

Create Your Own Radio Play

A guide for kids and families with tips from the makers of *The Dark Is Rising* Audio Drama

What is a radio play?

Long before televisions, cinemas or even books, people told stories through word of mouth. Gathered around a campfire, or standing on a soapbox in the town square, storytellers would use the power of their words and the magic of storytelling to entertain audiences.

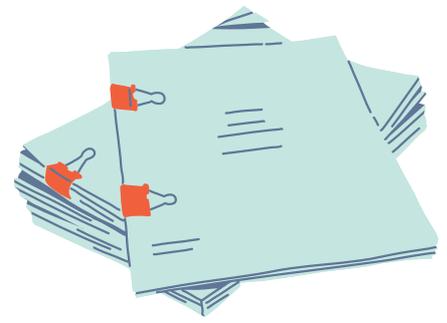
When BBC radio was created in 1922, it continued the tradition of oral storytelling by broadcasting radio plays. Using actors to voice characters and some simple sound effects, radio plays soon became very popular. The first play written for BBC radio was called *A Comedy of Danger* by Richard Hughes. It was set in a coal mine in the dark so the characters, like the audience, could only hear what was going on. There is something very exciting about listening to a play live on the radio at the same time as people all around the country. It is a shared experience.

Lots of radio plays are new stories being heard for the first time, but others are adaptations. This means the story was originally a book or film that has been changed to be suitable for radio. We decided to turn a book, *The Dark is Rising* by Susan Cooper, into a radio play because we knew the descriptive language and exciting story would make a thrilling audio experience.



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How to make your own radio play!



First, write your script.

- Decide whether you want to make up your own story or adapt a book. If you are adapting a book, choose your favourite scene and write down all the dialogue you can see (anything in speech marks).
- Look at the speech you've written down: does the story still make sense without all the text in the book? If not, you might need to add bits of narration or extra dialogue so all the information is there for the audience.
- The script should be laid out as the character's name, followed by their speech like this -
MAGGIE: How's your big brother Max then, Will?
WILL: Oh, fine thank you. Grown his hair long.

Try to keep your first script short (around one page) so you have time to record it all.

From the Pros:

"I've read *The Dark Is Rising* probably fifteen times over the past thirty years, but it was only when I began adapting it for radio that I began really to *hear* it as a novel, to understand how carefully it *listens*, how complex its soundscape is on the page. It's absolutely brimful of sounds, much more so – I think – than most novels; Susan is a deeply aural writer, we might say.

There is the chant at the novel's core, of course ('When the Dark comes rising, six shall hold it back...'); an incantation, a charm against harm – and, in its way, a plot for all five of the novels in the series. There's the music that sings and hums and rings throughout the book, coming out of radios, out of Paul's flute and Will's voice... And then there are the sounds, so many of them, from the blacksmith's hammer striking the anvil, to the whooping of Herne and the howling of the Yell Hounds when the Wild Hunt is launched, to the cracking of the ice on the Thames when the cold is at its fiercest.

So as you listen to our adaptation, and as you read the novel itself, I'd say: listen even more carefully than you would normally – hear the action in your mind's ear, as well as seeing it in your mind's eye!"

- **Robert Macfarlane**, Co-Adapter of *The Dark is Rising*

Adding Foley (Sound Effects)

One of the most fun parts of making a radio play is adding the sound effects, which are called foley. Foley artists use a variety of objects to recreate everyday sounds. For example, if a character walks through the snow in the play, the foley artist might record the sound of them squashing a bag of flour, to get a similar sound effect.

What sounds can you identify in your story? Read through the script and list them all. Then get to work finding fun and interesting ways to recreate them.

You might also want to include music in your radio play. If you play an instrument, then you could create your own original songs. You could also use pieces of music that already exist and suit the mood of your play. Instrumental music (music without lyrics) works best for playing in the background when characters are speaking.



From the Pros:

“I have found it fun to create the sound of crackling fire by crunching bubble wrap, for example, or sliding paper along a table to make the sound of skiing.”

- **Noah Alexander**, Will in *The Dark is Rising*

Tips for Recording



It's time to record your radio play! You don't need fancy recording equipment - the microphone on your (or your parent or guardian's) phone will work great.

You need to find a very quiet place to record so outside noises don't interfere with the recording. A DIY recording booth might be a bedroom closet with lots of clothes, or even a den made of duvets!

From the Pros:

“When I record my voice for auditions, I use duvets and blankets to dampen outside noises and reduce reverb. You could do this at home by creating a den of duvets and other soft materials.”

- **Noah Alexander**, Will in *The Dark is Rising*



How to share your work!

If you enjoy a **technical task**, there are lots of free apps on smart phones or online that you can ask an adult to help you download. These will let you edit your audio together with music and sound effects.

If you want to share your radio play straight away however, why not stage a **live reading** for friends and family? Set up a little stage area, get some actors involved and print out the scripts. You can read your play out as a live performance.

From the Pros:

"It's a really complex task to bring a novel to life on the radio. We typically record everything separately too. The first half of one scene might be recorded a week earlier than the second half depending on actor's availabilities. Narration was recorded 2 months after the cast. Sound effects, more abstract sounds and music are added once all the performers have been recorded. And finally we add Foley - footsteps, clothing sounds, sounds of items - as the very last layer to bring it all to life."

- **Gareth Fry**, Sound Designer for *The Dark is Rising*



If you've recorded a radio play, feel free to share it with friends and family. We'd love to hear it too! You can tag us on social media:



Twitter: @Complicite



Instagram: CompliciteTheatre



Facebook: TheatredeComplicite

Make sure you get permission from anyone involved in the play before you share it, and give credit to them in your post.

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