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## 7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY

### WAR OF THE WORLDS – MEDIA LITERACY

Imagine turning on your radio one normal Sunday night and hearing an announcer exclaim: “Ladies and gentleman, this is the most terrifying thing I have ever witnessed! ... Those strange beings who landed in the Jersey farmlands tonight are the vanguard of an invading army.”

That is exactly what happened to the unsuspecting listeners of the CBS’s “Mercury Theater on the Air” radio program on Oct. 30, 1938. The result: mass panic across the nation. Many New Jersey listeners fled their homes, trying to escape the invading aliens.

In 1938, there were two main radio shows that competed for listeners during the prime 8 p.m. Sunday time slot: Orson Welles’ “Mercury Theater on the Air” and “Chase and Sanborn Hour.” Welles wanted to pull listeners from his competition so he turned to his theater background for the Halloween show. He worked with the CBS staff to adapt H.G. Wells’s science fiction novel “War of the Worlds” for radio, updating the setting and shortening the plot.

At the beginning of the show, Welles announced that the following broadcast would be an adaptation of the novel. However, most listeners tuned into “Mercury Theater on the Air” during the musical break of “Chase and Sanborn Hour.” They missed the announcement and only heard the terrifying breaking news bulletins of “eyewitness accounts” of creatures with heat ray weapons and interviews with “government experts” describing mass destruction. These reports, combined with the sounds of clanking metal and a screaming crowd, made the experience extremely realistic — and upsetting — for listeners.

Within hours, though, listeners realized the report was a hoax and were outraged. Many tried to sue the radio station, but no law had been broken. It was a hard lesson in not believing everything you hear on the radio.

**WHILE LISTENING TO “WAR OF THE WORLDS,” ANALYZE THE PROGRAM BY *THOUGHTFULLY* ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS. ANSWERS MUST BE WRITTEN LEGIBLY.**

Who made this “news report”? (1 pt.)

Why was this “news report” made? (1 pt.)

“Use ‘War of the Worlds’ to Teach Media Literacy.” *NewseumEd*. N.d. 17 January, 2017. <<https://newseumed.org/idea/use-war-of-the-worlds-to-teach-media-literacy/>>

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When was this program made? (1 pt.)

How does this program get my attention? (2 pts.)

What is missing from this “news report” that would help a listener determine if it was real or fake news? (2 pts.)

What tools and strategies did Welles use to make the “news report” realistic? (3 pts.)

What could listeners have done to determine the accuracy of the report? (5 pts.)

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