

## RTNDA Speech Questions

Section I As you read Edward R. Murrow's speech to the 1958 RTNDA (Radio-Television News Directors Association) convention, answer the questions below. In the box, keep track of all unfamiliar words and phrases you encounter as you read. The questions that follow are labeled with the number of the paragraph to which they refer. You will be required to make inferences and draw conclusions from your reading in the last set of questions.

### Unfamiliar Words and Phrases

Questions from the Reading:

#### Paragraph 1

What warning does Murrow issue in this paragraph?

#### Paragraphs 2 and 3

What concerns does Murrow express in these paragraphs?

#### Paragraph 4

How many years have passed since Murrow made this speech?

What was the "intellectual ghetto on Sunday afternoons"? Does it still exist today?

Murrow makes a reference to the 8:00 to 11:00 p.m. programming on the three networks of his time. What background knowledge do you have about the programming he refers to here?

What types of programs are running today in these same time slots on any one of 250+ channels?

He states that "this nation is in mortal danger." What dangers was the United States facing in the 1950s?

Paragraph 5

Murrow's references to Nero and Neville Chamberlain were ones that his audience would have readily understood. What background knowledge do you have on either one of these historical characters? How could either of them be charged with indifference?

A sustaining show was a program without a sponsor. What point is Murrow making when he refers to movie Indians and real ones?

Does Murrow really mean what he's saying in the last sentence of this paragraph or is he being sarcastic? Give evidence to support your answer.

Paragraph 6

Murrow asserts that controversy in the media is acceptable as long as it illuminates rather than agitates. What's the difference between these two terms?

Paragraphs 7 and 8

What three examples of controversial programming does Murrow mention in these paragraphs?

What is the status of these controversies today?

## Paragraph 9

In this paragraph, he mentions critics of the media. Give examples of types of criticism leveled at the following media today.

Television:

Radio:

Newspapers and Magazines:

The Internet:

Paragraph 10

He claims that television was creating a tradition when it yielded to political pressure. What does Murrow mean by this assertion?

#### Paragraph 11

Which of these statements most accurately describes Murrow's meaning in paragraph 11?

- A. The Federal Communications Commission had too much control over editorial policy.
- B. If television networks were too afraid to offend their sponsors, their editorial commentary would only hold the illusion of power.
- C. The Federal Communications Commission was not doing a good enough job of keeping networks free of libel and obscenity.
- D. The networks did not have enough manpower to screen their content for libel and obscenity.

#### Paragraphs 12 and 13

What is Murrow's concern about news reporting on the radio?

#### Paragraphs 15 and 16

What examples of the networks censoring themselves does Murrow give in these paragraphs?

Does Murrow blame the government or the networks for this censorship? Explain your answer.

### Paragraph 17

A rate card is the chart of fees that are charged to advertisers for placing ads in various time slots. List the variety of duties Murrow says network management undertakes.

What effect does this have on decisions about news programming?

### Paragraph 19

Why did Murrow think it was a bad idea for networks to delay President Eisenhower's speech on the possibility of war with Russia and China?

### Paragraphs 20 and 21

In Murrow's time, holders of FCC licenses had to commit part of their airtime to unsponsored public affairs programming designed to benefit the community in general. This regulation was changed in 1985. What is Murrow's opinion of how their commitment to this type of programming was being honored by the networks?

What is his solution for this problem?

Paragraph 22

In this paragraph, he mentions "the facilities that belong to the public." To what is he referring?

Paragraphs 23 and 24

It appears that Murrow felt that the best type of programming would cause people to be uncomfortable. Who does he blame in this paragraph for creating the "endless outpouring of tranquilizers" that characterized network programming?

Paragraphs 27, 28, and 29

What solution does Murrow propose?

What topics does he suggest for these programs?

### Paragraph 31

Nielsen, Trendex, and Silex were the companies that determined through statistical analysis who was watching what television program at any given time. Networks could then determine how much to charge for advertising in each time slot. What effect does Murrow see on ratings if his suggestion is put into effect? (For more information on ratings go to: <http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/question433.htm>)

### Paragraph 33

What is the revenge Murrow refers to in this paragraph?

### Paragraphs 34 to 37

What did Murrow fear television would become?

What did he want television's primary mission to be?

## Section II

Using evidence gathered from the text of Edward R. Murrow's speech, answer the following questions.

1. What is Murrow's thesis?
2. Evaluate the speech on its style and on the types of words and phrases he chooses to express his thoughts.
3. What events of his day does Murrow select to illustrate his points?

4. Murrow states that television programming exhibits evidence of "decadence, escapism and insulation from the realities of the world in which we live." What is your response to this claim?

5. He mentions that he would want television to illuminate and to agitate viewers. Is this a worthy goal? Why or why not?

6. In his speech, Murrow mentions "malignant forces of evil who are using every instrument at their command to empty the minds of their subjects and fill those minds with slogans, determination and faith in the future," and who are "protecting the mind of the American public from any real contact with the menacing world." Who are the "malignant forces" he is speaking of? What do they have to gain? What is so bad about having "faith in the future"? What "menace" does Murrow see in the world that television viewers should be warned of?

7. Murrow also asserts that "If the people are given sufficient undiluted information, they will then somehow, even after long, sober second thoughts, reach the right decision." What would Murrow consider to be a "right decision"? What is "undiluted information"?

8. In Paragraph 4, he mentions what viewers 50 to 100 years in the future might see if they watch the kinescopes of the three networks in 1958. We are now in that future to which Murrow refers, and his comments in Paragraph 30 reflect the views of many contemporary critics of television. How could Murrow have been so prescient in 1958?

9. What message from this speech do people need to hear today? Select a quotation from the text that best states this message.

10. Summarize the problem as Murrow sees it.

11. Summarize his solution.

12. Who do you think Murrow would have selected for the type of programming he's suggesting?