

The 1927 Bristol Sessions Story

LESSON PLAN GRADES 8, 11



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TITLE OF LESSON: The 1927 Bristol Sessions Story

GRADE LEVEL(S): 8, 11

STANDARDS:

TN: SSP.01, .02, .05, .06; AAH.31; CI.19, .20; TN.50; US.30, .31, .32

VA: USII.1; USII.2, II.6; VUS.1; VUS.8, .10

FOCUS: Primarily Social Studies; connection to Local History

BRIEF SUMMARY:

This lesson provides students with an overview of the events surrounding the 1927 Bristol Sessions recordings, including the artists and personalities involved, the technology that influenced their success, and the impact of this music beyond those recordings. At the time, traditional music (what we now call old-time music) was recognized as viable content on recorded media, and artists traveled to record label studios in cities like New York to record music. Some record labels also engaged in “location recording sessions,” where they went to places where the music was being made in order to record it. In 1927 Victor Talking Machine Company producer Ralph Peer came to Bristol to discover and record new artists. Along with the previously recorded Ernest Stoneman and his extended family, newly discovered artists The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers were recorded at these sessions, amongst others. The 1927 Bristol Sessions are now referred to as “the big bang of country music,” and Bristol is internationally recognized as “the Birthplace of Country Music” due to this history.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

Why is Bristol called “the Birthplace of Country Music”?

OUTLINE & EXPLANATION OF LESSON:

The lesson will combine audio-visual and text resource materials to build student comprehension of the importance of the 1927 Bristol Sessions within regional and American history.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE REQUIRED (IF APPLICABLE):

General knowledge of US and regional history

PROJECTED LENGTH OF LESSON:

1–2 class periods, depending on desired length of student work

GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- Recognize the historic events that occurred in Bristol related to the development of traditional music into country music
- Familiarize themselves with the major people/artists who came to Bristol in 1927 for the recording sessions and the technology that made the recordings possible
- Understand the impacts of the 1920s economy and culture of the Tennessee/Virginia region and the United States through the context of music
- Use their collected information to create written and oral reports, which can be delivered by various available media

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8th-grade students will also:

- Use a variety of resources, including materials such as newspaper accounts, to more fully understand the purpose behind the 1927 Bristol Sessions and other “hillbilly music” recording sessions
- Address the question: How did transportation to Bristol by the artists of the Bristol Sessions affect who was recorded?
- More fully examine the backgrounds of the artists who recorded in Bristol

11th-grade students will also:

- Use primary and secondary sources to examine the cultural and economic trends at play nationally and regionally during the 1920s, which led to and influenced the Bristol Sessions
- Research the trends in commercial country music that grew out of these important recording events



LESSON STRUCTURE:

1. Introduction of the lesson on the 1927 Bristol Sessions

Students will brainstorm on what they know about Bristol in 1927, related to jobs/economy (farming, manufacturing, service), transportation (by foot, horse/cart, car, roads, trains), music (at home, in community, on recordings).

2. Introduction of information on the 1927 Bristol Sessions

- * Teacher shares 10-minute prepared video on the 1927 Bristol Sessions and pulls out some specific information from the teacher resource document to share verbally with students after the video.
- * Teacher shares pictures of the main four people and acts: Ralph Peer, Ernest Stoneman, Jimmie Rodgers, and The Carter Family.

3. Teacher will break students into four (4) groups, and each group will discuss one of the following topics:

8th-grade students:

- a. Background of vocations and jobs in the 1920s
- b. Music recorded at the 1927 Bristol Sessions (artists) or purpose of these recordings (Peer)
- c. Influence of the 1927 Bristol Sessions on the development of country music
- d. Technological developments that impacted the 1927 Bristol Sessions

11th-grade students:

- a. Various factors existing in the Appalachian region in the 1920s, including occupations, lifestyles, economic conditions (manufacturing, farming, etc.), transportation, business growth, and government influences
- b. Music recorded at the 1927 Bristol Sessions (artists) or purpose of these recordings (Peer)
- c. Influence of the 1927 Bristol Sessions on the development of country music
- d. The geographical distances that musicians had to travel to record, including artists beyond the primary three (Stoneman, the Carters, Rodgers) and how they might have traveled

4. Groups create a reporting method to share their discussion with the class

- * Students should organize information in a structured manner.
- * Students present findings to the class through an oral or audio-visual report.
- * Teacher records questions generated by students.

5. Compilation of information to create a report on the 1927 Bristol Sessions as an expression of the times (1920s) and influence on later times

- * Students will compile information from the four group presentations to produce written and/or oral reports developed from their research.
- * Teacher facilitates questions raised by student groups.

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EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT:

Students will produce an appropriate report, by teacher-determined method, that reflects an awareness and understanding of the 1927 Bristol Sessions Story.

- In addition, for middle school students, an awareness of what technological advances contributed to the recording events, will be expected.
- In addition, for high school students, a combined in-depth awareness of the artists involved and of the cultural and economic conditions of the region and the country in the 1920s will be expected.

MODIFICATIONS/ADAPTATIONS/EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

- Further explore additional artist biographies through BCM resources (Artists & Personalities documents (To come), [Blog](#))
- Further explore background of technology through internet searches and BCM resources for research (Science of Sound & Technology documents (To come), [Blog](#))

MATERIALS & RESOURCES AVAILABLE:

- Birthplace of Country Music website – www.birthplaceofcountrymusic.org
- Access the following documents [HERE](#):
 - * The 1927 Bristol Sessions Story Resource Document – Teachers
 - * The 1927 Bristol Sessions Story Resource Document – Students
 - * The 1927 Bristol Sessions Story Resource Document – Images
 - * Brief summary of regional history, economics, and social context, To come
 - * The Science of Sound & Technology of the 1927 Bristol Sessions Resource Document – Students, To come
 - * The Artists & Personalities of the 1927 Bristol Sessions Resource Document – Students, To come
 - * Primary and Secondary Sources, To come
 - * 1927 Bristol Sessions Recordings & Artists
 - * Lesson Plan Video Resources

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CONNECTIONS TO TENNESSEE AND VIRGINIA STATE STANDARDS

Standards for both Tennessee and Virginia delineate the skills that students will develop through this lesson, including investigating knowledge and analysis and critical thinking related to history, geography, and economics. This involves using evidence gained through primary and secondary sources to compare and contrast perspectives to develop conceptual understanding. In addition, the Tennessee standards specifically address the development of country music, The Carter Family, and the importance of African-American artists within musical heritage.

This lesson plan on the 1927 Bristol Sessions Story incorporates the use of primary and secondary sources, including written biographies and historical publications related to 20th-century America in Appalachia. This history includes changes in economy, communication, and technology. The people involved in the 1927 Bristol Sessions are examples of those who were both affected by these changes and contributed to some of these changes.

Students will engage in historical research and thinking, analyzing the influence of changing economics and the effect of geography on developments in the United States in the 1920s. The variety of impacts on rural populations and economies, the place and opportunities for African Americans in society, and the influence of a growing mass “popular” culture can be examined through the lens of the 1927 Bristol Sessions.

TENNESSEE STANDARDS:

Standard Number(s)	Standard Name	Short Description
SSP.01, .02, .05, .06	Social Studies Practices	Collect data and information from a variety of primary and secondary sources; critically examine primary and secondary sources; develop historical awareness; develop geographic awareness (Middle and high school)
AAH.31	African Americans and the Harlem Renaissance (1920s–1930s)	Describe the contributions of African Americans to the performing arts during the Harlem Renaissance era (11th grade)
CI.19, CI.20	Contemporary Issues: Culture	Analyze the changing role of media and technology; compare and contrast folk and/or traditional culture with popular culture (11th grade)
TN.50	Tennessee History: Tennessee: Reform and War (1900–1945)	Describe major developments in country music (11th grade)
US.30, .31, .32	United States History and Geography: The 1920s (1920–1929)	Examine the growth and popularity of country and blues music; describe the impact of new technologies of the era; describe the impact of Henry T. Ford, the automobile, and the mass production of automobiles on the American economy and society (11th grade)

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VIRGINIA STANDARDS:

Standard Number(s)	Standard Name	Short Description
USII.1	United States History: 1865 to the Present (Skills)	Demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship
USII.2, .II.6	United States History: 1865 to the Present: Geography AND Turmoil and Change: 1890s to 1945	Use maps, globes, photographs, pictures, or tables; apply social science skills to understand the social, economic, and technological changes of the early 20th century
VUS.1	Virginia and United States History: Skills	Demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship (11th grade)
VUS.8, .10	Virginia and United States History: Industrialization AND Emergence of Modern America and World Conflicts	Apply social science skills to understand how the nation grew and changed from the end of Reconstruction through the early 20th century; apply social science skills to understand key events during the 1920s and 1930s (11th grade)

For more extensive details on the specifics of these state standards, please see the appendix below.



APPENDIX: TENNESSEE AND VIRGINIA STATE STANDARDS

TENNESSEE STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

SSP [SOCIAL STUDIES PRACTICES] – SSP.01, .02, .05, .06

Social studies practices are specific skills that students should apply when learning social studies. Like the social studies standards, the social studies practices increase in rigor as students get older. Students should apply these skills to create and address questions that will guide inquiry and critical thinking. These practices should be regularly applied throughout the year and are not written as stand-alone standards. Students will progress through the inquiry cycle by analyzing primary and secondary sources to construct and communicate their conceptual understanding of the content standards (SSP.1–SSP.4) and to develop historical and geographic awareness (SSP.5–SSP.6).

[Tennessee Social Studies Standards, p. 11](#)

Content Strands will include: History (H), Culture (C), Economics (E), Geography (G), Tennessee (T), and Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) – these strands are legally required to be taught.

Practice Number	K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
SSP.01	Gather information from a variety of sources, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printed materials Graphic representations Artifacts Media and technology sources 	Gather information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printed materials Graphic representations Artifacts Media and technology sources 	Collect data and information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printed materials Graphic representations Artifacts Media and technology sources 	Collect data and information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printed materials Graphic representations Field observations/ Landscape analysis Artifacts Media and technology sources
SSP.02	Critically examine a primary or secondary source in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize significant ideas and relevant information Distinguish between fact and opinion Draw conclusions Recognize author's purpose and point of view 	Critically examine a primary or secondary source in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize significant ideas and relevant information Distinguish between fact and opinion Draw inferences and conclusions Recognize author's purpose, point of view, and reliability 	Critically examine a primary or secondary source in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extract and paraphrase significant ideas and relevant information Distinguish the difference between fact and opinion Draw inferences and conclusions Recognize author's purpose, point of view, and bias Assess the strengths and limitations of arguments 	Critically examine a primary or secondary source in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extract and paraphrase significant ideas Discern differences between evidence and assertion Draw inferences and conclusions Recognize author's purpose, point of view, and potential bias Assess the strengths and limitations of arguments

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Practice Number	K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
SSP.05	<p>Develop historical awareness by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequencing past, present, and future in chronological order Understanding that things change over time 	<p>Develop historical awareness by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing how and why historical accounts change over time Recognizing how past events and issues might have been experienced by the people of that time, with historical context and empathy rather than present-mindedness Identifying patterns of continuity and change over time, making connections to the present 	<p>Develop historical awareness by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing how and why historical accounts change over time Perceiving and presenting past events and issues as they might have been experienced by the people of the time, with historical empathy rather than present-mindedness Evaluating how unique circumstances of time and place create context and contribute to action and reaction Identifying patterns of continuity and change over time, making connections to the present 	<p>Develop historical awareness by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing how and why historical accounts change over time Perceiving and presenting past events and issues as they might have been experienced by the people of the time, with historical empathy rather than present-mindedness Evaluating how unique circumstances of time and place create context and contribute to action and reaction Identifying patterns of continuity and change over time, making connections to the present
SSP.06	<p>Develop geographic awareness by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying geographic symbols on maps and globes Understanding relationships between people, places, and resources 	<p>Develop geographic awareness by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determining relationships among people, resources, and ideas based on geographic location Determining the use of diverse types of maps based on the purpose Analyzing the spatial relationships between people, circumstances, and resources Analyzing interaction between humans and the physical environment Examining how geographic regions and perceptions of the regions change over time 	<p>Develop a geographic awareness by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the geographic perspective to determine relationships, patterns, and diffusion across space at multiple scales Determining the use of diverse types of maps based on their origin, structure, context, and validity Analyzing locations, conditions, and connections of places and use maps to investigate spatial relationships Analyzing interaction between humans and the physical environment Examining how geographic regions and perceptions of regions are fluid across time and space 	<p>Develop geographic awareness by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzing and determining the use of diverse types of maps based on the origin, authority, structure, context, and validity Using the geographic perspective to analyze relationships, patterns, and diffusion across space at multiple scales Analyzing locations, conditions, and connections of places and using maps to investigate spatial associations among phenomena Examining how geographers use regions and how perceptions of regions are fluid across time and space Analyzing interaction between humans and the physical environment

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SOCIAL STUDIES – GRADE 11

African Americans and the Harlem Renaissance (1920s–1930s)

Overview: Students will analyze the cultural contributions made by African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance.

AAH.31 Describe the contributions of African Americans to the performing arts during this era (e.g., DeFord Bailey, Duke Ellington, Fisk Jubilee Singers, W. C. Handy, James Weldon Johnson, John Work III). C, T

Note: *El Watson – an African American musician who recorded at the 1927 Bristol Sessions – played harmonica, like the Grand Ole Opry’s DeFord Bailey.*

Contemporary Issues: Culture

Overview: Students will explore the similarities and differences among people, including their beliefs, values, and traditions.

CI.19 Analyze the changing role of media and technology on the spread of information and the effects on global culture. C

CI.20 Compare and contrast folk and/or traditional culture with popular culture, and analyze efforts to preserve folk culture amid the spread of popular culture. C

Tennessee History: Tennessee: Reform and War (1900–1945)

Overview: Students will learn about the major events, people, and moments in Tennessee history in the first half of the 20th century and the effects they had on the state and the United States.

TN.50 Describe major developments in country music (e.g., Grand Ole Opry, WSM, and The Carter Family) and blues music (e.g., W. C. Handy and Bessie Smith) in Tennessee during this era. C, G, H, T

United States History and Geography: The 1920s (1920–1929)

Overview: Students will describe how the battle between traditionalism and modernism manifested in the major historical trends and events post-World War I.

US.30 Examine the growth and popularity of country and blues music, including the rise of: the Grand Ole Opry, W. C. Handy, and Bessie Smith. (T.C.A. § 49-6-1006) C, H, T, TCA

US.31 Describe the impact of new technologies of the era, including the advent of air travel and spread of electricity. C, E, H

US.32 Describe the impact of Henry T. Ford, the automobile, and the mass production of automobiles on the American economy and society. C, E, H

VIRGINIA STANDARDS OF LEARNING (SOLS) ADDRESSED:

Students will develop the skills needed to analyze, interpret, and demonstrate knowledge of important events and ideas in our history and will understand the contributions made by people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

History and Social Science Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools – March 2015

Skills: Gather and Analyze Information from Primary and Secondary Sources
Connections across Space and Time
Researching to Develop Products – textually, orally, and technologically



US/VA STUDIES – GRADE 8

United States History: 1865 to the Present

Students will continue to use skills for historical and geographical analysis as they examine American history since 1865. The standards for this course relate to the history of the United States from the Reconstruction era to the present. Students should continue to develop and build upon the fundamental concepts and skills in civics, economics, and geography within the context of United States history. Students will use investigation as a foundation to delve into the political, economic, and social challenges facing the nation once reunited after the Civil War. This foundation provides a pathway to develop an understanding of how the American experience shaped the world's political and economic landscapes.

Skills

- USII.1** The student will demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship by
- analyzing and interpreting artifacts and primary and secondary sources to understand events in United States history;
 - analyzing and interpreting geographic information to determine patterns and trends in United States history;
 - using evidence to draw conclusions and make generalizations;
 - comparing and contrasting historical, cultural, and political perspectives in United States history;
 - determining relationships with multiple causes or effects in United States history;
 - explaining connections across time and place;
 - investigating and researching to develop products orally and in writing.

Geography AND Turmoil and Change: 1890s to 1945

- USII.2** The student will use maps, globes, photographs, pictures, or tables for
- explaining how physical features and climate influenced the movement of people westward;
 - explaining relationships among natural resources, transportation, and industrial development after 1865.
- USII.6** The student will apply social science skills to understand the social, economic, and technological changes of the early twentieth century by
- explaining how developments in factory and labor productivity, transportation (including the use of the automobile), communication, and rural electrification changed American life and standard of living;
 - examining art, literature, and music from the 1920s and 1930s, with emphasis on Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Georgia O’Keeffe, and the Harlem Renaissance;
 - analyzing the causes of the Great Depression, its impact on Americans, and the major features of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal.



US STUDIES – GRADE 11

Virginia and United States History

The standards for Virginia and United States History expand upon the foundational knowledge and skills previously introduced to include the historical development of American ideas and institutions from the Age of Exploration to the present. While continuing to focus on political, geographic, and economic history, the standards provide students with a basic knowledge of American culture through a chronological survey of major issues, movements, people, and events in Virginia and United States history. As a foundation to develop historical thinking skills, students will apply social science skills to understand the challenges facing the development of the United States. These skills will support the investigation and evaluation of the fundamental political principles, events, people, and ideas that developed and fostered our American identity and led to our country's prominence in world affairs.

[History and Social Science Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools](#) – March 2015

Skills

- VUS.1** The student will demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship by
- synthesizing evidence from artifacts and primary and secondary sources to obtain information about events in Virginia and United States history;
 - using geographic information to determine patterns and trends in Virginia and United States history;
 - constructing arguments, using evidence from multiple sources;
 - explaining how indirect cause-and-effect relationships impact people, places, and events in Virginia and United States history;
 - analyzing multiple connections across time and place;
 - identifying the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and ethical use of material and intellectual property; and
 - investigating and researching to develop products orally and in writing.

Industrialization AND Emergence of Modern American and World Conflicts

- VUS.8** The student will apply social science skills to understand how the nation grew and changed from the end of Reconstruction through the early twentieth century by
- explaining the westward movement of the population in the United States, with emphasis on the role of the railroads, communication systems, admission of new states to the Union, and the impact on American Indians;
 - analyzing the factors that transformed the American economy from agrarian to industrial and explaining how major inventions transformed life in the United States, including the emergence of leisure activities;
 - evaluating and explaining the social and cultural impact of industrialization, including rapid urbanization.
- VUS.10** The student will apply social science skills to understand key events during the 1920s and 1930s by
- analyzing how popular culture evolved and challenged traditional values;
 - assessing and explaining the economic causes and consequences of the stock market crash of 1929;
 - explaining the causes of the Great Depression and its impact on the American people.