



## **ART BRIDGES: Lesson Plans for Enrichment, Growth and Healing**

### **Radio Theater**

**With Resources, Suggestions and Insights from:**

**Fred Greenhalph**

[www.radiodramarevival.com](http://www.radiodramarevival.com)

**Tony Palermo**

[www.ruyasonic.com](http://www.ruyasonic.com)

**Simply Scripts**

[www.simplyscripts.com](http://www.simplyscripts.com)

#### **Objectives:**

1. To learn about the tradition of Radio Theater
2. To learn the elements of producing Radio Theater, including sound effects
3. To create a live performance of Radio Theater for an audience

#### **Audiences:**

This activity could be used by any age group which is interested in re-creating Radio Theater but might be particularly enjoyable for a more elderly audience.

#### **Learning Opportunity:**

From the early 1920's until the 1950's radio programs created for entertainment (including radio theater, variety shows, comedies, sports broadcasts, etc.) were the mainstay for American homes. Series such as Amos n' Andy, The Guy Lombardo Show, Uncle Don, Believe it or Not, Death Valley Days, Rin-Tin-Tin, The Shadow, Myrt and Marge, Lum and Abner, Walter Winchell, The Eddie Cantor Show, Kate Smith, Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Tarzan, The Adventures of Charlie Chan, Buck Rogers, The Ed Sullivan Show, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, The Green Hornet, The Adventures of Superman, Abbott and Costello, Suspense, Gun Smoke and Challenge of the Yukon were among the programs that delighted and entertained an audience comfortably tucked away in their living rooms listening to the radio. Memorable in radio history was the 1938 broadcast which threw the nation into a panic two days before Halloween. Orson Welles broadcast of H.G. Wells' science fiction classic, "The War of the Worlds", caused a panic among listeners who believed that a Martian invasion of New Jersey was real.

In the 1950's when television became more accessible and affordable, it became the medium of choice for scripted programming. Since many variety programs, comedies and dramas were able to make the shift from radio to television broadcasts, radio had to redefine itself and soon embraced popular music as its major format of entertainment. The 50's Rock and Roll with Little Richard and Elvis Presley helped usher in this new age for radio which is still enjoyed today.

### **Preparing for the Activity:**

Creating a Radio Theater performance for a live audience will be great fun for your performers and crew as well as a rousing good time for the audience. *"Your tools are limited—voices, sound effects, and music—but your palette is limitless—the human imagination,"* explains Fred Greenhalgh (writer/director/producer of Final Rune Products and Radio Drama Revival). There will be no need for sets, scenery, costumes, etc. as you'd normally need for a stage production. All you'll need are some courageous "actors", a talented sound effects/production crew, a director to prepare everyone and an audience to lend an ear and a hand.

1. **Identify your pool of "talent"**
  - a. Actors/narrators interested in performing--Your cast will depend upon the script(s) you select
  - b. Production Manager and crew—you'll need a team of creative folks who can set up a workable sound systems, set up the performance space,

- time music, create the necessary sound effects from everyday objects, create prompt signs for audience participation, etc.
- c. Director—can either be the facilitator or come from the community at your site
  - d. An audience—not only will the audience enjoy the performance, but it can also respond to prompt signs (laughter, etc.) as needed for the script

## 2. Select a Script

Fred Greenhalgh shares, *“A good script is the heart of quality radio drama—in fact, it is the only thing that makes a radio drama worth producing.”* You can find a wide variety of scripts for your use free of charge by visiting:

[http://www.simplyscripts.com/radio\\_all.html](http://www.simplyscripts.com/radio_all.html) (includes comedy, drama, suspense, melodrama, etc.)

Free Scripts for kids can be found at

[http://a2zhomeschooling.com/explore/fine\\_arts\\_kids/theatrics/drama\\_scripts\\_asks\\_kids\\_teens/](http://a2zhomeschooling.com/explore/fine_arts_kids/theatrics/drama_scripts_asks_kids_teens/)

You may consider enacting one longer script or put together several smaller scripts into a show—determining how long you wish the “show” to run will help you in determining script selection. Many of the scripts will contain lines which include advertising for sponsors from the past. You’ll need to determine whether to strike those lines or leave them in for “flavor”. An alternative would be to write in promos for your own “sponsors”. Note, you will need to check any copyright provisions if you will be recording the performance and/or playing it over live radio.

## 3. Put together your cast of players

Advice from Fred Greenhalgh: *“Casting, if you’ve never casted before, can be hard. For Final Rune’s early plays, I started putting posters up around at my college, which got a few people through the door... On each subsequent production I knew a bit more about what I wanted from each of the actors, and I also started attending more plays, and being introduced to more actors working*

*professionally, which lead me to be comfortable inviting specific people to be in my shows. Now I even write with a specific person's voice in mind."*

Depending upon the script(s) you select and the interest of your participants, casting (including your narrator) will be a major, early endeavor for your show. Once a cast is selected, make sure to give ample time to actors to prepare. They will not need to memorize their lines and can have their scripts on hand for the performance, but running through the performance several times with the actors and sound effects/production team will help the show to run smoothly and the performers and crew to feel comfortable in the process.

#### 4. The Director

It will be important to assign a Director to the project. By visiting Tony Palermo's website: <http://ruyasonic.com> you will access information about writing for audio, sound effects, musical scoring, producing radio and directing. This website will give advice about preparing scripts, casting, voice and sound effects, microphone techniques and radio acting, cueing, direction and sign language.

#### 5. Production Crew and Sound Effects

Tony Palermo gives suggestions for creating a wide variety of sound effects (The Basic Manual Sound Effects Kit) and setting up for a live performance (Producing Radio Drama Live, on Stage) on his website: <http://ruyasonic.com>. Your Production Crew will have a great time coming up with the necessary sound effects to enhance the production, using their imaginations and many everyday items at their disposal. Here are some examples found on the web for creating sound effects:

**Fire:** Crunching cellophane wrap or wax paper will produce the sound of a crackling fire.

**Rain:** sprinkle rice, birdseed or coarse sand on a metal cookie sheet

**Thunder:** bang on a large piece of poster board or sheet metal

**Time Bomb:** place a microphone close to a noisy mechanical alarm clock or watch

**Walking through brush:** crackle cornhusks

**Bubbles:** use a straw or rubber hose to blow bubbles in a pan of water

**Splashing water noises:** stir a pan of water with your hand—the larger the container the water, the larger the water sound  
**Slap:** clap two thin boards together  
**Body Blows:** hit a pillow or fabric sofa cushion  
**Horse hooves:** hit coconut shells on a hard surface  
**Footfalls in snow:** step down on cat litter  
**Footfalls in leaves:** crunch corn flakes or potato chips with your feet or hands  
**Rustling clothing:** rub different pieces of fabric together  
**Breaking bones:** snap carrots in half  
**Coffin opening:** a squeaky hinge

### The Performance:

Once you've put all the elements for the production together (talent, script, cast, director, production crew and sound effects), practice, practice, practice to help everyone feel prepared and confident when it's time for the performance. Since the actors can use their scripts during the performance, it is not necessary for the cast to have the script memorized. However, the more familiar they are with their lines, the smoother the performance will be and the more the actors will enjoy the experience. Depending upon your situation, you may want to have the performance take place before a live audience. If you have a good intercom system, another option would be to broadcast the performance throughout your facility. In addition, microphones and a good amplification system will make it easier for the audience to hear the performance so not a single line is missed!

### Fun Extras:

For participants who are interested in creating their own scripts/program, visit [http://www.ruyasonic.com/wrt\\_template.htm](http://www.ruyasonic.com/wrt_template.htm) to download a "Free Audio Theatre Script Template" by Tony Palermo

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*Thanks to **Fred Greenhalgh** who graciously gave permission to Hildegard Center to re-post materials from his website "Radio Drama Revival" <http://www.radiodramarevival.com> for use with this lesson. Having found his calling in radio drama, Fred produces his own short stories and those of other*

writers in very elaborate studio productions at Final Rune Productions  
<http://www.finalrune.com> .

Thanks also to **Tony Palermo** who gave us permission to post a link to his website  
<http://ruyasonic.com> as a resource for this lesson. Tony is a radio  
dramatist/director, composer, engineer, sound effects artist and educator living in  
Los Angeles, CA, who continues to make wonderful contributions to Radio Theater.

Special thanks to **Simply Scripts** which has given permission to Hildegard to  
include a link to its website [www.simplyscripts.com](http://www.simplyscripts.com) to provide a wonderful listing  
of available Radio Theater scripts for use by all.

**If you have used this lesson plan, we'd love to hear from you! Please send  
questions or comments through our website [www.hildegardcenter.org](http://www.hildegardcenter.org) .**

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