

Introduction

A true story about a man named Leo Hart. This play is set during the years of the Great Depression, when a family from the dust bowl region falls on hard times and travels out to California looking for work. The plight of the "Okies" is taken seriously by a superintendent of Schools in Kern County.

For step-by-step instructions on how to perform a radio play with students, refer to the "Radio Theater Cookbook, Recipes for the Imagination," available from the Raven Radio Theater of the Air! This script is published with the following materials and information to help you prepare your students for their own radio drama presentation.

Master CD - a CD that contains the pre-recorded music and sound effects segments you will need to perform this play.

Master CD - lists the music and sound effect segments on the Master CD, their duration, and instructions.

Character List - tells you which characters are in the play, how many lines each one has, and which pages of the script to duplicate for each character.

Sound Effects Suggestions - ideas for finding or building the mechanical sound effects you will need to perform the play.

"Get-Ready" Cards - a master set of cue cards that you can copy onto card stock and use during the performance to cue sound effects crew.

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“Leo Hart and the Weedpatch School”

Character List

Announcer #1	8 lines	Introduces radio play to the audience
Announcer #2	13 lines	Introduces radio play to the audience
Benton	128 lines	Principal of a school and narrator of the story
Ann	14 lines	Teacher
Luis	1 line	Student
Roy	28 lines	Father of the migrant family from Kansas
Velma	14 lines	Mother of the migrant family from Kansas
John	9 lines	Son, John Benton as a boy
Ruth	4 lines	Daughter of the migrant family from Kansas
Arlen	23 lines	Uncle of the migrant family from Kansas
Maddy	6 lines	Daughter of the migrant family from Kansas
Frank	8 lines	Man from Oklahoma
Betty	7 lines	Frank’s wife
Mary	6 lines	Child from the Weedpatch Camp
Jed	9 lines	Child from the Weedpatch Camp
Leo	52 lines	Superintendent of Kern County schools
Hank	3 lines	Child from the Weedpatch camp
Halverton	8 lines	President of the school board
Woman	2 lines	Someone in the crowd at the school board meeting
Brown	2 lines	School board member
Nichols	2 lines	School board member
Alice	1 line	Leo’s secretary
Henry	8 lines	School district superintendent
Curtis	10 lines	Architect

Casting Notes: There are 24 speaking parts in “Leo Hart and the Weedpatch School.” Having an adult read the part of Benton can be very helpful as it helps establish the timing and expression of the young readers. Remember you are casting by voice alone, not by appearance. Become familiar with the script and try and match the reader to the voice of the character. The idea is to inspire the readers to bring as much life to their characters and the action of the story as possible. You will need 8 to 12 students for the sound effects crew.

Duplicating List

Announcer #1	p. 1 & 17	Announcer #2	p. 1 & 17
Benton	Full Script	Luis	p. 1
Ann	p. 1,2,16,17	Roy	p. 3-9
Velma	p. 3-7	John	p. 3-5, 8-10, 15,16
Ruth	p. 4-6, 10	Arlen	p. 4-8, 16
Maddy	p. 4, 5, 15, 16	Frank	p. 7, 8
Betty	p. 8	Mary	p. 9, 10, 13, 14
Jed	p. 9, 10, 13, 14	Leo	p. 10-16
Hank	p. 10, 13-15	Halverton	p. 11, 12
Woman	p. 11	Brown	p. 11, 12
Nichols	p. 11, 12	Alice	p. 12
Henry	p. 12, 13	Curtis	p. 14, 15

Master CD Index

With the music / sound effects *master CD* for Leo Hart and the Weedpatch School, you will be able to add audio texture and excitement to your radio theater production. The *master CD* includes **in sequence** the music and sound effects selections listed below.

1. Old-time radio segments and fanfare
2. Playground
3. Theme music
4. Theme music
5. Crickets
6. Theme music
7. Bird sounds
8. Theme music
9. Theme music
10. Theme music
11. Fiddle tune to playground
12. Theme music

CLIPPITY-CLOP! SPLASH! PLOP! CRASH! BANG! WHOOSH!

Sound Effects

Pump - Use a bicycle pump, oven baster, bellows, or other item to make a noisy, air pump. A voice can do this effect also.

Footsteps - Walk in place or hold a pair of shoes with the hands and “walk” on a table. It is important to get a realistic rhythm to the footsteps. If walking in place, a “heel to toe” step is best but takes practice to master.

Footsteps, Indoors - Footsteps can be done with leather soled shoes on a piece of plywood.

Footsteps, On Gravel - Use a tray with medium to small gravel on it.

Wind - A “wind machine” is made by hanging a piece of heavy canvas with lead fishing sinkers sewn in a seam along one end over a large, cylinder made of wooden slats and turned on a frame with a hand crank. The rubbing of the canvas against the slats makes the sound of wind.

You can also simulate wind by pulling a length of silk-like material across two or three upright wooden boards. The strength of the wind can be increased or decreased by varying the amount of drag. For wind in the trees, agitate a handful of old recording tape in front of the microphone.

Door - There was always a framed, half-size door in all the old radio drama studios. It either sat on a table top or, if larger, had castors so it could be easily moved around. The bigger the door and heavier the frame, such as one made of hardwood, the more realistic the sound it made. The handle was just a shade loose, so it could be rattled a little as the door was opened. A variety of other door fittings were often installed on the door and frame, including a lifting-type latch, a bolt, a knocker, etc. Sometimes the door doubled for window sounds, with a sash window set in the back of the boxed frame.

If you build your own sound-door, or have a parent or local business donate one, it can be used over and over again in future radio drama productions.

Another solution is simply to use a real door close enough to be picked up by a microphone.

Paper - Paper sounds pick up well over a microphone and make a telling effect. Try different types of paper for the best sound.

Sweeping - Use a whisk broom on a small piece of plywood or a full size broom on the floor.

Gavel - Pound a real gavel on a slab of hardwood. If you don't have a gavel, a hammer will do.

Fire - An old standby of radio theater, this effect is created by gently crumpling a piece of cellophane. Different pieces of cellophane create different sounds, so experiment to get just the right “crackle” for a campfire, grass fire, or house fire. You can add to this effect if you want by taking a small whisk broom and running your fingers along the top of the bristles while someone else snaps a thin piece of wood from time to time.

Ladling Out Stew - Place some canned beans or wet, crumpled up newspaper in a pot. Use a metal spoon to ladle it out onto a “camp-style” metal plate. Make sure to scrape the pot and strike the plate with the spoon as you do so. Follow this up with silverware occasionally scraping the metal plate.

Coffeepot and Pouring - A great sound effect when done in tandem. Take a coffeepot full of water (a porcelain, “camp-style,” coffeepot is best) and rattle the lid a few times before pouring the water into a tin cup next to a mic.

Baseball Hitting Glove - Place a leather baseball glove on your hand and strike the glove with a good size stick of wood. Timing and accuracy is very important to make this effect believable.

Telephone - Use a wind-up alarm clock, the kind with bells on top. Wind the alarm but not the clock itself! Set the alarm and time to the same time and pull out the alarm stem whenever you need the telephone to “ring.” For dialing, simply use an old rotary telephone. Pick-ups and hang-ups can also be done with a real telephone.

Telephone, Voice Box - (This device is used by an actor when indicated on the script.) Cut a silver-dollar size hole in each end of a cardboard box. A cigar box is the best size although a cardboard tube often works well. Place your lips firmly on the hole in one end with the hole in the other several inches from the mic. Speak into the box to create the illusion of someone heard speaking through a telephone.

Other ways to create this effect are to speak into a small plastic or earthenware cup next to a mic or plug a set of headphones into a microphone input on the mixer and speak into them. If the impedances are reasonably correct, the headphone diaphragm corresponds in performance to the cheap microphone in a telephone.

Hammering and Sawing - Take a small section of 2x4 and hammer in several nails only 1/4 “ deep. Hammer on these nails in a natural rhythm of building something. Sawing can be done with any small saw and a piece of 2x4. Have the students be careful because the saws can be sharp!

Blueprints - Roll up a piece of paper and fasten it with a rubber band.

Digging Dirt/Grave - This effect is done by using one or more small garden hand trowels and a shoe box-size container of dirt. Put some pebbles in with the dirt to make more sound. With a mic nearby, repeatedly push the trowel slowly into the dirt, lifting some up and pouring it back, to simulate the sound of a large shovel digging in hard ground. Be careful not to hit the sides of the box while you do this.

Bells, Church, Fight, Fire, School - These can all be made on an old automobile brake drum. Set the drum on a piece of wood so that the flange is facing up and is free to vibrate. Try striking it with various wooden and metal strikers for different tones and in various rhythms to get the effect of various bells.

Bells, Dinner and Emergency - These are usually rung much faster than the other bells. In order to get the speed necessary, suspend by a cord a piece of strap iron or small diameter pipe bent into a U-shape. With a small piece of metal, rapidly strike back and forth inside this inverted horseshoe.

PUMP
BOUNCE BALL
FOOTSTEPS Run (Gavel)
FOOTSTEPS Walk (Gavel)

FOOTSTEPS (Two Sets)

Wait for Cue!

WIND
DOOR (Open / Close)
FOOTSTEPS (Hard Surface)

CORN HUSK

Wait for Cue!

FOOTSTEPS
WATER (Poured)

Wait for Cue!

FOOTSTEPS
SWEEPING

p. 4-5

DOOR (Open / Close)

4

Wait for Cue!

FOOTSTEPS

TIN BOX (Open)

Wait for Cue!

FOOTSTEPS

PAPER

p. 7-8

CAMPFIRE

STEW ON PLATES

SILVERWARE (Eating)

5

Wait for Cue!

POURING COFFEE

p. 10

BASEBALL (Hitting Glove)

6

Wait for Cue!

FOOTSTEPS (Gravel)

Wait for Cue!

FOOTSTEPS (Gravel)

GAVEL (3 Sets of Cues)

Wait for Cue!

TELEPHONE (Two Rings)

Wait for Cue!

TELEPHONE (Hang-up)

TELEPHONE (Dialing)

HAMMERING

SAWING

Wait for Cue!

FOOTSTEPS (Gravel)

BLUEPRINTS

Wait for Cue!

FOOTSTEPS

FOOTSTEPS (Fade Away)

FOOTSTEPS

DIGGING

FOOTSTEPS

Wait for Cue!

SCHOOL BELL

FOOTSTEPS (Fade Away)

Leo Hart and the Weedpatch School

1

FADE-IN OLD-TIME RADIO SEGMENTS AND FANFARE

Announcer #1: Welcome ladies and gentlemen to the Raven Radio Theater and our presentation, "Leo Hart and the Weedpatch School." Today's radio drama was written by Joe McHugh and is brought to you by (announce name of class and school).

Announcer #2: Who are today's heroes? Are they the fearless characters of the action movies who, with guns blazing, defeat the bad guys and save the world? Are they the well-groomed celebrities featured on magazine covers. . . or the million-dollar-a-year professional athletes or corporate CEOs?

Well, perhaps the true heroes are those ordinary real-life men and women who, imbued with a sense of noble purpose, overcome apparently insurmountable obstacles with courage and determination to help make the world a better place. One such hero was Leo Hart, a remarkable man whose life and dedication to children helped save a generation of Americans.

2

FADE-IN PLAYGROUND

Benton: Let's just pump the ball up a little bit more, Luis.

pump and stop

Benton: Now, give 'er a try.

bounce ball several times and stop

Luis: That's great, Mr. Benton. Thanks!

footsteps on gravel run off
footsteps on gravel approach and stop

Ann: John, can I talk to you a minute?

Benton: Sure. . . What's on your mind, Ann?

Ann: (with some difficulty) It's. . . about my job here. I'm. . . well, I'm thinking of asking for a transfer to another school.

Benton: I'm really sorry to hear that, Ann. I consider you one of my best teachers. Let's sit on the bench over there under that tree and talk about it.

two sets of footsteps and stop

Ann: I've taught here at Lincoln Elementary for five years. You've been my principal for all that time and I've enjoyed working with you and the rest of the staff.

Benton: Then what's the problem?

Ann: It's the all new kids we're getting. More than half of the kids in my class have just come here from Mexico, or Russia or southeast Asia. Most of them don't even speak English and their parents don't come to open house and, well, I don't know. It's. . . it's very frustrating. I don't think I can deal with it much longer.

Benton: These are difficult times but these children need your love and help.

Ann: I know they do but. . . well. . . maybe it's easier for some teachers than others. I mean, you seem to get along with these new students just fine.

Benton: Well, maybe that's because I know what it feels like to be a newcomer and a stranger. Why, if it hadn't been for Leo Hart and his Weedpatch School, I don't think I'd be where I am today.

Ann: Who's Leo Hart?

Benton: A very brave and dedicated educator I once knew. You see, Ann, I was raised up during the Great Depression in the 1930s. I don't know why they call it the Great Depression. There was nothing "great" about it. Nobody had any money. People were scared and desperate. It took everything a person had just to get by. My own family was forced to leave our home in southern Kansas and come to California. It was the dust storms that finally drove us out. It was a terrible time.

3

**FADE-OUT PLAYGROUND
FADE-IN THEME MUSIC**

Benton: We dry farmed 140 acres of wheat and corn near a town called Liberal. There was me and my two sisters, Maddy and Ruth, and my little brother, Earl. Uncle Arlen lived with us too. He'd been gassed during the war and couldn't work a regular job. He was a fiddler and taught me to play. It was a tough life in western Kansas back then but we got by all right until the year 1929 when the bottom fell out of the wheat market. It soon got to where it cost more to raise a wheat crop than you could get for it. My daddy had to sell off most of the livestock and borrow money from the bank.

Then the drought started in 1931. For five straight years it didn't hardly rain a drop. The crops failed. The ponds and creeks and springs dried up. The grass died out and the cattle and horses starved. No one in that part of the country had ever seen anything like it. A harsh, blazing sun hung in the sky, day after day, baking the soil and driving people half-crazy with worry.

And just when we thought it couldn't get any worse, the dust storms hit us. That was in 1936. One day the wind just started to blow. Each day it blew harder and harder, gathering up the dried-out top soil into enormous clouds that turned the sky blood red. These dust clouds then swept along the ground at more than fifty miles an hour, shattering windows, knocking down barns and turning the land into a desert. Before a "norther" would hit, you'd see thousands of birds and rabbits bolting along in front of it. The air 'd be charged with so much free-flowing static electricity you'd get the shock of your life if you touched anything metal. Why, I've seen jackrabbits electrocuted to death by them storms. We'd stuff wet towels into the cracks in the windows and doors of our house and sleep with wet rags over our faces but still, in the morning, our blankets and pillows would be covered with dirt. Lots of times we kids had to walk to school backwards just to keep the dirt from scraping our faces and making 'em bleed. And, of course, there was always the risk of "dust pneumonia." A lot of people died from it. Make no mistake, Ann, those days were some of the saddest I ever saw.

FADE-OUT THEME MUSIC

fade-in wind

open door - pause - close door (wind louder while door is open)

footsteps on wood and stop

Roy: I declare but this storm's the worst yet, Mother. Why, just take a look at this sorrowful corn.

sound of dried-out corn husk crushed in hands

Velma: That was the last hope we had of getting a crop this year, Roy. I don't know what we're a-goin' to do now.

John: Are the chickens all right, Pa?

Roy: I didn't see 'em anywhere, son. They might a-got covered up by the dust. You best pour some water in a pail and go clean out the cow's nostrils in the barn or she'll suffocate.

John: OK, Pa.

footsteps and stop

Roy: Maddy, you and Ruth, get to sweeping out the house.

sound of water being poured into bucket in distance

Ruth: (whining) How come we always got to sweep up when there's a storm?

Arlen: You don't, and after the next storm, you won't even be able to find the floor. Now do what your mama says.

Maddy: You're right, Uncle Arlen. Come on, Ruthie.

footsteps move away - pause - sound of sweeping in distance

Roy: (calling out) And John, you be careful and don't go a-wanderin' around looking for them chickens. It's still blowing and near black as night. You might get lost.

John: (from a distance) Right, Pa.

door opens and shuts with increase in wind

Velma: What are we going to do, Roy? I swear I can't take much more of this. It's like watching the slow murder of everything you ever cared about. It just goes on and on.

Arlen: It's the over-planting and over-grazing and all the crop speculating by them money boys back East that's got us in this fix. They've used up the soil until it won't grow nothing.

Roy: I've been going over the books and . . . well . . . the sad truth is we're busted. It won't be long until the bank forecloses on our mortgage and we'll have to pack up and leave. If we don't, they'll just "tractor" us out.

Velma: Where do you reckon to go?

Roy: Well, I've been studin' on it. Where's that notice you picked up in town a week ago Saturday about California?

Velma: It's in the cracker tin above the woodstove. I'll fetch it.

**footsteps fade-away followed by
handling and opening of tin box**

Maddy: (from a short distance) The Crenshaws went out to California last year, Pa. They said it was the most beautiful place in the world.

Arlen: Yeah, but they've got family there to help 'em get settled and find work, Maddy. It'd be different for us. We'd be strangers.

**footsteps return and stop followed by
handling of paper**

Roy: OK, it says here they're a-needin' five hundred men to pick peaches and another seven hundred men to pick potatoes and carrots. The pay is ten dollars a day.

Arlen: Where's the work?

Roy: A place called Delano.

Arlen: Why, with that kind of money we could get back on our feet again in no time.

Roy: Well . . . that may be but we don't have no vehicle to get us out there.

stop sweeping