

A teal-tinted photograph of a man wearing a wide-brimmed hat and glasses. He is playing a harmonica and has his hands on a keyboard instrument, possibly a piano or organ. The background is a solid teal color.

The Instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions

LESSON PLAN GRADES 4,5



The Instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions

GRADES 4,5



TITLE OF LESSON: Picking at the 1927 Bristol Sessions

GRADE LEVEL(S): 4, 5

STANDARDS:

TN: SSP.01, .02, .03, .04, .05, .06; 4.21; 5.08; 5.14

VA: VS.1, .4, .9

FOCUS: Social Studies, English Language Arts, Music

BRIEF SUMMARY:

This lesson introduces the different instruments used on songs recorded at the 1927 Bristol Sessions (and by extension early “hillbilly music”), many of which are now standard in country music. These instruments and their origins highlight various important historical and cultural influences. The three primary instruments provide good examples: the fiddle (or violin) originated in the Mediterranean but traveled over with immigrants primarily from the British Isles; enslaved people from Africa brought the knowledge and memory of the banjo with them when they were forcibly transported to North America; and the guitar originated in Spain and came over with immigrant populations early in America’s history, but became even more popular after U.S. soldiers returned from World War I with guitars. Each instrument played at the 1927 Bristol Sessions provides a unique musical signature that contributed to the variety of songs and sounds recorded there – and they all illustrate diverse origins, histories, and cultures.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What instruments were used on the songs recorded at the 1927 Bristol Sessions?
- What origins and cultural/historical influences do these instruments represent?

OUTLINE & EXPLANATION OF LESSON:

The lesson will combine audio-visual elements, images, and text resource materials to build student comprehension of the three main instruments played at the 1927 Bristol Sessions (fiddle, banjo, guitar), their origins, how they came to the US, and their cultural importance.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE & EXPERIENCE REQUIRED (IF APPLICABLE):

N/A

PROJECTED LENGTH OF LESSON:

1 class period

GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- Learn about the three primary stringed instruments (fiddle, banjo, guitar) and identify their characteristics and country or continent of origin
- Compare and contrast the different stringed instruments, along with how they were used in their countries of origin and how they appear to be used on the 1927 Bristol Sessions recordings
- Recognize connections between instruments, their use, their origins, and historical narratives



LESSON STRUCTURE:

1. Introduction of the lesson on the instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions

- * Teacher surveys students to determine whether they know any stringed instruments that might have been used at the 1927 Bristol Sessions.
- * Students may have knowledge of these recordings or know about stringed instruments through their families or friends.

2. Introduction and exploration of information on the instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions

- * Teacher shares The Instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions student resource document with focus on the three primary instruments – fiddle, banjo, and guitar – used in Appalachian string bands and early “hillbilly music.”
- * Teacher shares related audio-visual resources, including sound clips and videos.
- * Teacher shares images of 1927 Bristol Sessions artists with these instruments.
- * Students will use these resources to become familiar with the instruments’ appearances, how they are played, regions of origin, and how they made their way to North America.

3. Teacher breaks students into four (4) groups

- * Each group will work together to use their knowledge to construct a graphic organizer comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences of the fiddle, banjo, and guitar. Elements to be covered are: number of strings, appearance, manner of playing, region of origin, and transit to the Americas.
- * Each group will look at the pictures of the 1927 Bristol Sessions artists with instruments and discuss:
 - a. Why do you think different artists used different instruments?
 - b. What do you see in the pictures, and what does that tell you about the musicians?

4. Teacher plays representative songs from the 1927 Bristol Sessions

- * Each group will then try to determine which instruments are used in the different recordings.

5. Teacher to bring groups back together for discussion

- * Students in each group will share their graphic organizer design and discuss their learning from these examinations of instrument histories, sounds, and appearances.
- * Teacher will facilitate discussion of any student questions.

The Instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions

GRADES 4,5



EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT:

Students will present a report on their learning by a teacher-determined method, showing their understanding of the three primary stringed instruments, their origins and how they made their way to America, and the differences and similarities between the instruments.

MODIFICATIONS/ADAPTATIONS/EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Identify and research additional instruments used at the 1927 Bristol Session to gain an understanding of their origin culture and place in American musical culture. (For instance, consider the mandolin and the popularity of mandolin orchestras in the late 1800s, or the kazoo and its early versions found in other cultures, along with the version developed in the United States.)

MATERIALS & RESOURCES AVAILABLE:

- Birthplace of Country Music website – www.birthplaceofcountrymusic.org
- Access the following documents [HERE](#):
 - * The Instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions Resource Document – Teachers
 - * The Instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions Resource Document – Students
 - * The Instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions Resource Document – Images
 - * Birthplace of Country Music Museum video resources
 - * Birthplace of Country Music Museum instrument sound clips and 1927 Bristol Sessions song examples (linked in resource documents)
 - * 1927 Bristol Sessions Songs & Instruments, To come



CONNECTIONS TO TENNESSEE AND VIRGINIA STANDARDS

This lesson connects to both Tennessee and Virginia standards related to Social Studies and English Language Arts, while also connecting to Music topics and curricula. It will allow students to develop required skills such as gathering and analyzing information from primary and secondary sources, comparing and contrasting multiple sources of information, analyzing impact of geography on events of history, and writing/creating narrative and informational texts.

Students will gain an understanding and recognition of the instruments that were used as primary (and accompanying) instruments at the 1927 Bristol Sessions, mainly through secondary sources describing the instruments. By listening to the instruments on recordings, the students will also gain primary knowledge of how they sounded and were used in the 1927 Bristol Sessions songs. They will also gain knowledge about the origins of and the cultures surrounding the instruments, which intersects to the important history of immigration and slavery in North America, and thus recognize and understand the contributions made by people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Students will also incorporate English language arts skills of reading, listening, and writing to critically examine texts and multimedia materials to determine valid information. Students will research multiple sources of information and combine this research into a comprehensive verbal or written presentation.

TENNESSEE STANDARDS:

Standard Number(s)	Standard Name	Short Description
SSP.01, .02, .03, .04, .05, .06	Social Studies Practices	Gather information from a variety of primary and secondary sources; critically examine a primary or secondary source; organize data from a variety of sources; construct and communicate arguments supported by evidence; develop historical awareness; develop geographic awareness
4.21	Social Studies: The Growth of the Republic (1800s–1850)	Compare and contrast the characteristics of slave life
5.08	Social Studies: Industrialization, the Gilded Age, and the Progressive Era (1870s–1910s)	Examine the role of immigrants in the development of the U.S.
5.14	Social Studies: World War I and Between the Wars (1920s–1940s)	Examine the growth of popular culture during the “Roaring Twenties”

VIRGINIA STANDARDS:

Standard Number(s)	Standard Name	Short Description
VS.1	Virginia Studies: Skills	Demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship
VS.4	Virginia Studies: Colonization and Conflict: 1607 through the American Revolution	Demonstrate an understanding of life in the Virginia colony
VS.9	Virginia Studies: Virginia: 1900 to the Present	Demonstrate an understanding of Virginia during the 20th century and beyond

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, .03, .04, .05, .06

Students will apply these skills to create and address questions that will guide inquiry and critical thinking. These practices should be regularly applied throughout the year. 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). – [TN Social Studies Standards](#), p. 11

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

Practice Number	Social Studies Practice
SSP.01	Gather information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printed materials (e.g., literary texts, newspapers, political cartoons, autobiographies, speeches, letters, personal journals) Graphic representations (e.g., maps, timelines, charts, artwork) 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 inferences and conclusions Recognize author's purpose, point of view, and reliability
SSP.03	Organize data from a variety of sources in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare and contrast multiple sources Recognize differences between multiple accounts Frame appropriate questions for further investigation
SSP.04	Construct and communicate arguments supported by evidence to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate and defend an understanding of ideas Compare and contrast viewpoints Illustrate cause and effect Predict likely outcomes Devise new outcomes or solutions
SSP.05	Develop historical awareness by: <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 Identify patterns of continuity and change over time, making connections to the present
SSP.06	Develop geographic awareness by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determining relationships among people, resources, and ideas based on geographic location (local, national, global) 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



SOCIAL STUDIES – GRADES 4, 5

[Italics added to indicate areas of study]

The Growth of the Republic (1800s–1850)

- 4.21** Compare and contrast the characteristics of slave life in plantations, cities, and other farms. C, E, G, H, P, T

Industrialization, the Gilded Age, and the Progressive Era (1870s–1910s)

- 5.08** Describe the challenges of the journey and process for successful entry into the U.S. through Ellis Island and Angel Island, and *examine the role of immigrants in the development of the U.S.* C, E, G, H

World War I and Between the Wars (1920s–1940s)

- 5.14** Examine the growth of popular culture during the “Roaring Twenties” with respect to the following:
- *Music, clothing, and entertainment*
 - *Automobiles and appliances*
- 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

VIRGINIA STUDIES [VS] – GRADE 4

Skills

- VS.1** The student will demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship by
- a) analyzing and interpreting artifacts and primary and secondary sources to understand events in Virginia history;
 - b) analyzing the impact of geographic features on people, places, and events to support an understanding of events in Virginia history;
 - c) interpreting charts, graphs, and pictures to determine characteristics of people, places, or events in Virginia history;
 - d) recognizing points of view and historical perspectives;
 - e) comparing and contrasting ideas and cultural perspectives in Virginia history;
 - j) investigating and researching to develop products orally and in writing.

Colonialization and Conflict: 1607 through the American Revolution

- VS.4** The student will demonstrate an understanding of life in the Virginia colony by
- b) describing how the culture of colonial Virginia reflected the origins of American Indians, European (English, Scots-Irish, German) immigrants, and Africans.

Virginia: 1900 to the Present

- VS.9** The student will demonstrate an understanding of Virginia during the twentieth century and beyond by
- a) describing the economic and social transition from a rural, agricultural society to a more urban, industrialized society;
 - c) explaining how advances in transportation, communications, and technology have contributed to Virginia's prosperity and role in the global economy.