The Classic Radio Hour

Research a topic from the 1920s or 1930s to better understand the significance of the Great Depression, then write and perform an old-time radio show about it.

Grades 9–12
U.S. History, APUSH

5–6 periods
research, writing, rehearsal

Show day
1–2 periods, plus the awards

Groups of 2–5
Narrator, Actors 1–3, Sound Tech

The project

Groups choose one of ten case files (labor unions, women's movement, Prohibition, crime, pop culture, the automobile, the crash, the Dust Bowl and Great Migration, politics, the New Deal). Each student cites at least two sources and builds fact cards from them: evidence cards with a short name, the fact as the show will say it, the details in their own words and the source. The group writes a radio show in four parts (Intro, Body, Commercial Break, Wrap-up) in a 1930s genre, weaving in 20 cited facts, 5 slang terms, 5 pop-culture references and sound cues, and answers its research question. On show day each group performs live; the audience takes a Fact Check and votes in the The Radio Age Awards.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Find, evaluate and cite reliable sources (MLA), judging each source's bias and usefulness.
- Turn research into evidence: specific, important facts placed in context and explained in their own words.
- Explain how a topic from the 1920s or 1930s connects to the causes, experience or response to the Great Depression.
- Use the language, popular culture and media of the period accurately, in context.
- Collaborate on, and present, an original script that answers a historical research question.

Standards

CA HSS 11.5.6	Trace the growth and effects of radio and movies and their role in the worldwide diffusion of popular culture
CA HSS 11.5.7	Mass production, the growth of cities, new technologies such as the automobile and electricity, and the resulting prosperity
CA HSS 11.6.2	The principal causes of the Great Depression and the steps taken by Hoover and Roosevelt to combat the crisis
CA HSS 11.6.3	The human toll of the Depression and the Dust Bowl, and the Dust Bowl refugees in California
CA HSS 11.6.4	The effects of and controversies over New Deal economic policies and the expanded role of the federal government

AP U.S. History Topic 7.7	1920s: Innovations in Communication and Technology
AP U.S. History Topic 7.8	1920s: Cultural and Political Controversies
AP U.S. History Topic 7.9	The Great Depression
AP U.S. History Topic 7.10	The New Deal
C3 D3.1.9-12	Gather relevant information from multiple sources, using their origin, authority, structure, context and corroborative value
C3 D3.2.9-12	Evaluate the credibility of a source by examining how experts value the source
CCSS WHST WHST.11-12.7	Conduct short and more sustained research projects to answer a question, including a self-generated one
CCSS WHST WHST.11-12.8	Gather information from multiple authoritative sources, avoid plagiarism and follow a standard format for citation
CCSS SL SL.11-12.4	Present information, findings and supporting evidence clearly to an audience

Summaries. Official text: California History–Social Science Content Standards; AP U.S. History Course and Exam Description (College Board); C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards (NCSS); Common Core Writing in History/Social Studies, grades 11–12; Common Core Speaking and Listening, grades 11–12.

CP or AP U.S. History

Written as a CP U.S. History project; AP classes can do it with a heavier research load. The class activity's setup has a **Course** menu that fills these in (change any of them).

	CP U.S. HISTORY	AP U.S. HISTORY
Standards	CA HSS 11.5.6–11.5.7, 11.6.2–11.6.4; CCSS WHST.11-12.7–8, SL.11-12.4	AP Topics 7.7–7.10, plus the same research and writing standards
Groups	4 (5 if every role should be its own person)	3
Fact cards each student	12, with 1 pre-filled as an example	16, none pre-filled
Readings in the Library	On: background for every case file	Off: students find every source, including at least one primary source
Days	All six days, then show day	Days 1, 2–3 and 5 (skip the Day 4 and Day 6 lessons; groups pick genres on their own), then show day
Research question	How did your topic affect Americans during the 1920s or the Depression?	Frame it as causation or continuity and change (e.g., "To what extent did the Dust Bowl worsen the Depression for farmers?")
Fact Check	Recall questions about the show	Stimulus-style: quote a line from the show and ask what it shows about the period
Supports	Give students with an IEP more pre-filled cards (some for reduced work, all for	Same

modified grades)

Plan A: free resources only

Everything here is free: the teacher's lessons on the projector (polls and quick competitions use students' Chromebooks), the research-skills practice, the sample shows, the Sound Lab and every printable. Students research and write on paper.

Day 1
Getting started

- Present the Day 1 lesson (Teacher's lessons): radio's golden age, War of the Worlds, searching and judging websites. Students practice with the research skills (Boolean searches, reputable sites, lateral reading).
- Form groups of 2–5; each group chooses a case file (the topics above) and writes a research question.

Days 2–3
Sources and fact cards

- Days 2–3 lessons: taking notes and paraphrasing; MLA citations, bias and corroboration.
- Each student fills in the **Sources and fact cards** sheet (two sources, then fact cards) or the cut-out **fact cards**. Collect them at the end of Day 3 for the research grade.

Day 4
Genre and roles

- Day 4 lesson; play a sample show. Groups choose a genre, a plot and roles (everyone speaks), and begin the **Script template**.

Day 5
Writing

- Day 5 lesson. Groups finish the script, mark each fact with its card's name, add sound cues and the commercial, and write their 3 Fact Check questions. Each student writes producer's notes: 3 facts from the show and how each connects to the Depression.

Day 6 (bonus)
Rehearsal

- Day 6 lesson. Groups rehearse with the Sound Lab on one Chromebook as the sound board, and time the show (3–5 minutes).

Show day
1–2 periods

- Each group performs; the audience takes notes on the **Audience sheet** and answers each group's Fact Check aloud or on the sheet. Collect ballots, count them, and hand out the printed **award certificates** (blank, to fill in and sign).

Plan B: with Teacher Plus

The class activity runs on students' Chromebooks with the period's join code all week. Names are locked on each Chromebook; only your screen can read them. Work comes only to your computer (and your SimHistory folder).

Before Day 1
10 minutes

- Open the class activity. Choose the period, group size and how groups form, show-day format, and the switches: own sounds, gunshots, Father Coughlin, readings in the Library, fact cards each student builds (16) and pre-filled cards for the class (one gives an example; all of them shifts the focus to writing). Choose the SimHistory folder for automatic records.

Day 1 Getting started	• "Present today's lesson" opens the Day 1 lesson on the same code: polls, quick writes, Try it now and the exit-check competition pop up on students' Chromebooks. • Students join at simhistory.org/radio, form groups, take a case file from the Library, and write their research question.
Days 2–3 Sources and fact cards	• In **My research**, each student cites sources (the MLA citation builds itself) and builds fact cards; each card is checked as they type (named, specific, important, in context, details). Pasting is off. • On the **Research** tab, read every student's work with a suggested score, see blocked pastes and cards copied from a reading, mark any fact inaccurate, and print one-pagers. Give individual students more pre-filled cards (IEP/504); teammates can't tell.
Days 4–5 Genre, roles, writing	• Groups take roles and write the script together, live: each types only in their own lines, places sound cues, highlights the words that use a fact and links its card (the counter tracks 20), and writes the Fact Check. Slang shows red and pop culture yellow. • Watch the **Writing monitor**: every script live, each partner's share (words, lines, cues, minutes, blocked pastes). "My partner isn't working" notes come to you only. • Set due dates, late deductions and cutoffs on the **Grades** tab.
Day 6 (bonus) Rehearsal	• Groups use the **Rehearse** tab: the teleprompter and sound board on their own Chromebooks. Groups that want to may record their show (only if every member agrees); a nervous group can play its recording on show day.
Show day 1–2 periods	• **Show day** tab: put each group on the air. The projector shows ON AIR and the teleprompter; the Sound Tech's Chromebook is the sound board. After each show, the audience takes the Fact Check; reveal the answers. • Open the vote (sealed ballots, totals only, no vote for your own group), then present the The Radio Age Awards on the projector, one envelope at a time. Students download their PDF (certificates, then their work). Print every certificate, or blank ones to sign. • Score performance and finish the rubric on the Grades tab; download the gradebook or the work packet.

Multi-day: the class saves itself on your computer and in your SimHistory folder; students rejoin with the same code on the same Chromebook. Save game makes a file you can open anywhere.

Rubric

PART	WHO	POINTS	WHAT EARNS THEM
Research	Each student	25	Two reliable sources with correct MLA citations, bias and evaluation; fact cards that are specific, important, in context and explained in their own words
History in the show	Group	30	20+ accurate cited facts woven into the plot; the research question answered; tied to the Great Depression
Producer's notes	Each student	10	3 facts explained in their own words and tied to the Depression
Script craft	Group	20	Genre conventions, a clear plot, 5 slang terms and 5 pop references, the commercial (inventor, use, importance)
Performance	Each student	15	Every member speaks, clear delivery, sound effects on cue (scored on show day)
Total		100	

Research in detail: two sources (reliable, MLA, bias, evaluation) 13; fact cards 12. Optional extra credit: each student's Fact Check score as an audience member.

Answer key: the daily exit checks

DAY	QUESTION	ANSWER
Day 1	Which search finds pages using either "Okies" or "Dust Bowl migrants"?	Okies OR "Dust Bowl migrants"
Day 1	What is the best first step to check a website you don't know?	Open a new tab and see what others say about it
Day 1	About what share of households had a radio in 1930?	About 40%
Day 2	A 1935 letter from a Kansas farmer about a dust storm is...	A primary source
Day 2	Which fact is strongest?	"On October 29, 1929, Black Tuesday, stock prices collapsed and the ticker ran hours behind."
Day 2	Which is a paraphrase, not plagiarism?	Your own words and sentence shape, with a citation
Day 3	In MLA, what comes first in a website citation?	The author
Day 3	Which word is loaded?	"heroic" strikers
Day 3	Two sources agree on a fact. That means...	You can trust it more (if they didn't copy each other)

DAY	QUESTION	ANSWER
Day 4	A good research question for the show should be…	Answered by the Wrap-up, with evidence
Day 4	Turning a fact into dialogue means…	Keeping the fact exact while a character says it for a reason
Day 4	Which is a detective-show convention?	Following the evidence to a trap at the end
Day 5	What does a STOP chip do?	Ends a looping sound where you put it
Day 5	The commercial must include…	The invention, who invented it, how it's used and why it mattered
Day 5	Where must your research question be answered?	In the Wrap-up

Show etiquette (share with students)

- Every member speaks. Read your lines with feeling: this is radio, so your voice does all the work.
- Facts must be accurate; your teacher may mark a fact to fix before show day.
- Be a great audience: quiet during shows, notes ready for the Fact Check, applause after every show.

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