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# Lesson Plan: Finding Your Voice - Crafting a Mini-Podcast Narrative

## Materials Needed

- Computer or laptop with internet access
- Headphones
- Microphone (a smartphone's built-in mic or a simple USB microphone will work perfectly)
- Free audio editing software (Audacity is a great, user-friendly option)
- Notebook and pen or a word processor
- Access to short audio clips from narrative podcasts (e.g., *The Moth*, *This American Life*, or *Snap Judgment*)

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## Lesson Overview

**Subject:** English Language Arts

**Topic:** Narrative Writing & Digital Storytelling

**Time Allotment:** Approximately 2-3 hours (can be split over two sessions)

**Lesson Goal:** To move beyond traditional essay writing by planning, scripting, and producing a short, personal narrative podcast episode. This lesson focuses on using voice, pacing, and sound to create an emotional impact on a listener.

## 1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Analyze the core components of effective audio storytelling (hook, story arc, vocal delivery).
- Develop and script a compelling personal narrative (250-400 words) suitable for an audio format.
- Use vocal techniques (tone, pace, volume) to convey emotion and meaning.
- Produce a 2-3 minute audio story, incorporating at least one sound effect or piece of background music.

## 2. Introduction: The Power of Sound (15 minutes)

Let's begin by exploring what makes audio stories so powerful.

1. **Listen & Analyze:** Play a 2-minute clip from a compelling narrative podcast (a story from *The Moth Radio Hour* is an excellent choice). Listen to it once without interruption.
2. **Guided Discussion:** After listening, discuss the following questions:
  - What was the story about? What made it interesting right from the start?
  - How did the storyteller's voice change during the story? Did they speed up, slow down, get quieter, or louder? Where?
  - Close your eyes and listen again. What images popped into your head? What specific words or phrases created those images?

- Did you hear any music or sound effects? How did they add to the feeling of the story?

### 3. Main Activity: From Idea to Audio

#### Part A: Finding Your Story (20 minutes)

Every great podcast starts with a great story. Your story should be personal, focused, and have a clear point or feeling you want to share.

1. **Brainstorming:** Let's find a topic. Think about a specific moment in time. Don't try to tell your whole life story, just one "slice." Here are some prompts:
  - A time you felt truly brave or genuinely terrified.
  - The story behind a scar or a meaningful object you own.
  - A moment you realized an adult was wrong.
  - The first time you succeeded at something you had practiced for.
  - A funny misunderstanding or a moment of embarrassing failure.
2. **Choose & Outline:** Select one idea. Now, map out the simple story arc:
  - **The Beginning:** Set the scene. Where were you? Who were you with? What was the "normal" situation?
  - **The Middle:** The turn. What happened to change things? What was the central conflict or challenge?
  - **The End:** The resolution. How did it end? What did you learn or how did you change? What is the "so what" of your story?

#### Part B: Writing for the Ear (30-45 minutes)

Writing a script to be spoken is very different from writing an essay to be read. It needs to sound natural.

1. **Draft Your Script:** Write your story based on your outline (aim for around 300 words). As you write, remember these tips:
  - **Write like you talk.** Use contractions (don't, can't, it's). Read your sentences out loud to see if they sound clunky.
  - **Show, Don't Tell.** Instead of saying "I was scared," describe the feeling: "My heart hammered against my ribs, and my hands felt slick with sweat."
  - **Use Sensory Details.** What did you see, hear, smell, taste, or feel? Paint a picture for your listener.
  - **Plan Your Pauses.** Where will you take a breath to build suspense? Mark this in your script with "(pause)."
  - **Identify Sound Cues.** Think of one place where a sound effect (a door creaking, a distant bell) or a short music clip could enhance the mood. Make a note in your script, like "[add sound of a cheering crowd here]."
2. **Rehearse:** Read your script aloud 2-3 times. This helps you find awkward phrases and practice your vocal delivery. Time yourself to make sure you're in the 2-3 minute range.

#### Part C: Recording & Production (45-60 minutes)

This is where your story comes to life!

1. **Set Up Your "Studio":** Find a quiet space to record. A closet works great because the clothes absorb echo! Use your phone's voice memo app or plug a USB mic into your computer and open Audacity.

2. **Record Your Narration:** Speak clearly and close to the microphone. Record your script. Don't worry about small mistakes—you can either re-record the line or edit it out later. Perform it, don't just read it!
3. **Edit Your Audio (using Audacity or similar software):**
  - Import your voice recording.
  - Trim any dead air at the beginning and end.
  - Cut out any major mistakes or long, awkward pauses.
  - Find a royalty-free sound effect or music clip (sites like Freesound.org or Pixabay Music are great resources).
  - Import your sound file and place it on a separate track. Adjust the volume so it sits nicely underneath your voice and doesn't overpower it.
4. **Export Your Masterpiece:** Export the final project as an MP3 file. Congratulations, you've made a podcast!

## 4. Assessment & Reflection (15 minutes)

The primary assessment is the final MP3 file itself. Let's listen to it together and reflect on the process.

### Simple Evaluation Rubric:

- **Narrative Arc (Excellent/Good/Needs Improvement):** Does the story have a clear beginning, middle, and end? Is the central point clear?
- **Vocal Delivery (Excellent/Good/Needs Improvement):** Is the narration engaging? Does the student use changes in pace, tone, and volume to convey emotion?
- **Creative Use of Sound (Excellent/Good/Needs Improvement):** Is there at least one audio element (music/SFX) used effectively to enhance the story's mood?
- **Clarity & Production (Excellent/Good/Needs Improvement):** Is the audio clear and easy to understand? Is it free of major technical issues?

### Reflection Questions:

- What part of this process did you enjoy the most? Brainstorming, writing, or producing?
- What was the most challenging part?
- If you were to do this again, what would you do differently with your story or your production?

## 5. Differentiation & Extension

- **For Extra Support:** Focus only on the storytelling. The student can simply record their voice reading the script, without the pressure of adding music or sound effects. A script template with sentence starters can also be provided.
- **For an Advanced Challenge:**
  - **The Interview:** Instead of a personal narrative, conduct a short interview with a family member or friend about one of their memories. Edit the interview down to a compelling 3-minute story, adding your own narration to guide the listener.
  - **Complex Sound Design:** Create a rich soundscape with multiple sound effects and layered music to build a more immersive world for the listener.

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