



We are often told about how the Media - film, television, radio, newspapers - affect our everyday life. One example of this is the way in which people have tried to make links between violent behaviour and violence shown in the Media. Woody Allen's film, "Radio Days" looks at a slightly different way in which the media, in particular radio, affected people's everyday life in America in the 1940s.

The first important thing to realise about the time in which the film is set is that television, although already in existence, was not as widespread as it is today. The radio was the most important medium in everybody's lives. All of the different types of programme that we now see on TV were once heard on radio. Just as now we might rush home to see a particular programme on TV, so in the 1940s, people would do the same, but for radio programmes.

How and why has radio changed since then? Is it as important to us now as it was to the people shown in the film? If radio has changed then why has it changed? What part does radio play in your life?

In "Radio Days", everybody seems to listen to the radio, everybody seems to have their favourite programme. What were those programmes?

TASK 1

Make a list of the different types of programme that we see people listening to or being made in the film. They might be quiz shows or music programmes. When you have done this, try to decide whether each of these type of programmes can still be heard on the radio. If they cannot be, then where would you now find this type of programme?

RESEARCH

Try to find someone who remembers the 1940s. Ask them whether they listened to the radio a lot and also what types of programmes they remember listening to. You might also ask them how their listening habits changed when TV was introduced into this country.

The programmes that the characters in "Radio Days" listen to seem to take over their lives at times. Joe dreams of having a Masked Avenger ring and will go to any lengths to get one. His relation, Ruthie, imitates singers from the radio. Sally White dreams of being a radio star and escaping from her life as a cigarette girl. The people that we see lose themselves in the world that is created by the radio. Do you think that this is still true today? Do you listen to the radio to escape or do you simply have it on for background noise?

What radio stations can you pick up in your area? Which are BBC stations and which are commercial? Are there any other stations? If you just turned on the radio, could you tell which station you were listening to simply by the content of the programmes?

TASK 2

Do you ever listen to the radio? Make a list of any particular programmes that you regularly listen to. When you have done this, ask other people what they listen to on the radio. Try to get a good range of people, that is not just people of your own age.

Is there any pattern to the radio listening habits of people of a certain age? Does everybody listen to the same radio station or do people of different ages listen to different stations? If certain people listen only to certain radio programmes and radio stations, then each of those stations might well be appealing only to that type of person. Can the same be said about TV?

TASK 3

It might be interesting to look at the difference between the different radio stations. Before doing this, let's look at the difference between TV channels? Do different types of TV programmes appear only on certain channels? What are the differences between, say, BBC1 and ITV, apart from the adverts?

When you have done this, then try to think of the differences between Radio 1, Radio 4 and your local radio station. How is each one different? You can use the chart below to help you with this task.

Programmes

Radio 1	Radio 2	Radio 3	Radio 4	Local (BBC)	Local (Commercial)

What types of audience is each one appealing to? How does each one try to appeal to that audience? In the film the characters, for entertainment, have a choice between the radio, magazines and films. Nowadays we could add TV to that list. What would you say was the major difference between watching something on TV and listening to something on the radio? How is the experience of "receiving" a programme different? What do you have to do when listening to something on radio as compared to watching something on TV?

When people make radio programmes they have to be aware that their audience cannot see what is happening. This can sometimes be an advantage. In "Radio Days" when you first hear the voice of the Masked Avenger, he sounds everything that a hero should be. When we are shown the actor recording a programme, then we realise that he could never play the part if the programme was on TV. A famous example of this is Orson Welles' radio production of "The War of the Worlds", which is actually featured in the film "Radio Days". Welles' production was so lifelike that people listening on the radio actually believed that Earth was being invaded by beings from outer space. People panicked and tried to flee New York, some even killed themselves. This gives some idea of the power that radio had and also could still have.

Almost anything can "happen" on radio. You could not go out into the playground and make a video of a shipwreck occurring, yet you could sit in the classroom with a tape recorder and make a radio play of this event. You would need sound effects but you could make it sound very realistic. However, certain types of programme do present certain problems for radio. Take sport, for example. How does a commentary on say a football match have to be different on the radio from a TV commentary?

TASK 4

Take an everyday incident, such as someone coming into a room. Now, imagine that you were going to shoot this scene for a film. How would you do it? What type of shots would you include in the scene? Now imagine that the person coming into a room was forming part of a radio news commentary. What extra information would you have to include? Try to tape record your commentary of the person walking into the room.

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