



JOHNNY CASH: THE TRUTH SEEKER

In 1970, Johnny Cash scored a hit with a protest song called “What Is Truth,” a question that served as a theme throughout his music. In a remarkable career that spanned six decades, Cash used his lyrics to explore life’s important questions.

“I want to write a song that has something to say—a song that will have a meaning not only for me, but for everybody who hears it,” he explained.

Cash was born in 1932 in Kingsland, Arkansas. One of seven children in a farming family, he absorbed gospel music in church, country music from the radio, and old-time folk music in porch sing-alongs. When he was twelve, his beloved older brother Jack was killed in a sawmill accident—a tragedy that haunted Cash and inspired him to write poetry, stories, and song lyrics. After high school, he spent four years in the Air Force and, while in the service, began to pursue music seriously. He learned to play the guitar, wrote songs, and even formed a country band.

Once out of the Air Force, Cash moved to Memphis and caught the attention of Sun Records, the studio that launched Elvis Presley’s career. Soon Cash was making waves on country charts with his self-written songs.

Deeply religious, Cash wrote about both saints and sinners. He also wrote protest songs about America’s problems as well as songs praising America. After a career decline in the 1980s, Cash established



his reputation as an American music icon in the 1990s with a series of recordings, many of which reworked his earlier songs. Recording almost up to his

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LISTEN

“I Still Miss Someone,” “I Walk the Line,” “The Man in Black,” “Tennessee Flat-Top Box,” “What Is Truth”



JOHNNY CASH: THE TRUTH SEEKER (CONTINUED)

final days, he died in 2003 in Nashville, Tennessee. Cash is a member of both the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and he also received the National Medal of Arts as well as the National Humanities Medal.



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. In which state was Cash born?

2. Circle the phrase “making waves on country charts” in paragraph four. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of the phrase.

3. In your opinion, why is this essay called “The Truth Seeker”? Highlight evidence in the text to support your answer.
