

# GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO IN THE U.S.

Est. Time: 90-120 minutes

Subjects: ELA, History/Social Studies

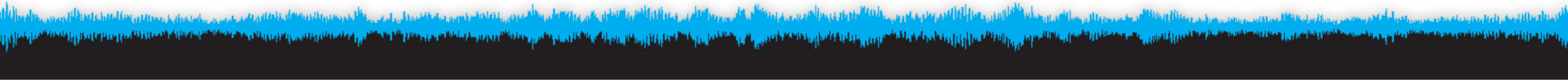
Age Range: All Ages


★ *TEACHROCK* ★



How did radio transform life in the United States during the 20th century?

In this lesson you will:

- Explore the history of how radio transformed life in the U.S.
  - Identify the importance of Black radio pioneers and border radio stations
  - Consider how radio helped create a “mass culture” in U.S. society
  - Identify how commercial radio transformed itself after the rise of television
  - Compare and contrast the style and influence of commercial radio from the 1920s - 1940s
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Ask a friend or family member who listens to radio regularly about their listening habits. Use the following questions as prompts, and feel free to create your own. Take notes as you conduct the interview.

- How often do you listen to the radio?
- Where and when do you often listen to the radio?
- What radio programs interest you? Music? News? Sports? Talk?
- Did you know that radio is the first broadcast medium (like television or the internet)?

If possible, pair with a classmate to share what each of you learned.




## 1900s-1920s

Read **this handout**, or have a guardian read it to you, to explore the early history of the radio.





Consider or talk with a friend:


- When did radio first become an important part of American life?
  - What is “commercial” radio? What kinds of programs did it offer in the early days?
  - Why did radio become so popular so quickly? What did it offer?
  - When did the popularity of radio begin to decline and why?
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Watch **this video** of the Biltmore Hotel Orchestra led by Earl Burtnett, performing much like they would have during a live radio show in the 1920s.





Consider or ask a friend:

- What are some words that come to mind to describe the band playing in the video?
  - How does the music they are playing make you feel? What might that feeling make you want to do if you heard this music playing from your radio?
  - In what ways might radio in the 1920s be like the Internet today? In what ways is it different?
  - How could you relate the performance you saw and heard in this video with music performances you see and hear on websites today? How are they similar? How are they different?
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Read **this handout**, or have a guardian read it to you, to discover how Black Americans played a vital role in the development of radio programming.








Consider or talk with a friend:

- How did early Black radio influence American music?
  - In what ways did the 1938 show “The Search for Missing Persons” bring wider attention to the separation of Black families after Emancipation?
  - How did Richard Durham’s “Destination Freedom” reclaim the narrative of Black History?
- 



DeFord Bailey was a pioneering African-American musician and a founding member of Country music's Grand Ole Opry weekly concert series. His performances on the Opry were broadcast around the country from Nashville, TN.


He was a featured performer on the program from 1926-1941. Bailey was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2005.

**Read more** about Deford Bailey at the Country Music Hall of Fame, or have a guardian read it to you.





Consider or talk with a friend:

- How did radio help DeFord Bailey to become well known?
  - What genre of music did he pioneer?
  - What American music institution did he help found?
  - How did you react to learning about this early radio star?
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## 1930s

Listen to excerpts of radio broadcasts from the 1930s, including President Franklin Roosevelt's first **"fireside chat"** and the drama program, **"War of the Worlds."**





Consider or ask a friend:


- Is it surprising that an audio-only medium like radio became so popular in the 1930s? Why or why not?
  - Do you think that radio required more creativity and imagination on the part of its audience than television and movies?
  - Considering President Franklin Roosevelt’s “fireside chat,” why might a radio broadcast be a good way to promote a new policy?
  - Considering the 1938 “War of the Worlds” broadcast, how did the creators of the program use sound to make the events feel real? What might the audience have been visualizing as they listened?
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Read **this handout**, or ask a guardian to read it to you, to explore how the technology and programming of “border radio” became a powerful force in the development of broadcast radio across North America.





Consider or ask a friend:

- How did Border Radio help to launch the careers of Lydia Mendoza and Maybelle Carter?
  - Imagine being one of these two women, how might it have felt to experience a career in Border Radio?
  - Do you think that radio stations were better or worse after Border Radio ended? Why?
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## 1940s


Listen to excerpts of radio broadcasts from the 1940s, including war correspondent Edward R. Murrow **reporting from London**, President Franklin Roosevelt delivering his **"Infamy Speech"**, and a U.S. government program called, **"You Can't Do Business with Hitler."**







Consider or ask a friend:

- How did Edward R. Murrow's reporting demonstrate the power of radio during the war?
  - Considering President Franklin Roosevelt's speech, how do you think the speech helped to unite Americans?
  - How did "You Can't Do Business With Hitler" use music and sound to convey its message?
- 

## 1950s

Listen and watch these clips as examples of 1950s radio, including the opening sequence of **The Lone Ranger** on both radio and TV and Elmore James' **"Dust My Broom"**

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Shirt-Pocket Radios



Big speaker  
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Long battery life  
(UP TO 100 HOURS)

**\$24<sup>95</sup>**

ACTUAL SIZE  
5 1/2" high... weighs only  
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A new Motorola radio miniaturized to fit a shirt pocket (or purse)—yet, with the power and sound you'd expect from a larger set. Powerful 6-transistor chrome speaker—stays—holds them strong and steady. Motorola-designed 2" Golden Voice speaker with new cone delivers rich, clear, low-crip highs. Battery life up to 100 hours at normal volume level—2½ times longer than its previous models. Has also. Give a look and listen at your Motorola Dealer. It's worth the trip.

**TOP RECEIVER CONTROLS** for a Purinton. Range—over what set in the pocket.

**WINDPROOF LENS** with screen. Protects speaker, volume knob, antenna, speaker, range.


**BUILT-IN EASEL STAND** which holds by stand upright in a shirt pocket.

**CUSTOM CARRYING CASES** and carrying cases, national rights only.

**MOTOROLA**



Consider or ask a friend:

- Why do you think people might have stopped listening to dramatic shows on radio in favor of watching them on television?
  - How did the decline of radio networks and the rise of television influence radio programming? How do you think the rise of portable, transistor, and car radios might have change programming and listening habits?
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# SUMMARY

- Radio has been hugely important to American society since the 1920s
- Radio influenced American culture through broadcasts highlighting news and a variety of entertainment offerings
- Radio transformed after the invention of television, with a greater focus on music that would appeal to teenagers



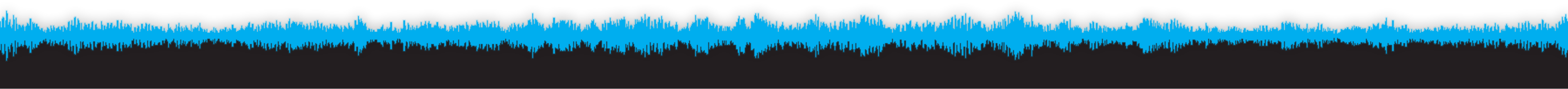
# BE CREATIVE

Write a song, or a poem, in the style of the music artists featured above. If possible, enlist friends and/or family who play a musical instrument to contribute to your song. Document your creative process with photos and record a final version of your work as an audio file. Use the songs explored earlier to guide your work and have fun!



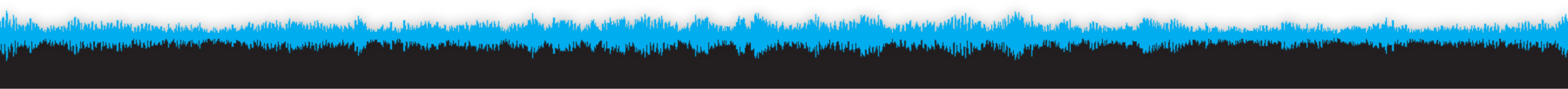
# BE CREATIVE

Create a radio drama based on a favorite short story. If possible, enlist friends and/or family to contribute voices to the characters and the sounds needed convey the environment of the story. Create a concise outline of how you will bring the story “to life” in an audio format, document your creative process with photos, and record a final version of the program as an audio file. If you are able, utilize audio software to make the quality of the recording sound “scratchy” or “old.” Use the media explored earlier (audio, images, video) to guide your work and have fun!



# BE CREATIVE

Create a news report like Edward R. Murrow's from London, but report about a day or week in your life while either learning remotely or in-person. Describe your day to day environment and briefly interview people that you are frequently interacting with while experiencing this new school year. Document your creative process with photos and record a final version of the program as an audio file. Use the media explored earlier, feel free to be experimental in your reporting, and have fun!



# BE CREATIVE

- Use the information in this lesson to create a colorful timeline that highlights early radio from the 1920s to the 1950s.
- Be sure to include the types of radio programs and historic figures you heard.
- Use the media (audio, images, video) explored earlier to guide your work and have fun!





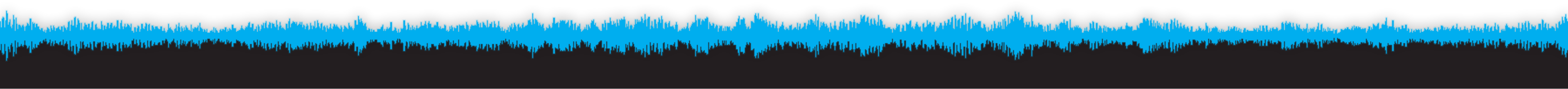
# BE CURIOUS

- Learn more about Border Radio's influence on early Tejano Music by **watching this trailer** for Chulas Fronteras by Argot Pictures and Les Blank Films. You can also **read about the film**.
- If you have a public library card, you can also **watch Chulas Fronteras**.



# CONNECT

Share with us! Either you or an adult in your life can share your Illustrated Timeline or your Radio Broadcast with TeachRock on **Instagram** or **Facebook**, email to **info@teachrock.org**, or Tweet it to **@TeachRock**



A photograph of a person with long blonde hair playing a white electric guitar on a stage. The person is wearing a white t-shirt and light-colored jeans. The background shows a drum set and stage equipment. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red color.

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Visit us at [teachrock.org](https://teachrock.org) for hundreds of other free arts-rich resources for every age range and classroom.

Please check back to [teachrock.org/distancelearning](https://teachrock.org/distancelearning) frequently as we will update the material weekly!