

2.3 Lesson Plan: Listening in on the Election Process

Overview

Students learn about the political process by exploring various formats of radio programming from PRX, the Public Radio Exchange. They evaluate the authority and authenticity of election-related programming. Finally, they compose a blog entry about what they have learned. (Note: This lesson works well as a precursor to lesson 3.3.)

Key Skills

NCSS Civic Ideas and Practices Expectations: Identify assumptions, misconceptions, and bias in sources, evidence, and arguments used in presenting issues and positions; articulate an informed personal position on a civic issue based on reasoned arguments resulting from consulting multiple sources

McREL Language Arts Standards: use a variety of strategies to enhance listening comprehension (e.g., focusing attention on message; monitoring message for clarity and understanding; asking relevant questions; noting cues such as change of pace or particular words that indicate a new point) recognize how format shapes message content; recognize how message credibility is shaped by perceptions of authority and authenticity; make notes while listening; use precise and descriptive language to summarize, clarify and enhance ideas

ISTE NETS Standards: 4c: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making: collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions; **1b:** Creativity and Innovation: create original works as a means of personal or group expression.

Grades 7–12

Time Estimate Two 45-minute class periods, plus homework

Required Resources Computers with Internet access

Preparation

Prior to teaching this lesson, create an account at the Public Radio Exchange Web site (www.prx.org/membership) and bookmark all of the Web sites used in the lesson on each computer in your classroom, or upload all links to an online bookmarking tool such as del.icio.us (del.icio.us). Preview the Web sites used in the lesson to make certain that they are appropriate for your students. Make copies of **Worksheet 2.3** for all students (3 copies per student).

Procedure

- 1. Grab interest.** Ask: Can people who are in jail vote in an election? Explain that students will be listening to some eighteen-year-old inmates at the Long Creek Youth Development Center in South Portland, Maine who voted for the first time in 2004. This type of radio program is called “vox-pop,” which is short for “vox populi” or “voice of the people.” This format of radio program features short interviews from average citizens. Listen to “Voting Behind Bars” at PRX (www.prx.org/pieces/2460). Discuss: Should prisoners be allowed to vote? Why or why not? How did the first-person perspective of the radio piece affect your opinion? Were there other aspects of the radio piece that helped to shape your view?
- 2. Judging credibility:** What’s authentic and authoritative? Explain to students that in deciding what to believe, people often judge the credibility of media messages without much awareness. Introduce students to the concepts of authenticity and authority as two dimensions of credibility. Authenticity is about being genuine, honest and “real.” Authority means commanding expertise and credibility on a topic. People’s judgments of authority and authenticity depend on their life experience and exposure to various kinds of media.
- 3. Audio as a medium.** Audio is a powerful medium, but many students are unfamiliar with it. Ask: How many of you regularly listen to the radio to access news and information? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this medium relative to others (e.g., video, print)?
- 4. Introduce students to PRX.** Explain that anyone can listen to thousands of radio pieces available on the PRX Web site by creating a free account. Demonstrate the search tool (under “all search options”) on the PRX Web site by typing “election” and then looking at the list under “format.” Show students how to select audio stories by keyword, format and tone on the Search page (www.prx.org/search).
- 5. Explore radio formats.** Discuss: Which of the various names for format (first-person, interview, feature, diary) are familiar? Which categories are unfamiliar? Explain the characteristics of any unfamiliar categories.
- 6. Understand the power of tone.** Tone is the author’s attitude toward his or her subject and/or the reader or listener. Review the list of adjectives, or tags, that identify the tone of the audio pieces at PRX.org. Discuss: How might tone affect our perceptions of authority and authenticity? Why do you think these concepts are important to radio producers?
- 7. Listen for learning: Practice.** Pass out copies of **Worksheet 2.3** (3 copies per student). Tell students that you are going to play a radio piece and they are expected to listen. Explain that afterward they will write a short summary and identify how the piece communicates authenticity and/or authority. You may want to use the following audio piece for practice.

Latina Voting Power (www.prx.org/pieces/25211)

Check to see that students can summarize the practice piece and make sure they can identify the format and tone and understand the concepts of authenticity and authority. Discuss: What is the piece about? Describe the format and tone of this piece. What factors in the audio piece contribute to your judgments about authenticity and authority?

- 8. Compare and contrast.** At the end of class or for homework, ask students to choose two pieces about the 2008 elections from the PRX database, making sure that they cover roughly the same topic(s) but differ in format and/or tone. (Note: You may wish to ensure coverage of key issues and candidates by providing a list of topics for students to pick from or assigning topics). Students review the two pieces, taking notes about the main ideas and the factors that contribute to the authenticity and authority of each, using Worksheet 2.3 as a guide.
- 9. BLOG THIS!** Students use their notes to compose a post in which they compare and contrast the two audio pieces and assess the tone, format, authenticity and authority of each.

Assessment

Use students’ final blogs to assess their grasp of content as well as technology, communication and collaboration skills.



Featured Web Site

Public Radio Exchange

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Worksheet 2.3 Listening in on the Election Process

Instructions: Listen to a radio piece at the Public Radio Exchange Web site (www.prx.org). Write a brief summary in 1–2 sentences. Then listen to it again, noting how the piece achieves its authenticity and/or authority.

Title: _____

Author: _____

Format: _____

Tone: _____

Summarize the story's main idea in 1–2 sentences:

Consider whether the piece seems authentic and is authoritative. What makes it seem real? What makes it seem believable? Describe specific ways that the content, format, and/or tone of the message helps add authenticity and authority.

Information that is
authentic seems **real**,
honest and **genuine**.

Information that is
authoritative seems
credible & **trustworthy**.