



We are living through history right now, and future generations will want to know: “What was life like during the COVID-19 pandemic?” Maine libraries are creating an online, living time capsule of the pandemic, and we want your thoughts and experiences to be included!

Parents and educators, check out these lesson plans for ideas on how to involve your students in learning about primary sources and documenting their experiences for the future. The materials you and your students create today will become the historical record of tomorrow.

Lesson

Listening to the Present, Sounds of the Past

Subject

Earth and Human Activity, Geography, History, Reading, Speaking and Listening, Sound Studies

Grade Level

All ages

Learning Results

English Language Arts--Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas--Standard 11

English Language Arts--Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas--Standard 1 (and 3?)

Science and Engineering--Earth and Human Activity--Standard 3

Social Studies--Geography--Standard 1

Social Studies--History--Standard 1 (F1, D1)

Objectives

Analyze and interpret information presented in a sound recording
Compare and contrast sounds of the present with sounds of the past
Discuss the impacts of human behavior and technology on the natural world

Definitions

Digital archive: an online collection of born-digital or digitized archival items; also a crowdsourced collection of materials documenting a particular topic or event

Noise pollution: any unwanted or disturbing sound that affects the health and well-being of humans and other organisms

Soundmark: a sound that makes the soundscape of a certain place different from any other place

Soundscape: An atmosphere or environment created by or with sound

Materials Needed

- Internet access to listen to sound recording examples
- Smartphone, tablet, or computer for capturing audio
- Paper and writing/art supplies for making sound lists

Modifications

No tech: Students can listen to whatever is around them and record their observations on paper.

Resources

Freesound: <https://freesound.org/>

National Archives: [Analyze a Sound Recording](#)

National Geographic: [Noise Pollution](#) | [Soundscapes Activity](#)

Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage: [The Sound of Life: What Is a Soundscape?](#)

US National Park Service: [Effects of Noise on Wildlife](#)

Introduction

Why study sound? And who studies sound? Historians, geographers, scientists, conservationists, and architects do. Historians think about how the past sounded. Geographers consider how sounds define a sense of place. Scientists and conservationists study the effects of noise pollution on birds, whales, and other animals, and on human health. Architects think about the acoustics of buildings--to protect people from hearing too much noise or to allow them to hear music better.

In this lesson, students will learn to think critically about sound. They will practice listening, investigate how sound can invite a deeper understanding of the past, and gain insight into the impacts of human behavior and technology on the natural world.

Step 1: Introducing Sound

Lead your students in a discussion about sound:

How did you wake up this morning? Was it a noise that woke you up?

Here are three different types of “alarms” that people have used over the years in order to wake up:

- Rooster crowing: <https://freesound.org/people/Lydmakeren/sounds/510906/>
- Old-fashioned wind-up alarm clock: <https://freesound.org/people/joedeshon/sounds/78562/>
- Cell phone alarm

What could these different alarms tell you about a person’s life? Would someone who is living in a city wake up to a rooster? Would your parents have woken up to a cell phone alarm?

Ask students to compare and contrast sounds of the present with sounds of the past:

What other sounds might have been different in your parents’ day or grandparents’ day?

Hint: Think about the ways that technology has changed. What sounds do your devices make? What about the sounds of transportation and traffic? Consider the appliances we use in daily life (vacuum cleaners, washing machines, dishwashers).

Step 2: Listening to Our Environment

Have your students sit quietly with their eyes closed and listen closely to their environment. Then ask them:

What do you hear?

Can you distinguish between natural sounds and human-produced sounds?

Is there a difference between *sound* and *noise*?

Use this as an opportunity for further discussion about **noise pollution** (see: National Geographic: [Noise Pollution](#) and US National Park Service: [Effects of Noise on Wildlife](#)).

Wildlife depends on sound to find a mate, to find food, to stay safe. Underwater drilling and other sounds of industrial processes disrupt whales and their ability to navigate and may be responsible for mass strandings. City birds must sing more loudly than their country counterparts to be heard over the din of traffic.

Step 3: Recording a Soundscape

Share this example of a **soundscape** that was submitted by a community member to Portland Public Library's digital archive: [A Dog Walk in the Early Afternoon](#).

Ask students:

What do you hear?

Do you think the person who recorded the sound would have heard the same things before the pandemic?

How do you think sounds in your home or neighborhood have changed since March of 2020?

Have students create their own soundscape. Students can create an original sound recording using a smartphone, tablet, or computer. Alternatively, they can create a word list of the sounds they hear around them.

Ask students to give their soundscape a title, and to identify the location, date, and time of day of the recording. Additionally, have them write a brief description of what they have recorded. This information will help researchers find and make use of their soundscape in the future!

Have students share their soundscapes with the class, reflecting on what they learned by listening to their environment. Can they identify any **soundmarks** that make their home or neighborhood unique?

Invite students to upload the recordings to your local or regional Maine Contemporary Archives project. (Use [this list to find a participating library](#) near you.) Each project has its own Terms and Conditions for contributions; get in touch if you have any questions!

Assessment Activity

Ask students to apply what they have learned to an analysis of a sound recording from New York Public Library's [Missing Sounds of New York](#).

Students can respond to these questions from the National Archives [Analyze a Sound Recording](#) worksheet:

Anticipate: What is the title? What do you think you will hear?

Meet the sound recording: What type of recording is it? What is the mood or tone?

Observe its parts: List what everything you hear, and write one sentence summarizing the recording.

When is this recording from? What was happening at the time in history it was recorded? Who made it?

Use it as historical evidence: What did you find out from this sound recording that you might not learn anywhere else? What other sources could you use to help understand this event or topic?

Soundscape Example

Title	A Dog Walk in the Early Afternoon
Creator	Raminta M.
Date	May 16, 2020 between 12 pm and 2 pm
Source	Isolating Together: Portland Public Library https://portlandlibrary.omeka.net/items/show/62
Description	During quarantine, dog walks had gotten a little more animated in the early afternoons as more kids were out playing in the streets. More neighbors without dogs have been walking the neighborhood and it feels as if every third house has a new basketball hoop.
Subjects and Keywords	COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020- Dog walking Outdoor sounds Soundscape Walking
Format	MP3 sound file
Duration	46 seconds