

The Music Industry in Tennessee

Lesson plans for primary sources at the Tennessee State Library & Archives

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Grade Level: 5th and 11th grade

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Visit <http://sos.tn.gov/tsla/education> for additional lesson plans.



Introduction:

The Volunteer State has aided in the development of the music industry. Tennessee has major contributions to Country Music, Blues and Rock n' Roll.

Guiding Questions:

- What were some major musical genres in Tennessee during the 1950s and 1960s?
- What do Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley and WC Handy have in common?
- What did Tennessee contribute to the Music Industry?

Learning Objectives:

During this lesson, students will explore the music industry in Tennessee. Students will listen to music created at Stax Records, analyze primary sources such as sheets of music, newspapers and photographs. Students will also play the game, "Who Am I?" This game highlights the achievements of W.C. Handy, Elvis Presley, Sam Phillips and Johnny Cash by giving various clues to the participants.

Curriculum Standards:

Social Studies Content Standard:

5.51 - Discuss the development of the music industry in Tennessee, including:

- Country music (e.g., Grand Ole Opry, WSM, and the Carter family)
- Blues music (e.g., W.C. Handy and Bessie Smith)
- Rock 'n' roll (e.g., Elvis Presley, Stax Records, and Sun Studio)

Standards—Reading: Informational Text

RI 5.1 - Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RI 5.7 - Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

Curriculum Standards continued:

RI 5.9 - Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

Social Studies Standard:

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)

Materials Needed:

- [Worksheet for Analysis of Photograph](#)
- [Mini Bio of Elvis Presley](#)
- [Beale Street Blues](#)
- [Worksheet for Analysis of a Written Document](#)
- [The Story of Stax.](#) (Website)
- [Many Saw Portents of Stax End...](#) (Article)
- Who Am I? (Printout)
- Activity cards (following this lesson plan)



Introduction to Activities: The following activities are constructed to provide your classroom with authentic primary sources. These primary resources and activities will expand your student's knowledge about music history in Tennessee. For more primary resources, go to [Music in Tennessee](#).

Introduction Activity: Divide the students in 10 groups. On the following pages you will find 10 activity cards, containing either a primary source or information about a primary source. Pass out one activity card for each group. Students will then match the primary source activity card with the information activity card.

Use the [Worksheet for Analysis of Photograph](#) to aid in classroom discussions about the photographs.

Lesson Activities:

Activity 1: Rock n' Roll: Elvis Presley

Elvis Presley (1935-1977) was an American singer and actor, dubbed the "King of Rock and Roll." He is regarded as one of the most significant cultural icons, as well as one of the most celebrated and influential musicians of the 20th century (TSLA).

- Students will watch this [Mini Bio of Elvis Presley](#) from [biography.com](#).
- Students will then read the [Elvis Day Proclamation, 1980](#).
- Finally, students will declare Elvis Day in the classroom. Teachers can divide the students into groups. Using information from the Mini Bio and the Proclamation, each group will write what Elvis is famous for and how Elvis Day should be celebrated. Finally, the class will vote on the best way to celebrate Elvis Day.

Activity 2: Rock n' Roll: Stax Records

As in introduction, the teacher will display "[The Story of Stax](#)." On this website, students can chronologically read about the history of Stax Records as well as listen to samples of songs created at Stax Records.

Students will then read an article from the Memphis Commercial Appeal about the end of Stax Records and complete, [Worksheet for Analysis of a Written Document](#). Lastly, students will complete a writing activity with the following prompt:

How did the Stax Museum contribute to Rock n' Roll and music in Tennessee? Using the primary source "[Many Saw Portents of Stax End...](#)", write about the demise of the Stax Museum.

Activity 3: Blues: W.C. Handy

Beale Street Blues by W.C. Handy is about a famous district in Memphis, TN known for its music and entertainment, Beale Street.

- Students will read the sheet music, "[Beale Street Blues](#)" by W. C. Handy and listen to the song being performed by Marion Harris <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBnNJ1NyFkY>.
- Students will then complete the [Worksheet for Analysis of Written Document](#).

Activity 4: Who Am I?

Students will play the game, "Who Am I?" This game highlights the achievements of W.C. Handy, Elvis Presley, Sam Phillips and Johnny Cash. Read or project each clue on the screen and have students guess the answer. Students (or teams) earn points based on how quickly they can determine the historic figure.

(Teacher guide and screen shots on following pages)

Activity Card: Primary Source



Activity Card: Information

Music in TN: Introduction Activity—Picture #1
Available from TSLA at [Beale Street](#)

Beale Street in Memphis, TN

Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee is significant to both the history of the city and of blues music. Created in 1841, the west end primarily housed merchant shops that traded with ships along the Mississippi River, and the eastern part developed as an affluent suburb. In the 1860s, many black traveling musicians began performing on Beale. In the 1870s, the land around Beale Street was purchased by Robert Church, eventually making him the first black millionaire from the South. During the 1890s, Beale Street underwent renovations, adding the Orpheum Theater and Church Park with its auditorium. In the early 1900s, the street filled with clubs, restaurants, and shops—many of which were owned by African-Americans. From the 1910s through the 1940s, Beale Street became an epicenter for blues and jazz and the development of the Memphis Blues style.

The stretch from Main to 4th was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1966, and on December 15, 1977, Beale Street was officially declared the "Home of the Blues" by an act of Congress.

Activity Card: Primary Source



Activity Card: Information

Music in TN: Introduction Activity—Picture #2

Available from TSLA at [Johnny Cash Receiving Award](#)

Johnny Cash Receiving Award

Johnny Cash (1932-2003) was an American singer-songwriter and guitarist who was widely considered one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century. Known primarily for country music, his sound embraced rock and roll, rockabilly, blues, folk, and gospel. He had a deep bass-baritone voice and a humble demeanor. He was known for free prison concerts and his trademark look which gave him the nickname, “The Man in Black.” Cash and his band, The Tennessee Three were signed to Sun Studios.

Activity Card: Primary Source



Activity Card: Information

Music in TN: Introduction Activity—Picture #3

Available at TSLA at [Musicians on the Memphis Queen II](#)

Musicians on the Memphis Queen II

Blues is a musical form and genre that originated in African- American communities in the rural U.S. South, particularly the Mississippi Delta, around the end of the 19th century. It developed from a fusion of traditional African music and European folk music, and incorporates spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts and chants, and rhymed ballads.

Activity Card: Primary Source

F. Stalene

GOVERNOR RAY BLANTON STATEMENT
AUGUST 17, 1977

IN RECOGNITION OF THE MEMORY OF ELVIS PRESLEY,
I HAVE ORDERED THE TENNESSEE STATE FLAG TO BE LOWERED
TO HALF MAST OVER STATE BUILDINGS.

ELVIS SET THE PACE FOR TWO DECADES OF AMERICANS--
CHANGING NOT ONLY OUR MUSIC BUT THE STYLE OF OUR
DAILY LIVES.

HE WAS A GREAT HUMANITARIAN WHO SOUGHT NO
RECOGNITION FOR HIS GENEROSITY.

THE PEOPLE LOVED ELVIS.

AS TENNESSEANS WE ARE PROUD OF HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS
AND WE MOURN HIS TRAGIC DEATH.

I JOIN WITH CITIZENS FROM ACROSS THE STATE IN
EXPRESSING SYMPATHY TO HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

ALTHOUGH HE IS GONE, HIS MEMORY WILL LIVE ON
THROUGH HIS MUSIC AND HIS INFLUENCE WILL ALWAYS
BE A PART OF AMERICA.

Activity Card: Information

Music in TN: Introduction Activity—Picture #4

Available from TSLA at [Gov. Blanton's Statement on the Death of Elvis Presley](#)

Gov. Blanton's Statement on the Death of Elvis Presley

After the death of Elvis Presley, Governor Ray Blanton released a statement acknowledging Elvis' cultural influence and declaring the Tennessee flag would fly at half-mast in memorium. Elvis Presley (1935-1977) was an American singer and actor, dubbed the "King of Rock and Roll." He is regarded as one of the most significant cultural icons, as well as one of the most celebrated and influential musicians of the 20th century.

Activity Card: Primary Source



(First Of Three Articles)

By JOSEPH WEILER

There was a time when the curious and the enterprising could wander freely into Stax Records and find themselves right at home.

It was a place where people made music all day and all night and loved it.

But now the doors are locked and guards stand watch over what once was a black music empire — now only an empty building closed in the wake of a bitter bankruptcy battle.

In 15 years, the impetuous little music company down on McLemore rose to the heights of the black recording industry, only to plummet even more quickly to the depths of personal and financial ruin.

And now at the bottom, Stax is so entangled in the legal and financial ropes that bind it that its hopes of ever rising again have all but vanished.

There is no one reason for this company's sudden rise to prominence, any more than there is one reason for its almost instant decline.

But from its very beginnings, Stax has always been more a state of mind than reality.

It all started out in the minds of Jim Stewart and his sister, Mrs. Estelle Axton — the first two letters of their last names forming the company name, Stax.

That was in 1960, when Stewart and his sister were moving their small record company, Satellite Records, Inc., to 926 McLemore.

He recalls now, "It is pretty difficult, in retrospect, to know what was in my mind in 1960. For three years (starting in 1957) I was not really in the business, but on the fringes of it, sort of floundering.

"I didn't consider myself in, or seriously in, until 1960. That's when we — me and my sister — moved Satellite Records to McLemore Avenue and the Capitol Theatre facility and built the studio and began to produce records."

McLemore was a "fringe area" of town, in a state of flux with white families mov-



— Staff Photo

ing out as black families moved in. Stewart is white and his background in music was primarily country and western — a result of growing up in Middleton, Tenn.

"We attracted many black musicians and artists to the studio. It's sort of got into the rhythm and blues aspect of the business out of being geographically located in that spot."

And while Stax was getting into rhythm and blues, rhythm and blues was working its way into Stewart.

"It wasn't a preconceived kind of goal or concept that I had in music that Stax or Satellite would be big in rhythm and blues; a black music-oriented record

company. As I got more and more into the music, I began to understand and have a feeling for it. I got into it by chance, but it was becoming a labor of love.

"I felt I didn't want to know or to direct my attentions toward any other type of music. That was to be my life."

He met black disk jockeys such as Rufus Thomas as he tried to peddle his records, and he came to know the black customers who frequented the record shop he was running at the front of the studio.

And from that group of people with whom he had begun to mix, a nucleus of

talent began to form. They began to work together and to make music together.

"That happened because it was a family-growing-up-together sort of relationship. This probably sounds trite and old because it has been said so many times. But it's not just PR (public relations). It's fact.

"That close tie and close relationship of struggling brought us together, because it was a struggling company. None of us had any money. All we had was the desire and the will and the ability to make it happen — which we did. That has been one of the

(Continued on Page 6)

Activity Card: Information

Music in TN: Introduction Activity—Picture #5
Available from TSLA at [Stax Records: The Dream that Died](#)

Stax Records

"Stax Records: The Dream That Died"
The Commercial Appeal, Memphis, TN.
First in a series of three articles.

This first article gives a detailed history of the start and development of Stax Records from 1960, up to its legal dispute with CBS, Inc. in the mid-1970s. The article talks about the Memphis Sound and the gradual development of the Soul sound from rhythm and blues. It touches on the popularization of black music in the 1960s and 70s.

WHO AM I?

(Teacher Key)

1st Clue	2nd Clue	3rd Clue	4th Clue	Answer
25 points	15 points	10 points	5 points	
I was an American Singer and actor.	I was dubbed the “King of Rock and Roll.”	I wrote “Blue Suede Shoes.”		Elvis Presley
I was an African-American blues composer.	I wrote “Beale Street Blues.”	My initials are W.C. H.		W. C. Handy
I was an American singer-songwriter and guitarist known primarily for country music.	People gave me the nickname “The Man in Black.”	My band, “The Tennessee Three” and I were signed to Sun Studios.		Johnny Cash
I was an American musician, music producer, and record executive who played an important role in the emergence of rock n’ roll.	I founded Sun Records in Memphis, TN.	I launched the musical careers of Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley and others.		Sam Phillips

WHO AM I?

Clue #1

I was an American
Singer and actor.

WHO AM I?

Clue #2

I was dubbed the “King of
Rock and Roll.”

WHO AM I?

Clue #3

I wrote “Blue Suede
Shoes.”

WHO AM I?

Clue #4



WHO AM I?

Answer:

Elvis Presley

WHO AM I?

Clue #1

I was an African-
American blues
composer.

WHO AM I?

Clue #2

I wrote “Beale Street
Blues.”

WHO AM I?

Clue #3

My initials are W. C. H.

WHO AM I?

Clue #4



WHO AM I?

Answer:

W. C. Handy

WHO AM I?

Clue #1

I was an American singer-songwriter and guitarist known primarily for country music.

WHO AM I?

Clue #2

People gave me the
nickname “The Man in
Black.”

WHO AM I?

Clue #3

My band, “The Tennessee Three” and I were signed to Sun Studios.

WHO AM I?

Clue #4



WHO AM I?

Answer:

Johnny Cash

WHO AM I?

Clue #1

I was an American musician, music producer, and record executive who played an important role in the emergence of rock n' roll.

WHO AM I?

Clue #2

I founded Sun Records in
Memphis, TN.

WHO AM I?

Clue #3

I launched the
musical careers of
Johnny Cash, Elvis
Presley and others.

Clue #4

House that Rock 'n' Roll Built

Plush Phillips Studios Open Tomorrow

Open House for Public Sunday, 2 to 6 P.M.

By EDWIN HOWARD

Press-Scimitar Amusements
Editor

Sam Phillips, who made \$2 million in the record business without a desk, finally has one—and new three-quarters-of-a-million-dollar studios to go with it.

As he leans back in an upholstered arm chair as white and billowy as the heavenly chariot, the white Formica top of the walnut desk slashes across in front of him like the wing of a jet.

His left hand rests on the colorfully buttoned control panel of the huge stereophonic hi-fi—a juke box that requires no dimes—which sits at the other end of the office.

"This is a little Cape Canaveral of the recording business," he says, his eye taking in the two floors of studios, control rooms, mastering rooms, mailing rooms and offices which lie beneath the penthouse executive offices.

"Woodshed recordings have had it. You've got to have latitude today—all the electronic devices, built-in high and low frequency equalization and attenuation, echoes, channel-splitting facilities, and metering on everything.

2 or 3 Years Ahead

"We knew that two and a half years ago when we started building these studios. We're still two or three years ahead."

The new Sam C. Phillips Re-

will have its grand opening Saturday, with about 150 persons, including 50 from out of town, attending a studio reception at 4, a dinner at the Holiday Inn on S. Third at 7:30, and a dance aboard the Memphis Queen at 9:30.

Open house for the public will be held Sunday from 2 to 6 p.m.

The building, equipment and furnishings represent an investment of close to \$750,000, as compared with the \$125,000 which set Phillips up in the recording business—without a desk of his own—at 706 Union in 1953.

Releases for Phillips' Sun and Phillips International labels have already been cut in the two new studios—one large, one small—which the building houses, but Phillips envisions the time, perhaps in two years, when other companies may cut more records in the studios than his own do.

"A lot of the major independents have wanted to record in Memphis for years," he said. "They like the 'Memphis sound.' But the facilities just weren't available. We've been in the new building six months now and, tho we haven't solicited any business, we're already rented out for a good many sessions.

Twitty Session Set

"Conway Twitty will cut a session for MGM here, on Sept. 23, for example."

Is there a possibility that the new studios might hire Elvis

his recording sessions?

"I don't know. Of course, RCA has its own studio in Nashville, and Elvis has been cutting there. But Ed Hinds of RCA's Nashville office, is coming over for our opening Saturday. Something might develop eventually."

It was Phillips' discovery of Elvis, soon after he opened his little recording service at 706 Union, that made his Sun label famous. However, there is no Presley disk among the seven gold records (each symbolizing a million or more sales of a single selection by a single artist) which hang over the hi-fi in Phillips' office.

The gold records are: Carl Perkins' "Blue Suede Shoes," Bill Justis' "Raunchy," Johnny Cash's "I Walk the Line," and Jerry Lee Lewis' "Great Balls of Fire," "Breathless," "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," and "High School Confidential."

"The most copies of a record Elvis sold on Sun," Phillips said, "was about 200,000 as I recall. 'That's All Right, Mama,' and 'Baby, Let's Play House' went about the same."

But RCA paid Phillips \$40,000 for Elvis' contract, and that gave Phillips what he says he needed most at the time: "Publicity, cash for expansion, and good credit."

2 Neuman Lathes

Those pioneering days of the record business in Memphis seem far behind when you walk

diol, control rooms, a ing and mastering roc

"Everything that h into this building," Phil tinued, "has been cust which is why it has t two and a half years finished. We have built future. We are fully to perform the finest r techniques now, and prepared for any new tion that may come al

"In our experience, the opinions of many pr al people who have visited our new stud have one of the best, and most versatile r studios, not just in th or even in the nation the world."

Bar, Sun Deck, Too

Formerly the Midas Shop, the building at lison was stripped to and completely rebuilt. W. Bond Jr. was the and Denise Howard, c by Denise, assisted in phases of the front, signed the mobile of colored disks which key She also handled inte signing and furnishing ing such luxury featu employes' lounges, execu and the roof-top sun dec with potted plants and fencing, provides an atr of outdoor living, visi the windows of the p executive offices.

Among out-of-town a

WHO AM I?

Answer:

Sam Phillips