

# Then & Now

This is a complete classroom podcast project plan for “**Then & Now**” — a comparative history and social issues podcast that guides students to connect past and present through primary and contemporary sources. This format encourages analytical thinking, historical reasoning, and civic awareness.

**Focus:** Historical Comparisons

**Project Type:** Comparative Analysis Podcast

**Length:** 4–5 class periods

**Product:** 7–9 minute group podcast episode

**Mode:** Small group (3–4 students)

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## Learning Objectives

Students will:

1. Analyze historical and contemporary sources to identify continuity and change over time.
2. Draw parallels between past events or debates and present-day issues.
3. Develop critical thinking and media literacy through comparative analysis.
4. Communicate insights through an engaging, evidence-based podcast episode.

### Standards Alignment (CCSS):

- RH.9-10.3 – Analyze how historical events and ideas develop and interact over time.
  - RH.9-10.9 – Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several sources.
  - SL.9-10.1 – Engage effectively in collaborative discussions.
  - W.9-10.7 – Conduct short research projects using multiple sources.
  - SL.9-10.4 – Present findings clearly and logically.
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## Project Overview

*Then & Now* invites students to act as historians and journalists exploring the question:

**What does the past reveal about the challenges we face today?**

Each group selects a major topic—such as civil rights, immigration, gender equality, media influence, public health, or environmental change—and compares a **historical case study** with a **modern parallel**. Using primary documents, speeches, newspaper articles, or visual media, students examine similarities and differences, causes and consequences, and lessons learned.

The final podcast presents both time periods side by side, blending storytelling, analysis, and commentary to reveal enduring patterns in human experience.

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## Session Breakdown

### Session 1 – Topic Selection and Historical Research

**Goal:** Identify a compelling connection between past and present.

**Activities:**

- Brainstorm key themes that connect across eras. Examples include:
    - Immigration and identity
    - Gender roles and representation
    - Civil rights and social justice
    - Technology and privacy
    - War, peace, and protest
    - Epidemics and public health
    - Economic inequality
  - Choose one **historical case** (event, movement, or law) and one **modern parallel**.  
Examples:
    - Women’s suffrage (1900s) ↔ modern gender equity movements
    - The Great Migration ↔ contemporary immigration and displacement
    - McCarthyism ↔ modern debates over free speech and political polarization
    - 1918 influenza pandemic ↔ COVID-19
    - Environmental reform in the Progressive Era ↔ climate change activism
  - Conduct research using primary sources (letters, speeches, photographs, government records) and contemporary journalism or data.
  - Record findings on a **Then & Now Research Sheet** including:
    - Historical event summary
    - Modern issue summary
    - Key figures, causes, and effects
    - Quotations or evidence from each period
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### Session 2 – Comparative Analysis and Script Development

**Goal:** Develop an analytical framework and structure for the episode.

**Activities:**

- Discuss guiding questions:
  - What is similar between the two contexts?
  - What has changed—and why?
  - How have technology, culture, or values shaped each era’s response?

- What lessons can the present learn from the past?
- Draft a script or discussion outline organized as follows:
  1. **Introduction (1 minute):** Introduce the historical and modern topics.
  2. **Historical Segment (2–3 minutes):** Tell the story of the earlier event, using primary evidence.
  3. **Contemporary Segment (2–3 minutes):** Present the modern issue, including recent sources.
  4. **Comparison and Reflection (2 minutes):** Discuss parallels, contrasts, and takeaways.
- Integrate direct quotations from both time periods (for example, a 19th-century speech and a modern interview).
- Assign group roles for clear participation.

**Example Excerpt:**

Host: “Today on *Then & Now*, we’re exploring freedom of the press—from the pamphlets of the American Revolution to social media whistleblowers.”

Speaker 2: “In 1776, pamphleteers like Thomas Paine used print to challenge government authority. Paine wrote, ‘The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind.’”

Speaker 3: “Fast-forward to today—digital activists use platforms like X and TikTok to mobilize public opinion. The technology changed, but the moral question remains: when does information become power—or danger?”

**Session 3 – Recording and Production**

**Goal:** Record, edit, and finalize the podcast episode.

**Activities:**

- Record the discussion using classroom devices or software such as Soundtrap, Audacity, or GarageBand.
- Emphasize clear articulation, balanced pacing, and evidence-based reasoning.
- Add optional sound clips, period music, or readings from primary documents for authenticity.
- Conclude with a reflection or question for the audience, such as:  
 “*What does our comparison tell us about how societies grow—or how they repeat themselves?*”
- Recommended total length: 7–9 minutes.

**Suggested Episode Opening:**

“Welcome to *Then & Now*, the podcast where we explore how the struggles and triumphs of the past still shape our world today.”

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## Session 4 – Listening Showcase and Reflection

**Goal:** Synthesize learning and evaluate historical insight.

**Activities:**

- Students share episodes in small-group listening circles or a class “History Across Time” showcase.
  - Audience members complete a **Comparative Reflection Sheet**, responding to:
    - What connections between past and present stood out most?
    - How did the evidence support the comparison?
    - What new perspective did the episode provide on today’s world?
  - Teacher facilitates discussion about continuity, change, and civic responsibility.
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## Group Roles

Role	Responsibilities
Host/Narrator	Introduces episode, transitions between eras, and summarizes insights
Historian	Researches and explains the historical context using primary sources
Contemporary Analyst	Connects past ideas to modern issues and current data
Producer/Editor	Records and edits the podcast, ensuring sound clarity and structure

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## Suggested Source Collections

### Historical Sources

- Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/>
- National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/research>
- Digital Public Library of America: <https://dp.la/>
- Smithsonian Learning Lab: <https://learninglab.si.edu/>

### Contemporary Sources

- Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/>
  - The New York Times Learning Network: <https://www.nytimes.com/section/learning>
  - Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/>
  - BBC News Archive: <https://www.bbc.com/>
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## Assessment Rubric (20 points)

Criteria	Excellent (5)	Proficient (4)	Developing (3)	Beginning (1–2)
<b>Historical Understanding</b>	Demonstrates deep knowledge of historical context	Accurate and clear understanding	General or uneven accuracy	Limited or inaccurate content
<b>Comparative Insight</b>	Makes strong, nuanced connections between past and present	Logical and relevant comparisons	Basic or partial connections	Weak or unclear comparison
<b>Use of Evidence</b>	Integrates multiple credible sources and direct quotations	Includes appropriate examples	Some evidence but lacks depth	Minimal or missing evidence
<b>Presentation and Collaboration</b>	Engaging, clear, and well-organized discussion	Mostly clear and organized	Uneven pacing or limited collaboration	Disorganized or unclear
<b>Creativity and Relevance</b>	Thought-provoking and meaningful reflection on modern implications	Clear relevance and interest	Some creative elements	Lacks engagement or originality

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## Extension Options

1. **Thematic Series:** Create a series of *Then & Now* episodes centered on a shared theme—such as “Justice,” “Technology,” or “Migration.”
2. **Global Focus:** Compare international case studies (for example, apartheid in South Africa and racial justice movements in the United States).
3. **Civic Action Follow-Up:** End the episode with a call to awareness or advocacy, linking historical lessons to community engagement.
4. **Multimedia Companion:** Pair the audio episode with a visual timeline or infographic showing parallels between the two eras.