



Listening to a Radio Play

When the movies and TV exploit their own peculiar virtues, they invite the viewer not to use his own imagination, but to take for real the images he's shown—to look through the eyes of the camera and see, as in life, the events that unfold. The stage, too, creates an impression of immediacy. But in radio, the craft is of a largely different sort. For what radio exploits, in full, is not the passive power of the eye to behold, but the versatile genius of the mind to create. Radio gives voice to words and energy to sound and then, because no scene is drawn, leaves the mind unfettered to envision not the things it must, but rather those it will.

~ Elissa S. Guralnick, *Radio Drama: The Stage of the Mind*, Virginia Quarterly Review, Winter 1985,
<https://www.vqronline.org/essay/radio-drama-stage-mind>

Stage Play vs. Radio Play

- Plays are driven by characters. When you watch a stage play, characters are created by how they move, the staging, facial expressions, and costuming, and how they interact with the set. In a radio play, the characters and their journeys are conveyed by voice (tone, volume, pacing) and sound effects.
- A radio play creates the setting and set through narration and sound effects and how the characters react or mention the setting (if they do at all). Like novels, language that evokes images seems to be part of radio plays, which is not necessarily the case in stage plays.
- Concise language and word choice are important in radio and stage plays since time is limited. Writers (and editors) determine how long novels will be; readers can return to novels at their own pace at any given time. Onstage and in radio, stories are limited by the time available. Very few audiences will sit through a four-hour play or radio play!
- Stage plays ask the audience to suspend reality and choose to believe what they see on stage. The production elements create a specific version of the play's world. A radio play invites listeners to use their imagination to visualize these elements. Each person may have a different experience and envision a different world depending on how they interpret what they hear.

While you Listen

Pay attention to the words and sounds:

- Do the descriptions or sounds remind you of anything?
- How do they make you feel?
- What parts can you picture clearly?
- How does music and sound support the action?

Draw or doodle while you listen:

- Engaging multiple senses at the same time can help you understand and process what you are hearing.

Listen multiple times:

- If you have time, listen more than once.
- Pay attention to what you hear more clearly or what you missed during the first listen.