Americans today can communicate on countless types of devices in countless ways in an instant. It wasn’t always that way, though. The invention of the radio allowed families to receive messages quickly. The invention changed the way families received information, music, and other entertainment forever.

The Early Years

The first successful radio transmission was completed by its Italian inventor, Guglielmo Marconi, in 1895. Radio waves, or electromagnetic waves, were used for communicating over long distances from a transmitter to a receiver. The first radio broadcast for the purpose of entertainment was broadcast in 1905. On Christmas Eve, Reginald Fessenden’s audio message included music from a violin and the reading of bible passages.

During World War I, radio became an important way for military forces to pass along information. After the war, radio stations began to open in the United States. The first news broadcast went out in 1920, and soon more news and entertainment programs entered the home of listeners.

The Golden Age

The Golden Age of Radio began in the 1930s and lasted until the 1940s. In the beginning of the decade, about 12 million Americans owned radios. By 1939, 28 million people had radios. It was credited for uniting communities and families as they gathered around for the evening broadcasts.

Radio opened up a whole new world of music for listeners. Future musicians were inspired by what they heard coming across the airwaves. Famous symphonies began to broadcast their performances. Country music did especially well on the radio, with shows like the Grand Ole’ Opry becoming platforms for talented artists. Radio gave musicians a way to achieve national fame and recognition.

Radio became the central form of entertainment. Each day, Americans could hear plays, variety shows, stories, game shows,
Fireside Chats

During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt developed a show called *Fireside Chats*. The name came from the presumption that families would gather beside the fireplace to tune in. Americans loved this time with their president and felt he was speaking directly to them. During his twelve years as president, 1933-1945, he gave 31 radio addresses. He explained his policies and decisions and gave updates on the war and the nation’s struggling economy. Americans loved Roosevelt’s calm and confident voice in a time of uncertainty.

War of the Worlds

One of the most famous radio plays of all time aired on October 30, 1938. Members of the Mercury Theater performed their Halloween show, an adaptation of the H.G. Wells novel, *War of the Worlds*. The director and narrator was a well known actor by the name of Orson Welles. The show was scripted to sound like a regular broadcast, but would be interrupted by a series of breaking news updates. The fictional breaking news updates warned of an alien invasion that became increasingly more dangerous, culminating with the aliens unleashing toxic gas in New York City.

Welles had told audiences that the story was fiction at the beginning of the show, but many had tuned in after it began. Many didn’t realize that the radio show was fiction-- they believed they were really hearing news reports about an alien invasion, and began to panic! By the end of the show, word had spread around the city of the alien attack. CBS news and the local newspapers were flooded with calls questioning the invasion. A local mayor was furious because his small town had mobs of panicked people in the streets.

The End of the Golden Age

The Golden Age of Radio came to an end in the late 1940s with the invention of the television. It quickly became the preferred entertainment. Radio did, however, remain a popular way to bring music into one’s home for many decades to come. Although radio today faces tough competition with online music streaming platforms, it is still a popular way to listen to music.

Newspaper ads like this one in 1922 encouraged families to buy a radio. $75 in 1922 has the same buying power as about $1,100 today.

Make It a Radio Xmas

F. B. GILLE HARDWARE

619 Kansas Ave.  Fairfax 0719

Presidential ads like this one in 1922 encouraged families to buy a radio. $75 in 1922 has the same buying power as about $1,100 today.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered his “Fireside Chats” from the White House. His show gave relief to many during WWII as loved ones served overseas and money was scarce. Date: January 11, 1944

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Comprehension Quiz

Answer each question according to the article.

1. Who invented the radio?

________________________________________________________________________________

2. How was radio used in World War I?

________________________________________________________________________________

3. The Golden Age of Radio began in the _______ and lasted until the _______.

________________________________________________________________________________

4. What type of music did especially well on the radio?

________________________________________________________________________________

5. What did radio do for musicians?

________________________________________________________________________________

6. When did President Roosevelt develop his “Fireside Chats” radio show?

________________________________________________________________________________

7. What did War of the Worlds lead many citizens to believe was happening?

________________________________________________________________________________

8. What invention ended the Golden Age of Radio?

________________________________________________________________________________
Finding Text Evidence

Find each piece of text evidence in the evidence bank provided and highlight OR underline it with the color specified.

**For items 1-4, you’ll be citing textual evidence to support what the text says explicitly.**

1. Find the sentence that explains how radio waves were used. Highlight it in blue.
2. Find two sentences that explain why Americans loved Roosevelt’s *Fireside Chats*. Highlight them in green.
3. Find the sentence that reveals the name of the show that gave artists a platform for music. Highlight it in purple.
4. Find the sentence that explains why President Roosevelt named his show *Fireside Chats*. Highlight it in gray.

**For items 5-8, you’ll be citing one piece or multiple pieces of textual evidence to support inferences drawn from the text.**

5. Find one piece of evidence that shows that radio became very popular throughout the 1930s. Highlight it in orange.
6. Find one piece of text evidence that makes you think families benefitted from the invention of radio. Highlight it in yellow.
7. Find one piece of text evidence that supports the idea that *War of the Worlds* was meant to be a fun holiday celebration. Highlight it in pink.
8. Find two details from the article that support this statement: *Orson Welles was responsible for widespread panic in New York on October 30, 1938.* Highlight them in red.
Text Evidence Bank

For each item, find the appropriate piece(s) of text evidence and highlight or underline in the requested color.

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