



OKLAHOMA HERITAGE Association
GAYLORD-PICKENS Museum

HERITAGE TIMES

Telling Oklahoma's Story Through Its People

GENEROSITY • INDIVIDUALISM • OPTIMISM • PERSEVERANCE • PIONEER SPIRIT

In **Lesson 5** students will explore some of the personalities that have played a role in Oklahoma's music history.

Featured Oklahomans

Mae Boren Axton
Louis W. Ballard
Vida Chenoweth
Charlie Christian
Vince Gill
Woody Guthrie
Toby Keith
Reba McEntire
Leona Mitchell
Carrie Underwood
Jimmy Webb

Supports PASS

Social Studies
Grade 4
Standard 1:1, 5:1 & 5:5

Oklahoma History
High School
Standard 1:1 & 8:1

Mae Boren Axton

Axton attended East Central State College and the University of Oklahoma, where she earned a bachelor's degree in journalism. She obtained a public teaching certificate and taught English and journalism at schools in Broken Bow, Moore, Walters, Frederick and Ada.

A schoolteacher by profession, she had a strong passion for music. Mae co-wrote a song titled "Heartbreak Hotel." Presley recorded the song and topped the pop chart for eight weeks, the country chart for 17 weeks, and the rhythm and blues chart for three weeks. The song was the biggest selling hit on the Billboard charts in 1956 and eventually won a Grammy Hall of Fame Award in 1995.

Axton wrote for several other artists, including Patsy Cline, Little Jimmy Dickens, Albert King, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roger Miller, Tanya Tucker, Conway Twitty, and Doc Watson.

In all, Axton wrote some 200 songs, 14 of which made the charts. She also was the mother to the late singer and actor Hoyt Axton.

Elementary Activity: Create an album/CD cover for Mae Boren Axton.

Secondary Activity: Research the real-life story that prompted the writing of "Heartbreak Hotel."



Vida Chenoweth

At the age of 13, Chenoweth turned from the piano to marimba when her finger became infected. Nine years later, she appeared at the New York City Town Hall and world concerts followed.

She was the first marimbist to play at Carnegie Hall and authored five books on marimba. She spent 13 years with a Stone Age New Guinea Tribe. She developed hymns in the villagers' own style, rhythms and idioms, a new pioneering work in ethnomusicology was evolving. She became a professor in the field at Wheaton College, where her experiments opened new vistas for the use of music with primitive cultures across the globe. Chenoweth was recognized as one of the "Outstanding Musicians of the 20th Century."

Elementary Activity: Draw a marimba.
Secondary Activity: Explore the impact Chenoweth's time in New Guinea had on her music.



Charlie Christian

Charles was about a year and a half in age when his blind father first introduced him to the guitar. As he grew, the guitar was replaced by the bass.

Christian elevated the guitar as a lead instrument. His single-string technique established a solo style that was carried on by such contemporaries as T-Bone Walker and emulated by later disciples



like B. B. King and Chuck Berry.

Christian was influenced by country music and jazz, an odd hybrid of influences that can be heard in his recorded works, such as "Seven Come Eleven," with the Benny Goodman Sextet. His style, which capitalized on innovations in amplification technology,

revolutionized and redefined the role of the electric guitar in popular music. Christian's pioneering efforts are still heard today.

Elementary Activity: Explore names for a class band that represents each student.

Secondary Activity: Research the evolution of the electric guitar from Christian's time to the present.

Words of Wisdom
from the
Oklahoma Hall
of Fame

“Many a month has
come and gone
Since I wandered
from my home
In those Oklahoma
hills where I was
born.

Many a page of life
has turned,
Many a lesson I
have learned;
Well, I feel like in
those hills I still
belong.”

-Woody Guthrie
Posthumously
Inducted 2006

“The hard side of
the music business
isn’t that hard at
all, because the
hard part is just
work. And I’m used
to work. That’s
okay with me –
‘cause I’ve worked
hard and traveled
all my life.”

-Reba McEntire
Inducted 1998

Reba McEntire

After graduating high school, McEntire attended Southwestern College at Durant and pursued a rodeo career as a barrel racer. In 1979 she ended her rodeo career to pursue music full time. She would go on to sell more than 35 million records, receive multiple awards, and become one of the most popular female country singers of all time.

She received the Minnie Pearl Award



for her outstanding humanitarian and community contributions and directed the Ben Johnson Pro Celebrity Benefit to raise millions for Children’s Medical Research, with her other beneficiaries being Texoma Medical Center and Reba’s Ranch House.

She was inducted into the Hall of Great Western Performers as the first country music

artist ever included. She has appeared in several movies and in 2001 her self-titled television sitcom “Reba” launched on the WB Network with 4.7 million viewers. She also performed a four-month run as Annie Oakley in the Broadway musical, “Annie Get Your Gun.”

Elementary Activity: Create a collage depicting a McEntire song.

Secondary Activity: Research the southeastern Oklahoma towns where McEntire began her rodeo career.

Carrie Underwood

From Checotah, Underwood rose to fame as the winner of the fourth season of *American Idol*, and has become a multi-platinum selling recording artist and a multiple Grammy Award winner.

Her debut album, *Some Hearts*, was certified seven times platinum and is the fastest selling debut country album in Nielsen SoundScan history. *Some Hearts* yielded three number one hits on the Billboard Country charts in the United

States and Canada: “Jesus, Take the Wheel,” “Wasted,” and her biggest hit to date, “Before He Cheats.” “Don’t Forget to Remember Me” topped the charts in Canada.

Her debut album is also the best-selling solo female debut album in country music history. Her second album, *Carnival Ride*, produced four number one country hits.

To date, Underwood has sold over 11 million records worldwide.

Elementary Activity: Design a Carrie Underwood concert ticket for a concert at the school.

Secondary Activity: Graph the number of weeks of Underwood’s hits on the various charts.



Woody Guthrie

Okemah native Woody Guthrie formed *The Corn Cobb Trio* in 1931, the first step in his historic career.

He arrived in California in 1937 and settled in New York City in 1939. Guthrie published his first novel, *Bound for Glory*, in 1943. He reinvented the American folk ballads as a vehicle for social comment and protest with such songs as



“This Land is Your Land,” “Pastures of Plenty,” and “So Long It’s Been Good to Know You.” His song, “Oklahoma Hills” has been declared

the official state folk song by the State of Oklahoma.

Guthrie was a poet-philosopher of the common person. He is a member of The Songwriters Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

and Museum. He has received numerous awards, including the Folk Alliance Lifetime Achievement Award and a Grammy from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences.

Elementary Activity: Learn and perform the song “Oklahoma Hills.”

Secondary Activity: Explore Guthrie’s social protests and provide an argument either for or against him.

Leona Mitchell

The Enid native and lyric soprano graduated from Enid High School before attending Oklahoma City University on a music scholarship. She graduated and won the Kurt Herbert Adler Award of the San Francisco Opera and received a \$10,000 Opera America grant to study with St. John Metz in Los Angeles.

She debuted with the San Francisco Opera Company and at the Metropolitan



Opera Company. Mitchell has sung with opera companies around the world, including Paris, Geneva, Israel, Japan, London, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and Lincoln Center in New York City.

Besides operatic performances, she has given recitals, concerts, and made three videos, one each with Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo and Jose Carreras. She has appeared

on television in “Live from the Met,” “Live from Lincoln Center” and the Gala Statue of Liberty Concert in Central Park. In 1985, she was honored by the Oklahoma Legislature as an honorary chairman of Black History Month.

Elementary Activity:

Look at the world map and trace the continent’s where Mitchell has performed.

Secondary Activity:

Download and view performances of Mitchell.

Did you Know?

from the Oklahoma Hall of Fame

Vince Gill and Jimmy Webb penned “Oklahoma Rising” as the State’s Centennial Song.

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” was written by Choctaw Freedman Wallis Willis. It is believed that the song refers to the Underground Railroad.

Woody Guthrie wrote more than 3000 lyrics in his lifetime, most of which he never recorded, penned two autobiographical novels, and drew more than 500 illustrations.

Jimmy Webb

Born in Elk City and raised in Laverne, Webb has penned numerous hits, including “Galveston,” “The Highwayman,” “By the Time I Get to Phoenix,” “Wichita Lineman,” “Up, Up and Away,” “Didn’t We,” and “McArthur Park.”

He was the first artist ever to receive Grammy awards for music, lyrics, and orchestration and is a member of the National Academy of Popular Music Songwriter’s Hall of

Fame and the Nashville Songwriter’s Hall of Fame.

Webb began his film scoring career when he wrote the title song and mid-summer hit for the James Garner-Debbie Reynolds comedy, “How Sweet It Is!” He also composed the theme music for the 1989 United States Olympic Festival.

Elementary Activity: Compose a class song or give a new spin to an existing one.

Secondary Activity: Research the impact of Webb’s rural upbringing on the type of songs that he composed.



Toby Keith



Toby Keith Covell was born in Clinton. He received his first guitar

at age 8, but didn’t turn to music full time until 1984 where he played the honky-tonk circuit in Oklahoma and Texas with the band Easy Money.

Keith’s 1993 debut single “Should’ve Been a Cowboy” went to No. 1 on the charts to begin his career in earnest. In 2000, he won two Academy of Country Music awards for male vocalist and album. In 2003, Keith was named entertainer of the year by the CMA. He was presented the Country Radio Broadcasters Artist Humanitarian Award in 2007.

In 2005, Keith started his own recording company, Show

Dog Records. The same year, he opened the first I Love This Bar & Grill restaurant. He starred in the Paramount/CMT film *Broken Bridges* in 2006.

Elementary Activity. Choose a local cause for the class to support.

Secondary Activity: Explore Keith’s philanthropic endeavors and his contributions to Oklahoma.

Educational opportunities annually offered by the **Oklahoma Heritage Association** include:

- More than \$400,000 in scholarships to high school students.
- Heritage Week competitions for students in grades 4 through 12.
- Summer Camp for ages 5 to 15.
- Oklahoma Institute for all ages.
- Field trips to the Gaylord-Pickens Oklahoma Heritage Museum—voted Nickelodeon’s Parents’ Choice Best Pick for Teens.
- “I Am Oklahoma” program for students of all ages.
- Excellence in Teaching Oklahoma History awards for educators.
- Celebrating Oklahoma Voices workshops.
- *Oklahoma: Magazine of the Oklahoma Heritage Association* is distributed to high school libraries statewide.

Louis W. Ballard

Ballard, of Cherokee, Quapaw, French and Scottish heritage, was born in the Native American community of Devil's Promenade, located near Quapaw, in northeast Oklahoma. His Quapaw name was Honganozhe, meaning "Stands With Eagles."

A Native American composer, educator, author, artist, and journalist, Ballard studied music at the University of Oklahoma and the University of Tulsa, where his composition instructor was Bela Rozsa. He later studied privately with Darius Milhaud, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Carlos Surinach, and Felix Labunski. He became an instructor at the Institute of American Indian Arts.

Ballard composed numerous orchestral, choral, and chamber works, many composed on Native American themes or in Native American languages. He also compiled several volumes of Native American songs for classroom use.

Elementary Activity: Create an illustration that represents Ballard's Quapaw name—Stands with Eagles.

Secondary Activity: Research the difference in instruction Ballard received between the classroom setting and the private study.



Vince Gill

Oklahoma City's Vince Gill left soon after his high school graduation to pursue a career in music. He has received numerous Grammy Awards, two each for the popular songs "I Still Believe in You" and "Go Rest High on That Mountain," as well as four Academy of Country Music Awards, and eight Music City News Awards. The songwriter and recording star has seven platinum and two gold albums. He has been named Male Vocalist of the Year, Entertainer of the Year, and Instrumentalist of the Year.

He returns to Oklahoma often to participate in charity events, including his annual Vince Gill Celebrity Golf Tournament in Oklahoma City to benefit Special Care. Other beneficiaries are the Jimmy Everett Cancer Center and the Junior Golf Program in Oklahoma. In 1995 he participated in the Fourth of July show honoring the heroes who did so much in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City Murrah Bombing and raised over a half-million dollars for the relief effort and the Red Cross.

Other honors include induction to the Hall of Great Western Performers, induction to the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City Public School's Wall of Fame, and the Minnie Pearl Award. Gill also was the master of ceremonies for the dedication of the Oklahoma State Capitol dome.

Elementary Activity: Design an award that could be presented to Oklahomans who use their success to benefit their home state.

Secondary Activity: What other Oklahoma artists has Gill performed with?



www.oklahomaheritage.com



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