

# Muscle Shoals Sound Studio



## Educator Resource Packet



Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area

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# Introduction

This curriculum packet is designed to provide fourth-grade students with an overview of the history of the 3614 Jackson Highway location of the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio through visual aids, critical inquiry, hand-on activities, and family participation. The resources found here can be adapted for other age groups.

This packet will provide students with the story of the recording industry as it was at Muscle Shoals Sound Studio from 1969-1978. It will show us the importance music has to a community as well as to the world as a whole. It will show the significance of the **records** produced at the Jackson Highway location and will encourage students to explore other studios in the area as well as the broader music history of the Shoals.

The history of Muscle Shoals Sound Studio at the Jackson Highway location begins with the studio's opening in 1969. Learning about the **music history** of the Shoals is a localized way of understanding America's musical past through the lens of a small faction that had a large impact on the course of music production.



## Background Information

The music produced in Muscle Shoals gained national and international significance throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though, of course, lots of important music was being created here prior to 1960, many of the most recognizable songs produced in the 1960s through the 1980s were a product of Muscle Shoals' recording studios. Jimmy Johnson, David Hood, Roger Hawkins, Berry Beckett, and Atlantic Records producer Jerry Wexler opened Muscle Shoals Sound Studio in 1969 at the 3614 Jackson Highway location. They had previously worked as **session players** at FAME Recording Studio, also in Muscle Shoals, owned by Rick Hall. When MSSS opened, it was the only **studio** in the country owned by the studio's session players. The music they created made a lasting impact on music history.

Though they owned the studio, the session players also spent a lot of time in-house **cutting a record** during **recording sessions**. They were available if a recording artist needed them as a backup band. During this time, the studio's sound engineer, often Jimmy Johnson, would spend a lot of time in the studio making sure they placed the microphones in the right places to pick up the sounds they wanted. He would also spend time in the control booth mixing the sounds that the microphones picked up from various instruments and voices in the studio to get the desired sound for the song they were **producing**. The finished product would either be a **single** or even an entire album.



## Historical Overview

Symbol Key:

\* Suggested listening material

In the early 1960s, Rick Hall co-founded FAME Studio in the hopes to cut hit records. He put together a rhythm section of local musicians to play backup when vocalists came in to record. By the late 1960s, Rick had Jimmy Johnson (guitar), David Hood (electric bass), Roger Hawkins (drums), and Barry Beckett (piano) as the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section at FAME Studios. In **1969**, this rhythm section partnered with music producer Jerry Wexler to open their own studio across town in an old coffin warehouse. They named this studio Muscle Shoals Sound Studio.

The first musician to record at the studio in 1969 was Cher. She titled her album “3614 Jackson Highway” after the address of the studio. Later that year, they produced their first **hit single**, R.B. Greaves’ “Take A Letter Maria.”\* After that, they had many successful and famous musicians record at their studio. The Rolling Stones, Paul Simon, Rod Stewart, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Bob Seger all recorded here while the studio was located on Jackson Highway. Over the course of this time, session musicians and studio owners Johnson, Hood, Hawkins, and Beckett gained the nickname The Swampers.

In **1978**, they moved their studio to another location not far away on the Tennessee River, and the studio continued to produce records until **1985** when it was sold to Malaco Records. The significance of this studio lies in the **international recognition** that the music received and continues to receive. In **2013**, the original studio location was purchased by the Muscle Shoals Music Foundation and was restored to its image from the 1970s. To this day, people travel from across the world to stand in the studio where their favorite music was recorded. The spirit of Muscle Shoals Sound Studio is still alive within the studio walls as a new generation of Muscle Shoals music continues to be recorded there.



## **Activity # 1**

### **Video**

If you are unable to watch the entire *Muscle Shoals* documentary, below is a link to one of the movie trailers. We highly advise either the documentary or this video to be shown before bringing the students to the studio. This is intended to spark students' interests in the site's history in a visual and exciting way. A longer version will be shown at the beginning of the tour.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNGtfpim0OM>

## **Activity # 2**

### **Music**

The students' awareness of the music of Muscle Shoals Sound Studio is important to begin developing before they tour the studio. We have put together a playlist of songs that can be played while students are working in the classroom etc.

Follow the link (Spotify account needed to log in)

<https://open.spotify.com/user/victorialynnh/playlist/7ixXGXIO7HKBDrPhzz258R>

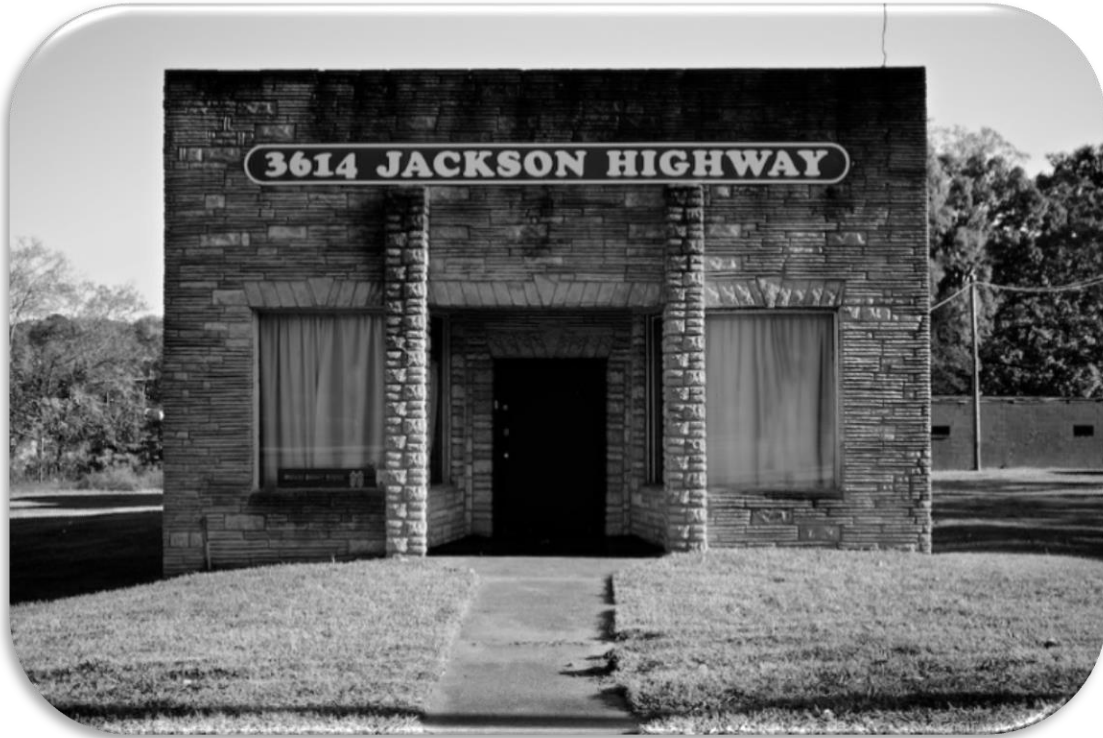
## **Activity #3**

### **Instagram Scavenger Hunt**

This activity can be accessed through Instagram. If your students have smart phone access, have them pull up the Instagram account @mssstudent. If students scroll through the feed starting from the first post, they will find interactive photos that will appear later on the tour. This will encourage the students to be engaged during the tour, listening to what the tour guide says, and looking for these photos throughout the building. If teachers prefer the option for not using a smart phone, the photos are located on the following pages and can be copied, printed, and handed out to students.

## Printed Scavenger Hunt

**Visit Muscle Shoals Sound Studio and learn about our incredible music history. While you are on the tour, answer the following questions. Make sure to ask your tour guide for help or if the question prompts you to do so!**



*Welcome to the studio! This is Muscle Shoals Sound Studio at 3614 Jackson Hwy. Are you ready to rock?*





1. Here is the very first album made at our studio in 1969. Take a good look at both photos. What's different about the two photos? Ask your tour guide to give you the answer.



*2. This album was made in our studio and has a really important secret on the back cover. Listen closely to your tour guide and hear what it is!*

**TOP  
SECRET**

*3. There's a hidden room in the studio basement. Keep your eyes peeled and be ready to uncover the studio's hidden lounge!*



*4. These cool guys owned the studio and played the instruments as well. From left to right David Hood (electric bass), Roger Hawkins (drums), Jimmy Johnson (rhythm guitar), and Barry Beckett (keys). Do any of you play an instrument or have one you like? Let us know!*



*5. A sneak peek behind the control booth. This console used to live in Nashville. If you look on the right-hand side you'll see where the producer set his Coca Cola bottle. Do you see it? Ask your tour guide to point to it if you don't!*



*6. Here is our drummer Roger Hawkins recording in the drum booth. He wouldn't always play on the drums, sometimes he got the sounds from drumming on other things in the studio. Ask your tour guide what he used!*

## Activity #4

### How well do you know Muscle Shoals Sound Studio?

Here you will be asked questions based on the tour you took at the recording studio.

Let's rock!

1. What was the nickname for the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section at the studio?
  - The Rolling Stones
  - 3614 Jackson Hwy
  - The Swampers
  - Lynyrd Skynyrd
2. What was the year the studio opened?
  - 2001
  - 1969
  - 1978
  - 1997
3. What are the in-house studio musicians called?
  - The band
  - The groove section
  - The backup group
  - The session players
4. What instrument was original to the studio
  - Piano
  - Lead guitar
  - Electric Bass
  - Drums
5. True or False: The Studio stayed at this location from 1969-1985
  - True
  - False

## Glossary

**“Cutting a Record”**-the cut recording process is an early method of audio recording by which a stylus cuts a vertical groove into a vinyl record

**Hit single**- a recorded song or instrumental released as a single that has become very popular. Though it sometimes means any widely played or big-selling song, the term “hit” usually refers to a single that has appeared in an official music chart through repeated radio airplay or significant commercial sales

**Mixing**- the process of combining several recordings into a single track so that these tracks are blended together

**Producer**- oversees and manages the sound recording and production of a band or performer’s music, which may range from recording one song to recording an entire album

**Recording sessions**- a period of time devoted to recording music in a studio

**Session Players**- highly skilled professionals who are hired to perform in recording sessions as well as live performances. Many session musicians specialize in playing rhythm section instruments such as guitar, piano, bass, or drums.

**Sound engineers**- a technician dealing with acoustics for a broadcast or musical performance

**Studio**- a specialized facility for sound recording, mixing, and audio production of instrumental or vocal musical performances, spoken words, and other sounds

**Tracks**- one of the several songs or pieces of music on a CD or other musical recording

**Vinyl Record**- a sound storage medium in the form of a flat vinyl disc with an inscribed spiral groove. This medium was popular for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century