

# IT HAPPENED HERE NEW JERSEY

## The Voice of Jersey: Frank Sinatra

Target Age: Middle School/High School  
Time Period: 20<sup>th</sup> Century  
Featured County: Hudson  
NJ 350<sup>th</sup> Theme: Innovation

### Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts:

R.CCR.1- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

SL.CCR.2- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

SL.CCR.5- Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

### New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

Social Studies: 6.1.12.D.13.d, 6.1.12.D.14.f

### **FOCUS QUESTION:**

How has music helped shape New Jersey's identity as well as how the state appears to the rest of the United States and the world?

### **BACKGROUND:**

Frank Sinatra is among the twentieth-century's greatest popular performers. He drew on several influences, including Bing Crosby's crooning, trombonist Tommy Dorsey's breath control, and blues singer Billie Holiday's rhythmic swing, but is principally credited with the concept of singing colloquially, or treating lyrics as personal statements and handling melodies with the ease of a jazz improviser.

While many associate Sinatra with Palm Springs and Las Vegas, he was first and foremost a Jersey boy. Born in Hoboken on December 12, 1915, the only child of Italian immigrants, he sang in the glee club of Demarest High School. His break came in 1937, when he and three instrumentalists, billed as the Hoboken Four, won the *Major Bowes Original Amateur Hour*. Harry James signed Sinatra to sing with his orchestra, and on July 13, 1939—two weeks after his debut at the Hippodrome Theatre in Baltimore—Sinatra cut his first record, "From the Bottom of My Heart." Of the first 10 songs he



Courtesy of Hoboken Historical Museum

recorded, the biggest seller, “All or Nothing at All,” sold just over 8,000 copies and ultimately became the first of Sinatra’s many million-sellers, hitting #2 on the billboard charts.

While Sinatra’s career ebbed and flowed during the 1940s and 1950s, in the 1960s he remade himself in Las Vegas at the Sands and later Caesars Palace as the leader of the notorious “Rat Pack,” which included Sammy Davis Jr., Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, and Joey Bishop. By the mid-1960s, he began experimenting with youth culture, covering songs by younger writers, and in 1968 recorded “My Way,” a French song to which Paul Anka wrote new English lyrics. A modest U.S. hit at the time—it reached #27 on the billboard charts—it was an overwhelming smash in Britain, staying in the Top 50 an unprecedented 122 weeks, and it has remained one of Sinatra’s best loved hits.

His fourth and final wife, Barbara, to whom he was married for 22 years until his death in 1998, said Sinatra “lived in a lot of places, but Hoboken and all of New Jersey were always very close to his heart.”

#### **ACTIVITY:**

Have students listen to “New York, New York,” one of Frank Sinatra’s signature songs (available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KJQNMqVlug>). Although not about New Jersey, it is about a city less than five miles away from Sinatra’s hometown of Hoboken. Indeed, many have suggested the lyrics “these little town blues” are about Hoboken and its residents as they look across the Hudson River. After listening once, display the song’s lyrics on the blackboard or in a powerpoint slide (or simply photocopy and distribute—they appear below). Ask students to identify particular elements including:

- Rhyme (words that sound alike)
- Imagery (scenes and settings that the singer describes)
- Repetition (words or phrases that appear more than once for emphasis)
- Tone (changes in the music that make it sound lighter and brighter, or darker and more serious)
- Pacing (places where the music speeds up or down and what emotion such changes suggest)

Then play the song a second time and ask students to listen for specific examples of those ideas and identify them in the text. This can be done as a class or you may choose to divide students into groups of five and have one person in each group assigned to listen for each of the five elements described above. Then ask students or groups to share their ideas with the class.

#### **“New York, New York”**

Start spreadin' the news, I'm leavin' today  
I want to be a part of it  
New York, New York  
These vagabond shoes, are longing to stray  
Right through the very heart of it  
New York, New York

For the full song lyrics please visit:

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/franksinatra/themefromnewyorknewyork.html>

#### **FOLLOW-UP:**

Frank Sinatra is just one of many New Jersey artists who have shaped the world of popular music. William James “Count” Basie, a native of Red Bank, became a highly successful jazz pianist and innovator. Sarah Vaughan, Queen Latifah, and Jon Bon Jovi are among those who have followed in his footsteps, bringing their own versions of the Jersey sound to audiences all over the world. But perhaps the second most famous New Jersey musician after Sinatra is Bruce Springsteen. In 1995, at a birthday tribute Springsteen called Sinatra “the patron saint of New Jersey” and said “since his rise from the streets of Hoboken, Frank has basically owned the place. But he has been gracious enough to loan me a small piece of it by the beach.” Springsteen has much in common with Sinatra; both have won Academy Awards, both are known by their nicknames—Ol’ Blues Eyes and The Boss, respectively—and both are renowned for their live shows.

Springsteen calls his writing “emotionally autobiographical” and through his songs, listeners can see and hear details of life on the Jersey Shore in the 1970s. He was born in Freehold, NJ and lived in Asbury Park. He sings about the driving circuits and the swamps, the beaches and the boardwalks, the Turnpike and the Meadowlands, about living in New Jersey and leaving New Jersey. Visitors to the corner of Tenth Avenue and E Street in Belmar can see the inspiration for both the song “Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out” and for the name of his band, and on the boardwalk in Asbury Park they would find Madam Marie’s fortune telling booth featured in his song “4<sup>th</sup> of July, Asbury Park.”

Attached are excerpts from six Springsteen songs that feature specific details about the state.

*The E Street Shuffle* (1973)  
*Fourth of July, Asbury Park* (1973)  
*Open All Night* (1982)  
*State Trooper* (1982)  
*Atlantic City* (1982)  
*Wrecking Ball* (2012)

Springsteen suggested in a *Rolling Stone* article that he “wanted the listener to hear the characters think, to get inside their heads, so you could hear and feel their thoughts, their choices.... I wanted the music to feel like a waking dream and the record to move like poetry.” His songs have a distinct sense of place, characters, and plot. Print the lyrics, divide students into groups, and ask them to analyze their song. If possible, allow them to use a device to hear the song. Have them consider:

1. Who are the characters in the song? From what point of view is the story being told?
2. What is the setting? Are specific places and details highlighted?
3. Can listeners trace the story being told? Is there a beginning, middle, and end? Is there a climax?
4. What is the tone of the song? What specific words create that tone?
5. What do these stories have to say about New Jersey?
6. Being residents of the state, can you relate to these stories about New Jersey?

## **WANT TO LEARN MORE?**

### **Places You Can Visit**

Hoboken Historical Museum: <https://www.hobokenmuseum.org/> (also offers a “Sinatra Walking Tour: <https://www.hobokenmuseum.org/self-guided-walking-tours/2011-09-30-17-33-08/frank-sinatra-tour-map>)

Twin Palms Frank Sinatra Historic Estate, Palm Springs, CA: <http://www.sinatrahouse.com/>

“Bruce Springsteen Rocked Here”- NJ.com article tracing the Jersey landmarks of the Boss.  
[http://www.nj.com/insidejersey/index.ssf/2009/05/bruce\\_rocked\\_here.html](http://www.nj.com/insidejersey/index.ssf/2009/05/bruce_rocked_here.html)

The Bruce Springsteen Collection at Monmouth University  
<http://www.monmouth.edu/university/the-bruce-springsteen-special-collection.aspx>

### **More Classroom Activities**

“Frank Sinatra Worksheets,” from eslprintables.com, a collection of materials for using Frank Sinatra lyrics to teach English as a Second Language:  
[http://www.eslprintables.com/worksheets\\_with\\_songs/frank\\_sinatra/](http://www.eslprintables.com/worksheets_with_songs/frank_sinatra/)

“From Asbury Park to the Promised Land—The Life and Music of Bruce Springsteen”: an educator’s resource developed by the National Constitution Center.  
<http://constitutioncenter.org/springsteen/educator.html>

VH1 Storytellers- Bruce Springsteen. Link to the educator resources.  
[http://www.vh1.com/partners/vh1\\_music\\_studio/supplies/specials/downloads/springsteen-lesson1.pdf](http://www.vh1.com/partners/vh1_music_studio/supplies/specials/downloads/springsteen-lesson1.pdf)

### **For More Information**

Jeanne Fuchs and Ruth Prigozy (eds.), *Frank Sinatra: The Man, the Myth, the Legend* (Rochester: University of Rochester, 2007).

Stanislao G. Pugliese, *Frank Sinatra: History, Identity, and Italian American Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

*Frank Sinatra: A Documentary* (4 hours), HBO Productions, 2013.

*Sinatra: The True Story of the Man and the Legend* (5 hours), Warner Home Video, 2008.

Sites for songs about New Jersey:

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/verymuchso/the-22-most-new-jersey-songs-of-all-time>

[http://www.nj.com/inside-jersey/index.ssf/cover\\_stories/the\\_best\\_jersey\\_songs\\_ever.html](http://www.nj.com/inside-jersey/index.ssf/cover_stories/the_best_jersey_songs_ever.html)

<http://www.phillymag.com/news/2013/08/22/list-best-new-jersey-songs/>

**"The E Street Shuffle," 1973**

Sparks fly on E Street when the boy- prophets walk it, handsome and hot  
All the little girls' souls grow weak when the man-child gives them a double shot  
The schoolboy pops pull out all the stops on a Friday night  
The teenage tramps in skin-tight pants do the E Street dance and everything's alright  
Little kids down there either dancin' or hooked up in a scuffle  
Dressed in snakeskin suits packed with Detroit muscle  
They're doin' the E Street Shuffle

For the full song lyrics please visit:

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/brucespringsteen/theestreetshuffle.html>

**"Fourth of July, Asbury Park (Sandy)," 1973**

Sandy the fireworks are hailin' over Little Eden tonight  
Forcin' a light into all those stoned-out faces left  
stranded on this Fourth of July  
Down in town the circuit's full with switchblade lovers  
so fast so shiny so sharp  
And the wizards play down on Pinball Way on the boardwalk way past dark  
And the boys from the casino dance with their shirts open  
like Latin lovers along the shore

For the full song lyrics please visit:

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/brucespringsteen/4thofjulyasburyparksandy.html>

**"Open All Night," 1982**

I had the carburetor cleaned and checked with her line blown out she's hummin' like a turbojet  
Propped her up in the backyard on concrete blocks for a new clutch plate and a new set of shocks  
Took her down to the carwash check the plugs and points  
I'm goin' out tonight I'm gonna rock that joint

For the full song lyrics please visit:

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/brucespringsteen/openallnight.html>

**"State Trooper," 1982**

New Jersey Turnpike ridin' on a wet night 'neath the refinery's glow, out where the great black rivers flow

License, registration, I ain't got none, but I got a clear conscience

'Bout the things that I done

Mister state trooper please don't stop me...

For the full song lyrics please visit:

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bruce springsteen/statetrooper.html>

**"Atlantic City," 1982**

Well, they blew up the Chicken Man in Philly last night

And they blew up his house, too

Down on the boardwalk they're ready for a fight

Gonna see what them racket boys can do

For the full song lyrics please visit:

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bruce springsteen/atlanticcity.html>

**"Wrecking Ball," 2012**

I was raised out of steel here in the swamps of Jersey, some misty years ago

Through the mud and the beer, and the blood and the cheers, I've seen champions come and go

So if you got the guts mister, yeah if you've got the balls

If you think it's your time, then step to the line, and bring on your wrecking ball

For the full song lyrics please visit:

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bruce springsteen/wreckingball.html>

**CREDIT INFORMATION:**

p. 1: Frank Sinatra, Courtesy of Hoboken Historical Museum.

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