

- *What sounds did you hear?*
- *What do the sounds tell you about the story?*
- *How does the background noise influence the story?*
- *Do the noises in the background sound believable? Why or why not?*
- *What is interesting, notable, or surprising about what you hear?*
- *Draw a sketch of what you think the location(s) in this story look like.*

COMPREHEND

Step 3: Note facts about the story

Students will take notes to keep track of details in the documentary and understand the story and themes.

Questions for discussion and writing:

- *What is the story about? What issue does the speaker discuss?*
- *What does the narrator say about the topic? What specific opinions does the narrator express about this topic?*
- *Why do you think the narrator has this point of view?*
- *Who does the narrator speak with to learn about this topic and form an opinion?*

MAKE A PERSONAL CONNECTION

Step 4: Connect with what you already know

Students will share prior knowledge and experiences to inform their listening.

Questions for discussion and writing:

- *Have you heard or read about this topic before?*
- *Have you had a personal experience related to the story told?*
- *How does this information influence what you already knew about the issue?*

ANALYZE AND CRITIQUE

Step 5: Form an opinion

Students will describe and analyze the issues presented in the documentary, share perspectives on the issues presented and make predictions about what will happen next.

Questions for discussion and writing:

- *What is your opinion about the issue discussed in this story?*
- *What did you like or dislike about the way the story was told?*
- *What would you change about this story?*
- *What do you think of the ending?*
- *What do you think could happen next?*

Step 6: Compare and contrast to other stories

Students will relate the story's theme to other sources of information or to topics previously discussed.

Questions for discussion and writing:

- *Have you heard the ideas expressed in this documentary before? If so, where?*
- *How are the ideas expressed in this documentary similar or different from other things you have heard about this topic?*
- *What other sources of information would you use to find out more about this topic?*

Step 7: Consider how the story was made

Students will discuss decisions made by the producer to consider how radio documentaries are made.

Questions for discussion and writing:

- *What are some of the steps the teen reporter took to create this piece?*
- *Who did he or she interview?*
- *What types of research were required to tell the story?*
- *Where did the reporter go to record sounds and interviews?*
- *Was there anything missing?*
- *What would you do differently if you created this documentary?*

Follow-up Activities

Use the following activities to extend your lessons on a Radio Rookies documentary.

- Write a letter to the teen producer of a radio documentary. What questions do you have about the story? What didn't you understand? Suggest next steps.
- Research an issue raised in one of the documentaries as a springboard to explore current events. Prepare a mini-magazine with factual news stories, opinion pieces, and a feature story about the Radio Rookie who produced the documentary.
- Create a storyboard for the documentary. Draw and write a chronology to illustrate the sequence of events in the story.
- Write a fictional story based on a "character" presented in a documentary. Incorporate your personal experience with the topic to come up with ideas for the plot.
- Identify the major themes in a documentary. Identify opposing perspectives and debate sides in the issues discussed.

Connections to Learning Standards

The Radio Rookies curriculum supports the New York State Learning Standards in a range of content areas. The interdisciplinary array of topics covered in Radio Rookies documentaries make these podcasts ideal for teaching intermediate and commencement levels in Social Studies, English Language Arts, Languages other than English, Health, Science, the Arts, and Career Development and Occupational Studies.

Radio Rookies lesson plans note the specific concepts, themes, and skills highlighted in each radio documentary and related standards. The specific standards are listed in the lesson plans.

*For more information on New York State Learning Standards:

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/standards.html>



Essential Vocabulary

The following list includes basic vocabulary to introduce students to radio documentaries.

Audio – n. transmitted, received, or reproduced sounds. You can listen to audio on radios, computers, and portable listening devices.

Documentary – n. a film, radio, or television program that provides a factual report of real-life events. A radio documentary uses various forms of audio (interview clips, sounds) to tell the story.

Interview – n. a conversation when questions are asked to discover a person’s opinions or experience

Narration – n. spoken commentary in a story

Podcast – n. a form of audio that can be downloaded from the Internet. Podcasts can be played on a computer or mobile device.

Radio – n. the industry that broadcasts sound programs to the public or a device that receives sound broadcasts

Scene – n. a specific part of an audio broadcast

Sounds – n. vibrations that travel through the air that can be heard when they reach the ear; noises, speech, or musical tones that can be heard. Specific kinds of sounds include:

ambience – n. background noise added to a recording to create an atmosphere or feeling of a place

tone – n. the quality of a sound to express a particular feeling or mood

