

REPORTING AMERICA AT WAR

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

“Orchestrated Hell” by Edward Murrow

SUBJECT:

U.S. History, World History, Journalism

ESTIMATED**TIME REQUIRED:**

One or two class periods.

OVERVIEW:

In this lesson, students will evaluate a radio broadcast by correspondent Edward R. Murrow as a primary historic source. The broadcast, popularly known as “Orchestrated Hell” recounts Murrow’s experiences with a Royal Air Force bomber crew on a raid over Berlin in December 1943.

OBJECTIVES:

As a result of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Investigate a primary historic source; a World War II eyewitness account.
2. Develop an appreciation of radio as a news medium.
3. Understand how radio correspondents reported an eyewitness news event.
4. Convey ideas and opinions about the source.

RESOURCES FOR THIS LESSON:

The transcript of the “Orchestrated Hell” broadcast

<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/20th/b/murrow2.html>

The “Radio Days” Edward R. Murrow site complete with biographical information on Murrow as well as sound links to Murrow broadcasts <http://www.otr.com/murrow.html>

“Radio Days” contains several links for Murrow’s radio show broadcast, as well as a great deal of historical background data regarding old time radio. <http://www.otr.com/index.shtml>

The “rhetorical analysis” of Murrow’s broadcast can be found at

<http://www.uttler.edu/meidenmuller/publiccomm/belynrogers.htm>

Murrow biography page from the State Library of North Carolina

<http://www.prioris.dcr.state.nc.us/nc/bio/literary/murrow.htm>

“American Masters” page on Murrow

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/murrow_e.html

University of San Diego World War II sound archives site

<http://history.sndiego.edu/gen/WW2Timeline/radio/O.html>

STRATEGY FOR THIS LESSON:

Prior to beginning the lesson, it is recommended that students review World War II and the air campaign against Axis nations in Europe. Next, the teacher might wish to introduce the lesson with a short discussion about the role of radio in the World War II era. The teacher may wish to share other audio clips from the “Radio News” archive with the class (includes many Real Audio files, such as the Hindenburg disaster, Pearl Harbor and other events) (<http://www.otr.com/news/html>), specifically to show the power and impact of radio on the way people received information during the war year.

The teacher may also wish to share information on the life and career of Edward R. Murrow, a fixture on CBS News (both radio and television), and Voice of America from the 1930s until his death in the mid 1960s.

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THE LESSON:

After preliminary discussion, the teacher should distribute copies of the transcript for the “Orchestrated Hell” broadcast. The actual broadcast of Murrow’s powerful December 1943 story can be downloaded from <http://www.soundsofhistory.com>. (This Web site has many links to World War II era broadcasts, including “Orchestrated Hell”, the liberation of the concentration camp at Buchenwald and several other 20th century historical event sound files.) Allow students to hear the audio and/or read the transcript. Next, have them answer the questions on the below sheet.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Students can:

Compare and contrast “Orchestrated Hell” with later journalism from the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm or Operation Iraqi Freedom. Students might write comparative essays evaluating the scope and impact of Murrow’s broadcasts with that of later journalists. (For example, many have noted that the impact of Vietnam era journalists was to further turn public opinion against the war.)

QUESTION SHEET FOR “ORCHESTRATED HELL”

(with possible answers)

- 1. Murrow’s account of the air raid over Berlin begins with a briefing for the pilots and crews. How does Murrow describe the briefing?**
(He says the atmosphere in the briefing was that “of a school and a church”. He noted that “the weatherman gave us the weather”. The pilots were reminded that Berlin is Germany’s greatest center of war production. The intelligence officer told us how many heavy and light ack-ack guns, how many searchlights we might expect to encounter. The Jock, the wing commander, explained the system of markings, the kinds of flares that would be used by the pathfinders. He said concentration was the secret of success in these raids; that as long as the aircraft stayed bunched, they would protect each other.)
- 2. You may have noticed that Murrow only identifies the men by their first names, while other journalists, such as Ernie Pyle, frequently used first and last names of men in their print columns, as well as hometowns and other information. Why do you think Murrow limited the use of information in his reports?**
(Murrow may have been concerned about security and giving away too much information about future missions. At that time, there may have been more spies to hear Murrow than read Pyle’s columns, which could have created more of a concern. Second, since the men Murrow flew with were Royal Air Force, and not American pilots and airmen, he just may not have felt it necessary to identify them the way Pyle identified U.S. soldiers during the war.)
- 3. Murrow uses color descriptively many times during his reports. Cite four examples of this from the transcript or the sound file. Why do you think Murrow used color so frequently in his stories?**
(Murrow may have used color to paint a more descriptive “word picture” of what he saw to his audience. Since he didn’t have film, he had to rely on color to describe what he saw and what happened to his audience. Some examples of color from the transcript include: “red-headed English boy (with the two weeks’ old mustache)”; “blue-green jets of the exhaust”; “dirty gray clouds”; “tremendous big blob of yellow light”; “unhealthy white light”; and “huge green searchlight”.)
- 4. By late 1943, both the U.S. and Britain were in World War II. Why do you think Murrow chose to fly his missions with a RAF crew instead of an U.S. Army Air Corps crew? Explain your answer.**
(Some students may speculate that U.S. policy would not have allowed journalists on board a bombing mission, when RAF policy did. Other students may believe that it was good propaganda for Murrow’s career and life, that CBS refused to allow him to go on future missions, citing concern about losing their star reporter.)

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5. During the course of the broadcast, Murrow describes the crew “D-Dog”, and also attempts to describe the personalities and demeanor of the crew. In our own words, describe how Murrow does this and whether it’s an effective technique to use?

(Most students would probably agree that his technique is effective. Murrow takes care to note that the crew always acts in a professional manner, even in instances of high stress. For example, he notes that when “D-Dog” gets close to German territory, “all (the crew) seemed to draw closer to Jock in the cockpit”. Murrow notes “the whole crew was a unit and wasn’t wasting words”. He also describes Jock’s tone as the searchlight finds “D-Dog” as quiet and makes other references to the calm courage of the crew compared to his own nervousness.)

6. During the raid, Murrow makes references to his own nervousness and concern for his safety. Describe what he says.

(As the pilot tries to avoid the searchlight, Murrow describes that he was “on his knees, flat on the deck...” He notes that “the knees should have been strong enough to support me, but they weren’t and the stomach seemed to be in some danger of letting me down too”.)

7. How does Murrow describe the bombing of Berlin?

(Murrow notes that the sticks of incendiaries from the preceding waves made the place look like a badly laid-out city with the street lights on. Murrow adds that the “small incendiaries were going down like a fistful of white rice thrown on piece of black velvet”. Later in the broadcast, Murrow says that he saw the white fires below had turned red, and the smoke was getting thick below.)

8. In the last paragraph of the transcript, Murrow describes Berlin as a “thing of orchestrated Hell”. Based on what you’ve heard and/or read, do you think Murrow’s assessment is correct? Explain your answer.

(Murrow notes that “Orchestrated Hell” was a “terrible symphony of light and flames”, so most students might agree that the idea of fire might imply “hell”. Others might look at the idea of all the difficulties the crew of “D-Dog” went through in the bombing run as “hell”, too.)

9. From your perspective, was Murrow’s reports as effective (or not) as other forms of reporting from that era. (You might include newsreels and newspapers as a form of reporting.)

(Some students may say that they would have liked Murrow’s reports better had he actually taken a tape recorder in the plane to collect sounds from the raid.)

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RELEVANT STANDARDS:

This lesson addresses the following national content standards established by McREL, at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>

Understands the overall effect of World War II on various facets of society (e.g., the impact on industrial production, political goals, communication, national mobilization, technological innovations, and scientific research, and how these in turn made an impact upon war strategies, tactics, and levels of destruction; the consequences of World War II as a total war).

Understands significant military aspects of World War II (e.g., major turning points of war; Axis and Allied military campaigns in the European and Pacific theaters; the financial material, and human costs of the war and their economic consequences for the Allies and the Axis powers; the locations of the major theaters of war in North Africa, Europe, and the Pacific; the diverse contributions of men and women during the war).

Understands the different purposes of various media (e.g., to provide entertainment or information, to persuade, to transmit culture, to focus attention on an issue).

Understands production elements that contribute to the effectiveness of a specific medium (e.g., the way black-and-white footage implies documented truth; the way set design suggests aspects of a character's socio-cultural context; effectiveness of packaging for similar products and their appeal to purchasers).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Michael Hutchison is Technology Curriculum facilitator for the Vincennes Community Schools in Vincennes, Indiana. In 1996, Michael was named a national winner of the 21st Century Teacher competition, a recognition that was repeated in 1997. In 1998, Compaq named Michael a first-place prizewinner in its Teacher Lesson Plan contest, and in 1999, Michael was named the Midwest regional winner in Technology & Learning magazine's Teacher of the Year program. In 2002, Michael was named "Teacher of the Year" by the Indiana Computer Educators and "Technology-Using Teacher of the Year" by the International Society for Technology in Education. In addition, Michael hosts a weekly social studies forum for TAPPED IN and serves as a faculty member of Connected University, as well as a member of the PBS TeacherSource Advisory Group.