From Memoir to Podcast: Telling the Stories of Our Lives

Grade 10, New Media/Creative Writing

Duration: 8-10 weeks

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# Rationale

“For years I have been inviting students to share their stories through various writing assignments in the class, and I always try to connect students’ worlds with those they encounter in literature. Memoir writing is a powerful medium through which students can reflect on and share moments that have shaped who they are.” – Denise Clark

As Marshall McLuhan states, “The medium is the message.” Transforming memoirs into podcasts allows students to explore how the medium affects both how they express themselves and the message. Telling their stories through podcasts allows students to explore aspects of who they are as they communicate through different media and provides opportunities for students to demonstrate strengths in various forms of communication. Students are also given the opportunity to connect with a wider audience outside the classroom.

This unit is based on lessons using the following resources:

* “Memoirs,” in *Lessons That Change Writers*, by Nancie Atwell (Firsthand/Heinemann, 2002)
* Session 1: The Workshop Approach to Memoir Writing in “Lessons that Change Writers – Teaching the Craft of Writing,” by Liisa House, School District 39

Students explore various memoirs before they brainstorm, workshop, draft, peer-edit, and polish their own memoirs, all while examining a social issue that affects them. They then use an interview process to begin exploring how the social issue investigated in their memoir affects others. Students use their memoir and what they learn through their interviews to create a podcast that further examines the issue. During this process, students learn about developing scenes, sound/music, and editing on classroom iPads and/or their own devices. Students then reflect on how the medium changed the sharing of the social issue and how people might understand the issue.

# Notes for educators: Making podcasts in the classroom

The resources in this unit are based on the pedagogical strategies of Youth Radio ([www.youthradio.org](http://www.youthradio.org)). In fact, teachers can find a whole set of lessons in Youth Radio’s DIY Toolkit for making outstanding podcasts (<https://youthradio.org/teach-youth-radio/diy-toolkit-how-to-make-a-podcast/>), including **youth-produced examples**. Radio Rookies (<https://www.wnyc.org/story/diy-radio-rookies-toolkit/>) offers another great set of resources that teachers may draw from and adapt.

For the unit presented here, Youth Radio resources have been changed to accommodate a traditional high school classroom setting for students and educators who had neither prior audio editing experience nor access to high-quality audio equipment.

## Content of podcasts: Students have options!

Class podcasts can be about anything. Podcasts work best when they are driven by real, authentic questions that students have, a hypothesis they are out to prove, or a mission to tell a unique story. Students need to have a *purpose* to seek out other perspectives and information. Otherwise, the podcast lacks urgency, and it is hard for students to think of whom to interview and what to include. Students should be able to choose the issue to explore, one which affects their lives.

## Essential questions

* How does the medium affect our expression?
* How does listening to others’ stories affect our understanding of our own lives?

## Learning standards

### Big Ideas

* Texts are socially, culturally, geographically, and historically constructed.
* Digital citizens have rights and responsibilities in an increasingly globalized society.
* The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world.
* Language shapes ideas and influences others.
* Creative writers take risks and persevere.

### Curriculum Competencies

* Access information for diverse purposes and from a variety of sources
* Explore the relevance, accuracy, and reliability of texts
* Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, visual, and multimodal texts
* Recognize and appreciate how different forms, formats, structures, and features of texts enhance and shape meaning and impact
* Explore how language constructs personal and social identities
* Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
* Respectfully exchange ideas and viewpoints from diverse perspectives to build shared understandings and extend thinking
* Assess and refine texts to improve clarity and impact
* Demonstrate speaking and listening skills in a variety of formal and informal contexts for a range of purposes
* Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful texts for a variety of purposes and audiences
* Use digital media to collaborate and communicate both within the classroom and beyond its walls
* Express and support an opinion with evidence

### Content

* writing processes
* new media design processes
* multimedia presentation processes

## Core Competencies

### Communication

* Connect and engage with others
* Acquire, interpret, and present information
* Collaborate to plan, carry out, and review constructions and activities
* Explain/recount and reflect on experiences and accomplishments

### Creative/Critical Thinking

* Generating ideas
* Developing ideas

### Positive Personal and Cultural Identity

* Personal values and choice
* Personal strengths and abilities

### Personal Awareness and Responsibility

* Self-determination
* Self-regulation

## Connections with First Peoples text and First Peoples Principles of Learning

### Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.

Students will listen to authentic Indigenous podcasts as part of their exploration of podcasting:

* <https://newjourneys.ca/en/articles/11-indigenous-podcasts-for-your-listening-pleasure>
* <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/newfire/lisa-charleyboy-how-i-found-my-culture-in-the-heart-of-the-city-1.4212752>
* <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/newfire/indigenous-youth-are-standing-up-and-speaking-out-1.4181773>

## Materials

* Personal Recording devices (**Note:** If students have cell phones have them download a free recording app onto their phones. Students without a cell phone may use class devices.)
* Class devices (iPads, laptops, desktop lab) with audio-editing software installed
* Audio speakers to play sample podcasts for the class

**Note:** GarageBand comes installed on Apple devices. If you will be using other types of devices, [Audacity](https://www.audacityteam.org/) is a free audio editing software that can be downloaded from the Internet.

## Delivering this unit

The activities in this unit can be structured as follows:

1. Lesson 1: What Is a Podcast? (introducing the genre)

2. Lesson 2: Interviewing

3. Lesson 5: Scripting/Narration (introducing characters, structuring/ ordering components, writing transitions, tone of voice)

4. Podcast Reflection

## Expanding this unit

Teachers may expand this unit by developing lessons that address other key components of teaching podcasts. The three lesson plans developed for this unit are included in the table below in **bold text.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Lesson** | **Content/purpose** |
| **Lesson 1** | **What Is a Podcast?** – Introduction to the genre |
| **Lesson 2** | **Interviewing** –Who to interview; asking good questions, being an engaging interviewer, and technical logistics |
| Lesson 3 | Scenes – Capturing action and real-time sound/moments |
| Lesson 4 | Sound, Music, Media – Adding flavour, personality, humour, relevancy, pop culture |
| **Lesson 5** | **Scripting/Narration** –Introducing characters, structuring/ordering components, writing transitions, tone of voice |
| Lesson 6 | Scripting Introductions and Conclusions |
| Lesson 7 | Using the Audio Editing Software |
| Lesson 8 | Assembling the Podcast |

# Lesson 1: What Is a Podcast?

## Part 1: “What is a podcast?”

Activate prior knowledge by asking students to talk in pairs about the questions “What is a podcast? Have you ever heard one? What was it about?” This can then lead to a classroom share/discussion.

## Part 2: “Why people might listen to a podcast?”

Once the class has reached an understanding that a podcast is a “narrative audio story,” have students return to form small groups and to discuss the question “Why might people listen to a podcast?” Have each group share a reason as to why people might listen to a podcast. Record these on the whiteboard.

Compare the list below and the class list. Are there discrepancies? Additions? Discuss.

|  |
| --- |
| **“Why might people listen to a podcast”** |
| * To learn something new * To be entertained * To watch interesting characters * To laugh * To discover new aspect of popular culture |

## Exploring text: Examples of podcasts

* “How Positive Stereotypes Hurt Asian-Americans Like Me”: <http://youthradio.org/journalism/education/how-positive-stereotypes-hurt-asian-americans-like-me/>
* “Indigenous Youth are Standing Up and Speaking Out”: <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/newfire/indigenous-youth-are-standing-up-and-speaking-out-1.4181773>
* “Lisa Charleyboy: How I Found My Culture in the Heart of the City”: <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/newfire/lisa-charleyboy-how-i-found-my-culture-in-the-heart-of-the-city-1.4212752>
* (optional) “How Fashion Helped This Cal Poly Student Embrace Her Ethnicity”: <http://youthradio.org/journalism/how-fashion-helped-this-cal-poly-student-embrace-her-ethnicity/>

## Podcast discussion questions

* Who was interviewed? Who else could have been interviewed?
* Are there scenes\* in the podcast? If so, can you identify them?
* What other scenes could have been collected?
* What is a takeaway message from the podcast?
* What bigger social issues does this podcast connect to?

\***Note:** A “scene” is a moment of action or real-time activity (e.g., an audio clip of sounds from a cash register).

**Tying it together**

* What in your memoir connects with a social issue that other people might want to know about?
* What is the message you want others to take away about this social issue?
* What kind of scenes might you gather for your podcast?
* Who might you interview?

# Lesson 2: Interviewing

**Note:** This lesson may take more than one class period.

## Do now/Warm up

Why might we include interviews in our podcasts? What PURPOSE might these other voices serve? [Possible answers: to help prove our point, to show we’ve considered multiple perspectives, to get information from experts, so that listeners don’t get bored with only one voice.]

## Good and bad questions during an interview

Play a few examples of interviews – you can find funny examples on YouTube with celebrities (for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZVh_u5RyiU>), or you can record an interview yourself with a guest. Make sure to include good and bad questions!

As a class or in pairs, have students make a checklist for writing **good interview questions**. This could include:

* Don’t ask yes/no questions
* Don’t ask inappropriate/overly personal questions
* Don’t ask questions that you know the interviewee can’t answer
* Do establish a rapport with your subject
* Do ask questions that elicit stories/anecdotes
* Do ask open-ended questions that focus on your topic/are relevant for your story
* Do ask follow-up questions, such as “Can you elaborate on that?” and “Can you give me an example?”

## Interview body language and conduct

Interviewing other people can be AWKWARD! Put slips of paper in a hat with common interview pitfalls. (Pitfalls could include no eye contact, acting disengaged or bored, too much background noise, and forgetting to hold the mic close to the speaker’s mouth.) Have students come up to the front of the class in pairs (one interviewer and one interviewee) and pull a pitfall from the hat. Have them act it out and have the class identify what’s going wrong.

## Set up recording devices

Have students download recording apps onto their cell phones. (If students do not have smart phones, the teacher can have students share, or find cheap recorders to lend to students.) Students should play around and figure out how to use the device, especially how to save and rename files.

## Practise

Give students a few options for interview topics. Have students pair up and then use their recording devices to interview each other about these sample topics. Keep in mind the checklist and the pitfalls. Students should be challenged to keep their interviewee talking for five minutes straight!

## Think about your own podcast

Have students now turn to thinking about their own podcast. Who do they want to interview? Encourage them to think of resources in their community (e.g., school counsellors, teachers, siblings, neighbours, religious leaders, crossing guards).

Have students make a table in which to consider what TYPE of interviewee each person is (e.g., a supportive voice, an unsupportive voice, an anecdote, an example).

Achieving a balance of perspectives might be an objective you want to include. For example:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name of interviewee** | **Supportive / unsupportive voice? Example? Similar point of view?** | **Brainstorm questions (keep in mind the checklist of good/bad questions!)** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

## Homework

Go out and collect your interviews on your recording devices. (Be sure to push Record!)

# Lesson 5: Scripting/Narration

## Prep work

Print out several copies of a podcast script (e.g., Amber Ly’s Model Minority Myth podcast). Cut the script up into a pile of sound clips. Scramble them.

## Warm up

Have students work in pairs to reassemble/reorder the podcast script. Tell them to use the clues in the narration to help them!

## Listen to the podcast

Have the whole class listen to the podcast in its entirety. As they listen, have students double-check that they put their pieces in the right order.

## Class discussion

As the narrator of a podcast, what is your job?

Possible answers:

* Introduce the characters.
* REACT to what they say in your narration. Did they surprise you? Did you disagree with them?
* Connect and create an arc for your story.

## Tone of voice

Remind students of the following:

* The tone of voice in a podcast is casual and conversational.
* Avoid wordy phrases and formal terminology.
* You want the podcast to sound like you.
* You want your listeners to feel like they are having a conversation with you.

## Putting your podcast in order

Have students fold a blank white sheet of paper into thirds (see Table 1: Ordering the elements in a podcast). In the left-hand column, have them list all the elements they have collected so far and that they want to include in their podcasts.

In the middle column, have students put these elements in an ORDER that makes sense.

In the right-hand column, have students identify places where they will need to narrate transitions between these components.

### **Table 1:** **Ordering the elements in a podcast**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Podcast elements:**  Interview with mom (part I)  Interview with mom (part II)  Scene in the car  Interview with store owner  Clip from commercial  Beyoncé song  Introduction  Conclusion | **Elements in order:**  Introduction  Scene in car  Interview w/ mom (I)  Clip from commercial  Interview with store owner  Interview w/ mom (II)  Beyoncé song  Conclusion | **Transitions:**  Her opinion reminded me of a commercial I see at least twice a day.  This perspective really surprised me. And I know my mom disagrees.  I decided to ask my mom what she thought. |

Name:

Podcast Reflection

1. Think back to your memoir. What was your general conflict about?
2. How did you feel about your conflict after writing your memoir?
3. If you used your memoir as the basis for your podcast, what changes or new insights have you noticed between your original memoir and your finished podcast?
4. If your memoir is NOT based on your podcast, what conflict were you investigating? What new understanding about the conflict did you gain from your podcast?
5. Explain your choices behind the making of the podcast using your planning chart and the final product.
6. What do you want others to notice about your podcast?
7. What changes would you make if you had more time or if you had to do it all over again?
8. What mini-workshops helped you the most?
9. Advice for future podcast projects?

**Sample Rubric: From Memoir to Podcast**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Curricular Competencies and Content** | **Emerging** | **Developing** | **Proficient** | **Extending** |
| * Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful texts for a variety of purposes and audiences * Use digital media to collaborate and communicate both within the classroom and beyond its walls   **1. Podcasts should include at least 5 elements: The author’s own voice, at least 2 other voices (interviews or a live scene), and at least 2 sound elements (music, sound effects, ambient sound).** | Very short; ideas are not developed with few elements or details. Might seem like elements are missing. | Podcast includes fewer than 5 elements. | Podcast includes5 elements: author’s own voice, at least two other voices (interviews or a live scene), and at least 2 sound elements (music, sound effects, ambient sound). | Podcast includes more than 5 elements. Podcast is full of rich sound and voices expressing multiple perspectives. |
| * Assess and refine texts to improve clarity and impact   **2. Style: Podcast should be understandable and flow together. Audio should be clear and transitions should be as smooth as possible.** | Disjointed and awkward. Technical problems obscure the meaning. | Straightforward, but little evidence of creative or impactful editing. | Some attempts made to use effective and creative techniques (choosing interesting sound clips, music, ambient sound audio). | Takes risks with the use of a variety of techniques. |
| * Express and support an opinion with evidence   **3. Podcasts should include an introduction from the author that expresses a perspective or opinion.** | Usually introduces the topic. | Opening establishes purpose. | Podcast includes an engaging introduction. | Podcast includes an introduction that sets up the conflict/issue and engages the listener in a surprising, emotional, catchy way. |
| * Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful texts for a variety of purposes and audiences   **4. Podcasts should be between 5 and 10 minutes long.** | Podcast is not fully edited/put together. | Podcast is just 5 minutes but seems not fully developed. | Podcast is 5 minutes and developed. | Podcast is between 8 and 10 minutes and thoughtfully developed. |
| * Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful texts for a variety of purposes and audiences   **5. Authors should be able to explain the design choices they made, and why they chose each element in post-project reflection, to complement planning outline.** | Podcast is assembled in a seemingly random fashion. | Elements in the podcast are explained and some of the design seems intentional. | Elements (including sound) in the podcast are explained thoughtfully and the design is intentional. | Elements (including sound) in the podcast are explained insightfully and the design is intentional and tries to elicit a response from the audience. |
| * Express and support an opinion with evidence * Respectfully exchange ideas and viewpoints from diverse perspectives to build shared understandings and extend thinking   **6. There should be a “so-what” to the podcast. Does the podcast make listeners care?** | Conclusion seems disjointed, irrelevant, and illogical and is not linked with the ideas in the interviews. Omits effective ending. | Conclusion is logical but may lack a sense of purpose. Seems mechanical or very predictable. | Podcast has a thoughtful conclusion. Conclusion takes into account the elements of the podcast and tries to provide a resolution to the central question, issue, or conflict | Podcast includes an insightful, mature conclusion that is reflective of learning standards. Conclusion takes into account the elements of the podcast. Provides a satisfying resolution to the central question, issue, or conflict. |