DIRECTIONS

Compose an audio essay that explores the role of sound in your own personal literacy history and that will help class members gain a broader understanding of your literacy practices and values.

This project should *not simply record and reproduce sounds*. Rather, it should use sound to *tell a story, make meaning about, create some commentary on, offer some insight into your literacy practices and values*. Most importantly, it should help listeners *reflect* on what they are hearing. Your essay can take the form of a sound portrait, soundscape, audio documentary, or sound reflection.

Other than these requirements, the assignment is wide open—and purposefully so! I want you to exercise your own creativity in the service of teaching us all something about literacy.

In class, we will listen to the audio essays below to explore sound. Listen to them yourself as well.

- **sound portrait:** an audio essay that focuses on some aspect of a person's life. It is often biographical.

    "Willie Young Rabbit Hunter (sound portrait, 1:37)"
    <http://www.soundportraits.org/on-air/rabbit_hunter/>

    "Reggie Jones, Lifeguard" (sound portrait, 3:45)
    <http://www.soundportraits.org/on-air/lifeguard/>

- **audio documentary:** an audio essay that records the sounds of an important event or time in history when something momentous is happening, some change is taking place, or some trend/pattern is observed in society.

    "Woolworth's Lunch-Counter Waitress" (audio documentary about the original civil rights sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter, 4:58)
    <http://www.soundportraits.org/on-air/lunch-counter_waitress/>

    "Street Dogs" (audio documentary about dogs who live with street people, 12:06)
    <http://www.transom.org/shows/2001/200108.shows.streetdogs.perrywarga.html>

HINTS FOR SUCCESS

- Make sure to plan for your sound project. Writing will help you here and you should hand in all the written materials that support your project. For example, be sure to keep a written production log of the time you spend on your project. Here is a sample entry for that log:

27 November 2006

9:40-11:00   In class, spent 40 minutes uploading audio and 40 minutes editing audio according to plan. PLAN FOR NEXT SESSION: Continue to edit audio.

—record citations for the audio clips you download from the web
—write a reflection on a draft

- Make sure you know how to use your recording equipment! Read the documentation that comes along with the digital sound recorders!

  —always wear isolating headphones so that you can hear what you are recording
  —whenever possible, connect the audio recorder to a power source with an adaptor;
     batteries fail at the worst possible times.

  Other written documentation will also come in handy. Careful written documentation will help your teacher understand how much work you have put into your project. Here are some suggestions for the documentation you should be keeping:

  —storyboard your audio essay or write a scene-by-scene outline
  —write out interview questions beforehand and share them with the person(s) you are
     interviewing.
  —make a list of sounds/people/activities you need to record
  —make sure you are not recording sounds (e.g., air conditioning hum, a lawn mower going by, a
     nearby source of electrical power, ambient noise in a room) that will obscure or contaminate the
     sounds you want to capture

- Schedule more time than you think you need for editing with Audacity—it always takes *much much* longer than the original recording!! Before you begin editing, be sure to go through the Audacity tutorial on the SourceForge web site <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/help/> or the Audacity overview at the Transom Web site <http://www.transom.org/tools/editing_mixing/200404.audacity.html>.

- Before you edit—draw a visual plan of how you want the essay to be structured—what anecdotes go where, where you are going to include soundmark, signal sound, keynote sounds, silence, music, narration, and so on. Identify when and where you are going to *layer* these sounds to create a rich texture for your project.

- Make sure to provide some kind of focused reflective frame for your audio project—some way of helping listeners understand what they are hearing, why it is significant, and what you are trying to convey about your subject. (Read the excerpt from Abel and Glass (1999) *An Illustrated Guide for Radio*.)

- Select/edit/winnow! Make sure your sound composition is tightly and effectively composed. Cut everything that doesn't directly contribute to your intended message. (Read *An Illustrated Guide to Radio*.)

- Make sure your sound project effectively takes advantage of the specific affordances (capabilities) of the medium. What can sound capture best (e.g., tone, emotion, accent)? What escapes the affordances of sound (e.g., a wink, a hand gesture, a facial expression)?

- **SAVE OFTEN, SAVE OFTEN, SAVE OFTEN!!!**

- **BACK UP YOUR WORK, BACK UP YOUR WORK, BACK UP YOUR WORK!!!**

- See the attached evaluation sheet for the criteria on which this assignment will be graded.

EVALUATION SHEET
Audio Autobiography: Sound and Literacy

1   2   3   4   5

Little evidence of careful <————————————————————————> Lots of careful planning/
planning/composing/producing   composing/producing
Comment:

1   2   3   4   5

Reveals very little <————————————————————————————> Reveals a great deal
about role of sound in life   about role of sound in life
Comment:

1   2   3   4   5

Lack of reflective focus <————————————————————————> Great reflective focus
on personal literacy practices   on personal literacy practices
Comment:

1   2   3   4   5

Ineffective use of affordances of audio<——————————————> Effective use of affordances of audio
Comment:

1   2   3   4   5

Ineffective attention to audience/purpose <————————————> Effective attention to audience/purpose
Comment:

1   2   3   4   5

Less than careful approach to citation, <————————————————> Very careful citation and
documentation, copyright, licensing   and documentation, copyright, licensing
Comment:

1   2   3   4   5

Less than careful approach <————————————————————————> Very careful approach
to permissions/releases   to permissions/releases
Comment:

1   2   3   4   5

Poor written documents/ <————————————————————————> Excellent written documents/
supporting materials   supporting materials
Comment:

1   2   3   4   5

Less creative/insightful <————————————————————————> Very creative/insightful
Comment:

GRADE: