

**Roosevelt and the Rise of Radio:  
America Tunes into Politics**

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## Process Paper

For this year's theme, "Communications in history; the key to understanding," our attention immediately turned to mass media's role in history. Within that broad category, we chose Franklin Delano Roosevelt's use of radio as our topic because it made a significant impact on history, Laura's experience with amateur radio stimulated interest in radio history, and we were both fascinated by the history of the Depression era.

First, we researched broadly to give us a foundation on which to build the rest of our learning. We read about mass communications, broadcast media, radio history, the New Deal, and FDR's life. The Western Washington University library was a wonderful resource from which we obtained most of our print sources- newspapers as well as books. The library's video collection was also helpful. The local radio museum was also an invaluable resource. Jonathan Winter, the curator, allowed us to use his extensive radio history resources including books, magazines, and old radio programs, as well as one corner of the museum for interviews. After the regional contest, we continued researching by focusing on more personal sources, such as elderly men and women in our community in order to better understand the more personal aspects of the Depression and Roosevelt's "chats".

Although we had little experience with documentaries, we finally decided that it was the best method to display our research because it allowed for extensive use of both powerful visual images and auditory clips. Using an *i-movie* program, we experimented, played, and discovered the capabilities available. Our biggest struggle was simply getting

the computer to do what we envisioned for our movie, a struggle in which we hope we have succeeded.

In our documentary, we show that Franklin Delano Roosevelt used radio to explain his New Deal to the American public, thereby gaining their understanding, cooperation, and promoting their involvement in politics, and setting a precedent for later presidential use of the broadcast media. He was able to do this for many reasons: the radio's rise in popularity during the 1920's made the medium widespread enough to reach the entire nation; he had previous experience with the radio as Secretary of the Navy; and he had a marvelous radio voice and personable style. He needed to use the radio because the New Deal required cooperation from the people which could be garnered more easily through the radio than through any other medium, and harsh press and political criticism threatened to undermine his New Deal. Thus, Roosevelt's communication through the radio during his presidency was the key to the American people's understanding of the New Deal, and to their greater involvement in government undertakings, which is the basis for our title; Roosevelt and the Rise of Radio: America tunes into politics. We hope you benefit from our research as you enjoy our video.