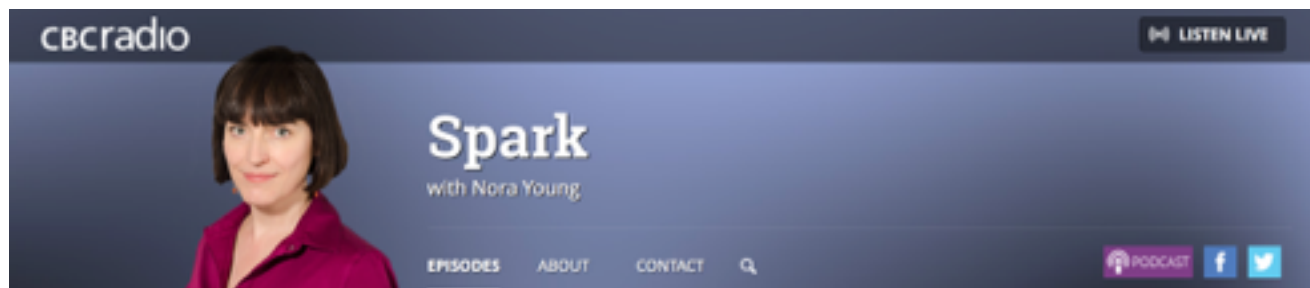

SPARK

Podcast all about “tech, trends, & fresh ideas”



By Hailley Fargo

Spark, hosted by CBC Radio, is a podcast reflecting on “life in 21st century Canada” ([CBC Radio: Spark Facebook page](#)) focusing on “tech, trends, and fresh ideas.” This show first began in 2007 and is hosted by Nora Young. From their “About page”: *With an eye on the future, host Nora Young guides you through this dynamic era of technology-led change, and connects your life to the big ideas changing our world right now.*

The podcast is published once a week and covers several technology stories in an hour. While you can stream the podcast through the Apple Store, by going to [the website](#), you are able to view each story individually as well as see the various links connecting you to other pages on the web. There is a comment feature as well, where you can add your thoughts to individual stories. This format creates a unique platform of both blogging with discussion paired with audio stories.

On the Internet Archive page for Spark, it says: “The program is made collaboratively with its audience.” Young is a proponent of people contributing to the podcast, through story submissions or comments. For instance, one of the episodes I listened to discussed Uber drivers and began with a call from a listener who had once been mistaken for an Uber driver.

Overall, I found the website to be clean and easy to use. Each episode is subdivided into the various stories; these headlines show up under the title of the episode so it is easy to choose to listen to all of an episode or just a single story. I had a hard time picking out which episode to listen to — each contained a robust set of topics that sounded interesting to me. I found the additional links extremely helpful and bookmarked several sites for future use. I think this podcast/website would be a great resource in general for teachers or librarians looking to do digital literacy and are in need of fresh ideas or websites. The wide range provides something for everyone.

In other ways, the website is also daunting, the front page never ends with episodes (it keeps generating back episodes when you click “Load more”). If you’re not sure what you’re looking for, it could be overwhelming to find an episode to start.

Because Young relies on listener input, I think the podcast is relevant to librarians, teachers, and youth media teachers. While there are other sites that provide stories on media and technology (look at any online news source like Atlantic, Slate, New York Times, etc. where they have a dedicated “Tech” section), I think this one offers a snapshot into what is up and coming and new ways in the tech world. The collaborative aspect could be capitalized on with students as well; a discussion about technology could evolve into a question to pose to Young. Even if Young decided not to follow through on the question, it would allow students to be exposed to interacting with an online community, moving from being simply consumers to active producers as well. Additionally, Young’s tagline on her personal website is: *At the Corner of Technology and Culture*. This seems relevant to the students we would work with and helping them to connect the dots and see the bigger picture.

I see many ways to use this site with students. For reading and listening, this website is probably best for middle to high school students. Since most individual stories are under 10 minutes, it could be used in a classroom or workshop setting by listening to the story and then having a discussion. For an extended assignment, you could have your students listen to various stories and report back to the class on what they learned. In a more informal setting, the podcast gives you many ideas about potential topics: like how to tell a story on Twitter, the “like culture” on social media, or the move towards digital journalism (and the various benefits and consequences)— just to name a few. Because Young provides hyperlinks to various websites, we have many options for projects or places to direct students who want to explore technology.

This podcast might be a good starting spot for student-produced podcasts. If technology is the focus, then having the students research a topic and create a short, under ten minute story would be a good way to research, write, and produce an audio story. Young’s podcast could provide the background about potential topics and how to set up a story about a technology.

I believe with any sort of podcast, you’re going to find a bias in the stories that are told. This podcast provides some insight into topics that Canada is finding relevant and obviously we can see many parallels to American society (example: the “like culture” of social media is universal in many ways). Since the podcast is produced by a well-respected Canadian radio station, we can more reliably trust the news source. Young herself has many years of experience and is also considered a reliable source. Her interest in technology is quite clear across various websites, which, for me, makes Spark even more appealing because we can hear her passion in the podcast.

Sources consulted:

Internet Archive, Spark (radio show) Wikipedia, CBC Spark website, Nora Young’s personal website, CBC “Who We Are, What We Do”.