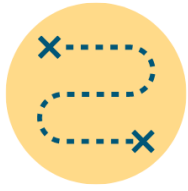


## STRUCTURES FOR STUDENT LEADERSHIP &amp; ADVOCACY TOOL



## Using Podcasts to Inform and Promote Student Leadership and Advocacy

By Courtney Henry

### TOOL DESCRIPTION

A choice-based performance assessment that engages students in advocacy.

### CRITICAL CONTEXT INFORMATION

This unit was developed as an end-of-year project for high school Advanced Placement English Language and Composition students at a suburban high school, in an open enrollment (rather than selective) class setting.

### TOOL & LINKS

- [AP Choice Project / Presentation—Student Directions and Rubric](#)
- Suggested podcasts:
  - [Serial, Season 1 Podcast](#) (Serial Productions)
  - [The Student Podcast Challenge](#) (NPR)
  - [19 Great Learning Podcasts for the Classroom](#) (Common Sense Education)

## About this Tool & Guidance for Adaptation

**First**, as a summer assignment, students listen to the first three episodes of NPR's *Serial*, Season 1, in which Sarah Koenig explores the 1999 arrest and incarceration of Adnan Syed. He was accused of killing his ex-girlfriend, a charge he adamantly denies. Koenig explores whether or not this may be true, and, in doing so, also investigates and reveals many flaws in the criminal justice system.

What I ultimately want my students to see is that podcasts are ever-growing in popularity and provide writers with another method with which to get their ideas out into the world. Since AP Language and Composition focuses on social justice and citizenry, we continue to explore these ideas and other podcasts throughout the year.

While *Serial* works well for Advanced Placement upperclass students, there are many podcasts out there that are appropriate for younger students and that touch upon a host of topics. In fact, while *Serial* is the only podcast I use in its entirety (we end up finishing it once the school year begins), I pull episodes from other podcasts throughout the year as well, [Radiolab](#) being one example.

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**Then**, once students are familiar with podcasts, including how and why they function, they complete research on a social issue that feels important to them. Students are encouraged to gather information and viewpoints from multiple sources, including those that challenge their own.

**Finally**, students are ready to create a podcast of their own. As part of a “Choice” project, they are prompted as follows:

- A. Reflect on your research.
- B. Decide on the purpose of your presentation. What do you hope to say about this issue?
- C. Write a script that is modeled after the podcasts you are familiar with. There will be opportunities for reflection and feedback.
- D. Record your podcast.
- E. You must still:
  1. Submit a works cited page of your sources (5+) on presentation day
  2. Craft the conversation through use of a basic script (some ad libbing is okay)
  3. Consider production value<sup>45</sup>

I encourage teachers to consider what you want your students to learn by creating their podcast. Do you want them to learn about the life cycle of a butterfly and know it so well that they can teach it to others? Do you want them to write a narrative in the style of [This I Believe](#) and then record it? Do you want students to develop a podcast on how to be a good friend and use it as a SEL lesson?

Guide them on the best resources to use once they start. Internet research is, of course, always key, but what else can they use? Would they be able to interview others? Incorporate appropriate music? Use soundbites from the media?

## Teacher Narrative

Podcasts are a great medium because they vary in their approach and thus are pretty versatile teaching and learning tools. Some are expository, some are persuasive, and all aim to be entertaining. As a writing teacher, I love the opportunities to talk about the choices we make as writers, and how those choices must be in response to our audience and our purpose.

This is a valuable opportunity for leadership, collaboration, and student agency, as they are put in control of so many aspects of their learning: what topic to study, what to say about that topic, what creative angle to use, the writing itself, and the recording process.

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<sup>45</sup> **A note about technology:** My students have used Voice Record Pro and VoiceMemos, two free apps, to create their podcasts. Anchor is another free app that allows you to publish easily onto digital services like Spotify.

For example, one year, a group of students with different political ideologies worked together to create a podcast in which they civilly discussed abortion law. Not only was that a valuable research and writing experience for those students, but it perhaps had a more important message than just the topic itself: that people with different views can come together and have a conversation about a controversial topic. This is something our world desperately needs right now.

Once the podcasts are created, the students have a product that they can use as a tool for advocacy. They can share it with their classmates to start, but look for other opportunities to broaden their audience as well. For instance, our school has an ELA night, where students are able to perform or present their work. This allows them to reach our school community as a whole, as well as interact with people from our local community who attend the event. There are also competitions for student podcasts. NPR, for example, runs a yearly contest in which students from grades 5-12 are able to submit podcasts, and the winning submission is shared on the air.

I find my students to be passionate and engaged in social issues, and I love to offer these opportunities for them to become part of a wider conversation and to put their ideas out into the world.

## MEET THE AUTHOR

Courtney Henry teaches high school English at Nipmuc Regional High School in Upton, MA. She currently teaches both AP Language and Composition and Satire, a heterogenous course offered to the school's seniors. She teaches in an inclusion setting, with some co-taught classes. She believes that all students should learn how to use their voices effectively to share their beliefs and make a positive impact on the world.

