

A man wearing a light-colored shirt, a dark tie, and a wide-brimmed hat is playing a harmonica. He is also playing a keyboard instrument, possibly a piano or organ, with his hands on the keys. The background is a solid teal color.

# The Instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions

LESSON PLAN GRADES 8,11



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**TITLE OF LESSON:** Picking at the 1927 Bristol Sessions

**GRADE LEVEL(S):** 8, 11

## **STANDARDS:**

TN: 8.34, .35, .36, .39, .40, .41; AAH.21, .26, .28, .31; TN.50; US.28, .29, .30, .31; WG.38, .39, .40  
VA: 6.1, .5, .7; 7.1, .5, .7; 8.1, .5, .7; VUS.1, .3, .8, .10; WG.1, .7, .9, .10, .15; USII.1, .4, .6

**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. Other stringed, percussive, and mouth instruments intersect with similar histories and provide interesting global cultural connections. 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 wide variety of instruments played at the 1927 Bristol Sessions, their origins, how they came to the US, and their cultural importance.

## **PRIOR KNOWLEDGE & EXPERIENCE REQUIRED (IF APPLICABLE):**

N/A

## **PROJECTED LENGTH OF LESSON:**

1–2 class periods, possibly within a block schedule

## **GOALS & OBJECTIVES:**

Students will:

- Learn about the three primary stringed instruments (fiddle, banjo, guitar) and identify their characteristics and country or continent of origin
- Explain the instruments’ origin culture and how the instruments made their way to the U.S. and Appalachia, and how the instruments continued to be used, such as entertainment, cultural transmission, etc.
- Explain the differences and similarities between the instruments and their styles of playing
- Identify and describe additional instruments used at the 1927 Bristol Sessions, along with their origins and route to the U.S.
- Recognize connections between instruments, their use, their origins, and historical narratives



## **LESSON STRUCTURE:**

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### **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.

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

- \* Teacher provides a brief description of the three primary instruments – fiddle, banjo, and guitar – used in Appalachian string bands and early “hillbilly music.” Other instruments may also be included where time allows.
- \* 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’ appearance, how they are played, regions of origin, and how they made their way to North America.

### **3. Teacher facilitates student discussion**

- \* Students will identify and discuss the routes and the populations that brought the instruments to the Americas.
- \* Students will identify and examine the cultures of origin.
- \* Students will compare and contrast the different instruments in musical accompaniment, identifying differences and similarities.

### **4. Teacher breaks students into four (4) groups**

- \* Teacher will assign different songs selected from the 1927 Bristol Sessions recordings to each student group.
- \* Student groups will listen to their song and identify instruments that are being played in it.

### **5. Student groups create a “visual display package”**

- \* Students will create a visual display package – essentially an EP cover – for their song.
- \* Each visual expression will illustrate the selected song, along with the primary or multiple instrument(s) used. It should also reflect the historical and cultural connections of the instruments.

### **6. Students present designs to class**

- \* Each group will present their design to the class and will be prepared to explain their design and its influences.
- \* Teacher will facilitate discussion of any student questions.

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## **EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT:**

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Students will present a visual and/or written asset, showing their understanding of the dynamics of the three primary stringed instruments (and possibly other stringed, percussive, and mouth instruments), their origins and how they made their way to America, and the ways in which these instruments were used in individual songs.

## **MODIFICATIONS/ADAPTATIONS/EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:**

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Students will write “liner notes” of 1–3 paragraphs describing the instrument and song, with the lyrics provided. This extension provides the opportunity for engaging in explanatory and persuasive writing. Examples of liner notes are provided for students to use as models. Students will then present their liner notes to the class. They need to be prepared to answer how it would be different if other instruments were focused on instead.

## **MATERIALS & RESOURCES AVAILABLE:**

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- Birthplace of Country Music website – [www.birthplaceofcountrymusic.org](http://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)
  - \* Examples of liner notes and EP covers, To come
  - \* 1927 Bristol Sessions Songs & Instruments, To come



## CONNECTIONS TO TENNESSEE AND VIRGINIA STANDARDS

This lesson reflects both Tennessee and Virginia standards related to Social Studies and English Language Arts, while also connecting to Music topics and curricula. It will give students the opportunity 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 develop a greater understanding of the states' rich histories and will learn about challenges facing the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries, with an emphasis on major events of the early 20th century that changed our history. Students will use geographic and economic concepts within this historical context. Students will develop the skills of analysis and interpretation to demonstrate knowledge of important events and ideas in our history. Students will understand the contributions made by people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Students will use geographic tools to examine the influence of physical and cultural geography on history.

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

### TENNESSEE STANDARDS:

Standard Number(s)	Standard Name	Short Description
8.34, .35, .36, .39, .40, .41	Sectionalism and Reform (1790s–1850s)	Describe the development of the agrarian economy in the South; analyze the characteristics of Southern society; identify the conditions of enslavement; identify the push-pull factors for Irish and German immigrants; analyze the development of various transportation modes; describe the significance of the Second Great Awakening
AAH.21, .26, .28, .31	African American Life after Emancipation through World War I (1890s–1920s) AND African Americans and the Harlem Renaissance (1920s–1930s)	Assess the economic and social impact of Jim Crow laws on African Americans; describe the economic, cultural, political, and social impact of African American migration; describe the impact of African American regiments on western campaigns; describe the contributions of African Americans to the performing arts
TN.50	Tennessee History: Tennessee: Reform and War (1900–1945)	Describe major developments in country music
US.28, .29, .30, .31	United States History and Geography: The 1920s (1920–1929)	Analyze the impact of the Great Migration of African Americans; describe the growth and effects that radio and movies played in the emergence of popular culture; examine the growth and popularity of country and blues music; describe the impact of new technologies of the era
WG.38, .39, .40	World Geography: Population and Migration	Define and give examples of voluntary, forced, interregional, and infraregional migration patterns; analyze past and present trends in human migration; describe the impact and challenges of migration



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## VIRGINIA STANDARDS:

Standard Number(s)	Standard Name	Short Description
6.1, .5, .7; 7.1, .5, .7; 8.1, .5, .7	Communication and Multimodal Literacies; Reading; AND Writing	Understand the recursive process of writing; determine and explain a theme; compose with attention to a central idea; analyze and use mentor texts as models
VUS.1, .3, .8, .10	Virginia and United States History: Skills; Early America: Settlement and Colonization; Industrialization; AND Emergence of Modern America and World Conflicts	Demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship; apply social science skills to understand early European colonization; apply social science skills to understand how the nation grew and changed; apply social science skills to understand key events during the 1920s and 1930s
WG.1, .7, .9, .10, .15	World Geography: Skills	Demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship; analyze characteristics of the European region; analyze characteristics of the Sub-Saharan African region; analyze characteristics of the North African and Southwest Asian regions; apply social science skills to analyze past and present trends in human migration and cultural diffusion
USII.1	United States History: 1865 to the Present – Skills	Demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship
USII.4, .6	United States History: 1865 to the Present – Reshaping the Nation and the Emergence of Modern America: 1877 to the Early 1900s AND Turmoil and Change: 1890s to 1945	Apply social science skills to understand how life changed after the Civil War; apply social science skills to understand the social, economic, and technological changes of the 20th century

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



## APPENDIX: TENNESSEE AND VIRGINIA STATE STANDARDS

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### TENNESSEE STANDARDS ADDRESSED

#### SOCIAL STUDIES – GRADE 8

#### UNITED STATES HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY: COLONIALIZATION OF NORTH AMERICA TO RECONSTRUCTION

Eighth-grade students will study the European settlement of North America and the role geographic features played in the early settlement of Thirteen Colonies. Students will examine the development and maturation of the Thirteen Colonies and the political, cultural, and economic influences that led to the American Revolution. Students will analyze the major events and outcomes of the American Revolution as well as the individuals who played influential roles in the development of the new nation. Students will follow the development of the United States and its government, continuing through the early 19th century. Students will analyze the impact of the expansion and sectionalism of the U.S., including implications on domestic and foreign policy. Students will also study policies that affected American Indians and African Americans. Finally, students will examine the major events and issues leading up to the Civil War, individuals and events that were significant during the war, and the resulting era of Reconstruction.

This course will place Tennessee history, government, and geography in context with U.S. history in order to illustrate the role our state has played in American history.

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

Source: [\*TN Social Studies Standards, p. 101\*](#)

#### Sectionalism and Reform (1790s–1850s)

- 8.34** Describe the development of the agrarian economy in the South, the locations of the cotton producing states, the significance of cotton and the cotton gin, and the founding of Memphis as a center for cotton and the slave trade. C, E, G, H, P, T
- 8.35** Analyze the characteristics of Southern society and its influence on the social and political conditions prior to the Civil War. C, E, G, H, P, T
- 8.36** Identify the conditions of enslavement, and explain how slaves adapted to and resisted bondage in their daily lives. C, G, H
- 8.39** Identify the push-pull factors for Irish and German immigrants, and describe the impact of their arrival in the U.S. prior to the Civil War. C, E, G, H, P
- 8.40** Analyze the development of roads, canals, railroads, and steamboats throughout the U.S., including the Erie Canal and the National Road. C, E, G, H, P
- 8.41** Describe the significance of the Second Great Awakening and its influence on reform in the 19th century. C, H



### SOCIAL STUDIES – GRADE 11

#### African American Life after Emancipation through World War I (1890s–1920s)

- AAH.21** Assess the economic and social impact of Jim Crow laws on African Americans. C, E, H, T
- AAH.26** Describe the economic, cultural, political, and social impact of African American migration within and from the South (e.g., Exodusters, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, First Great Migration). C, E, G, H, T
- AAH.28** Describe the impact of African American regiments on the western campaigns, the Spanish American War, and World War I. C, G, H, P [*soldiers bringing guitars back*]
- 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

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

- 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)

- US.28** Analyze the impact of the Great Migration of African Americans that began in the early 1900s from the rural South to the industrial regions of the Northeast and Midwest. (T.C.A. § 49-6-1006) C, E, G, H, T, TCA
- US.29** Describe the growth and effects that radio and movies played in the emergence of popular culture as epitomized by celebrities such as Charlie Chaplin, Charles Lindbergh, and Babe Ruth. C, H
- 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 the spread of electricity. C, E, H

#### World Geography: Population and Migration

*[This relates to the instruments’ countries or continents of origin, along with their inclusion in histories of immigrants, enslaved peoples, and the cultural items and traditions these peoples brought and “planted” in North America.]*

- WG.38** Define and give examples of voluntary, forced, interregional, and intraregional migration patterns. C, G, H, P, T
- WG.39** Analyze past and present trends in human migration and the role of intervening obstacles and opportunities (e.g., economic, social, political, and environmental). C, E, G, H, P, T
- WG.40** Describe the impact and challenges of migration on both the sending and receiving countries. C, E, G,





### VIRGINIA STANDARDS OF LEARNING (SOLS) ADDRESSED:

#### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS – MIDDLE SCHOOL

Communication and Multimodal Literacies (6.1, 7.1, 8.1); Reading (6.5, 7.5, 8.5); and Writing (6.7, 7.7, 8.7)

Source: [English Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools](#), 2017

##### Essential Understanding:

- Understand that writing requires a recursive process that includes planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing
- Determine a theme(s) and explain how it is developed through specific details

##### Essential Knowledge, Skills, and Processes:

- Compose with attention to central idea, unity, elaboration, and organization
- Analyze and use mentor texts as models for writing
  - o *[Students will be provided examples of liner notes written for albums from contemporary times.]*

#### SOCIAL STUDIES – MIDDLE SCHOOL

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

#### Virginia and United States History: Skills; Early America: Settlement and Colonization; Industrialization; AND Emergence of Modern America and World Conflicts

**VUS.1** The student will demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship by

- a) synthesizing evidence from artifacts and primary and secondary sources to obtain information about events in Virginia and United States history;
- b) using geographic information to determine patterns and trends in Virginia and United States history;
- c) interpreting charts, graphs, and pictures to determine characteristics of people, places, or events in Virginia and United States history.

**VUS.3** The student will apply social science skills to understand early European colonization by

- c) explaining the impact of the development of indentured servitude and slavery in the colonies.

**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

- a) 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;
- b) 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;
- c) examining the contributions of new immigrants and evaluating the challenges they faced, including anti-immigration legislation.

**VUS.10** The student will apply social science skills to understand key events during the 1920s and 1930s by

- a) analyzing how popular culture evolved and challenged traditional values.



### SOCIAL STUDIES – HIGH SCHOOL

#### World Geography: Skills

- WG.1** The student will demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship by
- a) synthesizing evidence from artifacts and primary and secondary sources to obtain information about the world's countries, cities, and environments;
  - j) investigating and researching to develop products orally and in writing.
- WG.7** The student will analyze the characteristics of the European region by
- a) identifying and analyzing the location of major geographic regions and major cities on maps and globes;
  - d) recognizing cultural influences and landscapes.
- WG.9** The student will analyze the characteristics of the Sub-Saharan African region by
- a) identifying and analyzing the location of major geographic regions and major cities on maps and globes;
  - d) recognizing cultural influences and landscapes.
- WG.10** The student will analyze the characteristics of the North African and Southwest Asian regions by
- a) identifying and analyzing the location of major geographic regions and major cities on maps and globes;
  - d) recognizing cultural influences and landscapes.
- WG.15** The student will apply social science skills to analyze past and present trends in human migration and cultural diffusion by
- a) determining how human migration and cultural diffusion are influenced by social, economic, political, and environmental factors.

#### United States History: 1865 to the Present – Skills

...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... The study of history must emphasize the historical thinking skills required for geographic analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship...

- USII.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 United States history;
  - b) analyzing and interpreting geographic information to determine patterns and trends in United States history;
  - c) interpreting charts, graphs, and pictures to determine characteristics of people, places, or events in United States history;
  - d) using evidence to draw conclusions and make generalizations.



### **United States History: 1865 to the Present – Reshaping the Nation and the Emergence of Modern America: 1877 to the Early 1900s AND Turmoil and Change: 1890s to 1945**

**USII.4** The student will apply social science skills to understand how life changed after the Civil War by

- a) examining the reasons for westward expansion, including its impact on American Indians;
- b) explaining the reasons for the increase in immigration, growth of cities, and challenges arising from this expansion;
- c) describing racial segregation, the rise of “Jim Crow,” and other constraints faced by African Americans and other groups in the post-Reconstruction South;
- d) explaining the impact of new inventions, the rise of big business, the growth of industry, and the changes to life on American farms in response to industrialization.

**USII.6** The student will apply social science skills to understand the social, economic, and technological changes of the early twentieth century by

- a) 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;
- c) examining art, literature, and music from the 1920s and 1930s.