



Johnny Cash: Songwriting and the Agricultural Experience



(Arkansas History G.1.AH.7-8.4, G.2.AH.7-8.2, H.7.AH.7-8.7, and H.7.AH.7-8.10)

Instructions: Read the following passage and then complete the assignment.

In 1935, the family of singer Johnny Cash moved to the town of Dyess, Arkansas. He was three years old. Dyess was started by the federal government as a place to settle farm families whose farms had failed during the Great Depression. Cash grew up in this agricultural community, experiencing the lifestyle shared by many Arkansans. He later wrote about this lifestyle in his musical career.

One example is the song “Pickin’ Time,” which talks about the lifestyle of farmers. Farmers lived most of the year off of loans which they would pay back when the crops were harvested in the fall. Many families would also use the harvest season as a time to make special purchases. Farmers would look forward to “pickin’ time” throughout the year, hoping that if the crop was successful they would be out of debt and able to buy what they needed for the winter.

Take a look at some of the lyrics to “Pickin’ Time.” If you are able, you might listen along on YouTube or some other music sharing program.

“Pickin’ Time” (Johnny Cash)

I got cotton in the bottom land
It's up and growin' and I got a good stand
My good wife and them kids of mine
Gonna get new shoes, come Pickin' Time
Get new shoes come Pickin' Time.

Ev'ry night when I go to bed
I thank the Lord that my kids are fed
They live on beans eight days and nine
But I get 'em fat come Pickin' Time
Get 'em fat come come Pickin' Time.

Now write a song about your own life. Make it about your day-to-day life. How do you and your family spend your time? What are your hobbies? Is there a special time of year that is important for your family? How does it make you feel?