



Teacher's Tool Kit

Grades 3–8

English Language Arts • Music • Social Studies



CountryMusicHallOfFame.org/Portal

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BEGIN by asking your students what they know about the band Alabama. After class discussion, read the following text about the band and the band member biographies. Then select activities that best correspond to your curriculum. This kit includes three interdisciplinary lessons to use in the classroom. The lesson resources can be found at the back of this tool kit. Visit CountryMusicHallofFame.org/portal for more ready-to-use materials.

VOCABULARY WORDS: genre, harmony, rock & roll, R&B, reggae, sharecroppers, shape-note

POETRY IN MUSIC

English Language Arts • Music

Randy Owen has a vivid childhood memory of his father, Gladstone, reading the poetry of Edgar Albert Guest. Guest's words inspired Owen to write lyrics and share his own poetry with the world in the form of songs. Read Guest's poem "Home" and listen to Alabama's "My Home's in Alabama."

READ Edgar Albert Guest's poem "Home" from his 1916 book, *A Heap o' Livin'*.

READ the lyrics and listen to Alabama's song "My Home's in Alabama."

COMPARE AND CONTRAST these two works of art, considering the theme and message of each piece.

MY HOME'S IN ALABAMA

RANDY OWEN—TEDDY GENTRY

Drinkin' was forbidden in my Christian country home
I learned to play the flat-top on them good old gospel songs
Then I heard about the bar-rooms just across the Georgia line
Where a boy could make a livin' playing guitar late at nite

Had to learn about the ladies, too young to understand
why the young girls fall in love with the boys in the band
When the boys turn to music—the girls just turn away
to some other guitar picker in some other late night place

Yeah I held on to my music, let the ladies walk away
took my songs and dreams to Nashville then I moved on to L.A.
Up to New York City, all across the U.S.A.
I've lost so much of me but there's enough of me to say

That my home's in Alabama
no matter where I lay my head
My home's in Alabama
Southern born and Southern bred



GENRE BLENDING

English Language Art • Music • Social Studies

Alabama got their start playing nightly at a bar called The Bowery in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. They specialized in delivering audience favorites during long sets, where they played a combination of rock & roll, R&B, and country for their patrons, which ultimately helped shape Alabama's unique sound.

LIST different genres of music.

DISCUSS your favorite songs and types of music.

REVIEW vocabulary words.

RESEARCH a genre of music you usually don't listen to.

Find the origins and significant artists.

PRESENT what you like about this genre and present another style influenced by the genre you researched.

DISCUSS which genres you hear in Alabama's music.

GENRES TO CONSIDER: country, rock & roll, R&B, classical, blues, jazz, reggae, pop, hip hop



The Bowery in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

English Language Arts



Teddy Gentry



Randy Owen



Jeff Cook

Alabama members Jeff Cook, Teddy Gentry, and Randy Owen are cousins who come from the state of Alabama. The bandmates stress the importance of family in their lives and in their music.

DISCUSS the meaning of family.

WRITE a list of activities you do with your family.

DOCUMENT your favorite family activity by taking photos and writing a presentation.

SHARE this activity with the class.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How do you define family?
- Do all families live close together?
- Does family only mean blood relatives?



ABOUT THE BAND

Jeff Cook, Teddy Gentry, and Randy Owen were born and raised in the mountainous northeast corner of Alabama. They named their band after their home state. Second-cousins Gentry and Owen grew up poor on Lookout Mountain. Gentry grew up on a cotton farm, while Owen's family produced cotton, corn, hay, and timber. Cook, a distant cousin, came from a middle-class family in nearby Fort Payne, a small mill town labeled by its chamber of commerce the "sock capital of the world."

All three were raised on country music and attended church, where they learned to sing and play instruments. Growing up in the 1950s and early '60s, they also absorbed the music of early American rock & roll acts and British Invasion groups, such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

In 1968, they held their first band practice and soon shared an apartment in Anniston, Alabama, making ends meet by laying carpet and hanging drywall, keeping evenings open to rehearse music. The band began playing at a popular bar in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, called the Bowery. They spent the next seven spring and summer seasons performing there. The group sharpened their musical skills and developed an identifiable sound and style while entertaining tourists six nights a week. Depending on tips for their livelihood, the

band learned to play audience-oriented music, ready to put aside any pretensions to please their listeners.

"We were essentially a country band dropped into an environment that favored R&B and rock & roll," Owen stated in his memoir. "We became an all-hits-all-the-time bar band, and it turned out to be the best musical education we could have possibly received . . . When we could get our original tunes into the nightly mix, people responded to them, even though they weren't a hard-country crowd. That told us something—that country music, done in a looser, more energetic way, could appeal to anyone who liked music."

The band self-financed three albums to sell at shows, then in 1977 they released a single with Nashville-based GRT Records. The group performed at the annual Country Radio Seminar in March of 1980, sharing the bill with Reba McEntire and others. They were signed by RCA Records and grew in popularity. The band went on to score 30 #1 hits and win the Academy of Country Music's Entertainer of the Year award five consecutive years as well as other Academy of Country Music, Country Music Association, and Grammy awards. They were named artist of the decade for the 1980s by the Academy of Country Music. They were inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2005.

MEET ALABAMA



Alabama (left to right): Jeff Cook, Randy Owen, and Teddy Gentry.

JEFF COOK (born 1949), lead guitarist, fiddler, and harmony vocalist, became proficient on several instruments at a very young age. In his teens, Cook performed with local bands and worked at radio stations in Alabama. He earned a diploma in electronics from Alabama Technical College, leading to a position at Western Electric.

RANDY OWEN (born 1949), a bashful kid whose first love was playing lead guitar, reluctantly became Alabama's lead vocalist and rhythm guitarist after Cook claimed the band's lead guitar spot. The oldest child of sharecroppers, Owen helped tend the family's land. He attended itinerant shape-note singing schools, and his family performed as a traveling gospel group. Owen graduated from Jacksonville State University (Alabama) with a degree in English, which nurtured his love for language and helped develop his songwriting craft.

TEDDY GENTRY (born 1952), was raised by his single mother and maternal grandfather in a house without running water. He and Owen were childhood pals long before they began making music together. Gentry met Cook when the two were in their teens. Before supplying bass guitar and harmony vocals for Alabama, Gentry won a talent contest as a member of the Sand Mountain Chickenpluckers.



“HOME”

EDGAR ALBERT GUEST FROM *A HEAP O’ LIVIN’* (1916)

It takes a heap o’ livin’ in a house t’ make it home,
A heap o’ sun an’ shadder, an’ ye sometimes have t’ roam
Afore ye really ’preciate the things ye lef’ behind,
An’ hunger fer ’em somehow, with ’em allus on yer mind.
It don’t make any differunce how rich ye get t’ be,
How much yer chairs an’ tables cost, how great yer luxury;
It ain’t home t’ ye, though it be the palace of a king,
Until somehow yer soul is sort o’ wrapped round everything.

Home ain’t a place that gold can buy or get up in a minute;
Afore it’s home there’s got t’ be a heap o’ livin’ in it;
Within the walls there’s got t’ be some babies born, and then
Right there ye’ve got t’ bring ’em up t’ women good, an’ men;
And gradjerly, as time goes on, ye find ye wouldn’t part
With anything they ever used—they’ve grown into yer heart:
The old high chairs, the playthings, too, the little shoes they wore
Ye hoard; an’ if ye could ye’d keep the thumbmarks on the door.

Ye’ve got t’ weep t’ make it home, ye’ve got t’ sit an’ sigh
An’ watch beside a loved one’s bed, an’ know that Death is nigh;
An’ in the stillness o’ the night t’ see Death’s angel come,
An’ close the eyes o’ her that smiled, an’ leave her sweet voice dumb.
Fer these are scenes that grip the heart, an’ when yer tears are dried,
Ye find the home is dearer than it was, an’ sanctified;
An’ tuggin’ at ye always are the pleasant memories
O’ her that was an’ is no more—ye can’t escape from these.

Ye’ve got t’ sing an’ dance fer years, ye’ve got t’ romp an’ play,
An’ learn t’ love the things ye have by usin’ ’em each day;
Even the roses ’round the porch must blossom year by year
Afore they ’come a part o’ ye, suggestin’ someone dear
Who used t’ love ’em long ago, an’ trained ’em jes’ t’ run
The way they do, so’s they would get the early mornin’ sun;
Ye’ve got t’ love each brick an’ stone from cellar up t’ dome:
It takes a heap o’ livin’ in a house t’ make it home.



"MY HOME'S IN ALABAMA"

TEDDY GENTRY/RANDY OWEN

Drinkin' was forbidden in my Christian country home
I learned to play the flat-top on them good old gospel songs
Then I heard about the bar-rooms just across the Georgia line
Where a boy could make a livin' playin' guitar late at nights

Had to learn about the ladies, too young to understand
Why the young girls fall in love with the boys in the band
When the boys turn to music, the girls just turn away
To some other guitar picker in some other late night place

Yeah, I held on to my music; let the ladies walk away
Took my songs and dreams to Nashville then I moved on to L.A.
Up to New York City, all across the U.S.A.
I've lost so much of me but there's enough of me to say

That my home's in Alabama
No matter where I lay my head
My home's in Alabama
Southern born and Southern bred

What keeps me goin' I don't really know
Can't be the money, Lord knows I'm always broke
Could it be the satisfaction of bein' understood
When the people really love you and let you know when it's good

Oh I'll speak my Southern English as natural as I please
I'm in the heart of Dixie, Dixie's in the heart of me
And someday when I make it, when love finds a way
Somewhere high on Lookout Mountain I'll just smile with pride and say

That my home's in Alabama
No matter where I lay my head
My home's in Alabama
Southern born and Southern bred
Southern born and Southern bred
Southern born and Southern bred