

**COMMUNITY
DISCUSSION &
ENGAGEMENT
GUIDE**



COUNTRY MUSIC

A FILM BY KEN BURNS

A STORY OF AMERICA, ONE SONG AT A TIME.

THE GOAL OF THIS GUIDE is to help facilitate deeper conversations around *Country Music*. This guide will help you engage your community and best prepare you for a thoughtful event, with resources and information from WETA. Whether you are hosting a private screening, or a large public community event, we hope that this guide prepares you to spark deep conversations, share stories and connect with your audience!

ABOUT THE FILM

Series Description

Country Music is an eight-part, 16-hour documentary series directed and produced by Ken Burns, written and produced by Dayton Duncan, and produced by Julie Dunfey, that explores the history of a uniquely American art form. From its deep and tangled roots in ballads, hymns, minstrel music and the blues performed in small settings, to its worldwide popularity, learn how country music evolved over the course of the 20th century, as it eventually emerged to become America's music.

Country Music explores questions such as “What is country music?” and “Where did it come from?” while focusing on the biographies of the fascinating characters who created and shaped it. From the Carter Family, Jimmie Rodgers and Bob Wills to Hank Williams, Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, Loretta Lynn, Charley Pride, Willie Nelson, Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, Garth Brooks and many more, the film explores stories as well as the times in which they lived. Much like the music itself, the film tells unforgettable stories of hardships and joys shared by everyday people.

Country Music traces the origins of the music and its early years when it was referred to as hillbilly music and played across the airwaves on radio station barn dances. The series will follow how Hollywood B movies instituted the fad of singing cowboys like Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, and watch how the rise of juke joints after World War II changed the musical style by bringing electric guitars and pedal steel guitars to the forefront. It continues by following the rise of bluegrass music with Bill Monroe and how one of country music's offspring—rockabilly—mutated into rock and roll in Memphis. And, it will explore how Nashville slowly became not just the mecca of country music, but “Music City USA.”

Airdates

Country Music will premiere September 15, 2019. The first four episodes will air nightly from Sunday, September 15, through Wednesday, September 18, and the final four episodes will air nightly from Sunday, September 22, through Wednesday, September 25. Each episode will premiere at 8:00 p.m. ET.

Episodes will stream on station-branded PBS platforms timed to the broadcast with each episode streaming for a period of three weeks. PBS Passport members will be able to stream the entire series for a period of six months beginning Sunday, September 15.



Bill Monroe on the Grand Ole Opry, Nashville, c.1958.

LES LEVERETT COLLECTION

Website and Social Media

- pbs.org/countrymusic
- The official hashtag is #CountryMusicPBS
- A social media toolkit is available on [PBS Source](#)

Production Credits

Country Music is a production of Florentine Films and WETA, Washington D.C. It is directed and produced by Ken Burns; written and produced by Dayton Duncan; and produced by Julie Dunfey—Emmy-award winning creators of PBS’s most-acclaimed and most-watched documentaries for more than a quarter century, including *The Civil War*, *Lewis & Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery*, *Mark Twain*, *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*, *The Dust Bowl*, and many more.

Funding Credits

Funding for *Country Music* was provided by Bank of America, the Annenberg Foundation, the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, Belmont University, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, Rosalind P. Walter and by members of ‘The Better Angels Society,’ including: The Blavatnik Family Foundation, the Schwartz/Reisman Foundation, the Pfeil Foundation, Diane and Hal Brierley, John and Catherine Debs, the Fullerton Family Charitable Fund, the Perry and Donna Golkin Family Foundation, Jay Alix and Una Jackman, Mercedes T. Bass, Fred and Donna Seigel, Gilchrist and Amy Berg, James R. Berdell Foundation, David Bonderman, Deborah P. and Jonathan T. Dawson, Senator Bill and Tracy Frist, Susan and David Kreisman, Rocco and Debby Landesman, Lillian Lovelace, John and Leslie McQuown, Mindy’s Hope Foundation, the Segal Family Foundation, Michelle Smith. Major funding was provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PBS.

ABOUT THE ENGAGEMENT

Partnerships

Community partners are vital in strengthening outreach and engagement. Partnerships can make your initiatives more meaningful and increase their impact. Get your partners to the table early and rely on them as experts to inform your work, connect with their constituency and support and promote your community events.

Begin partnership outreach by connecting with historical, arts, cultural, music, media and/or educational organizations that may help you to reach new target audiences, create projects, host events, develop content, provide supplemental funding, enhance promotional opportunities, and generally extend the impact and reach of the film. Consider working with local country music radio stations, public libraries, schools and universities, local music venues, songwriters and musicians, historical societies, humanities organizations and museums.

WORK WITH PARTNERS TO

- Provide advice and guidance on your station's plans and engagement activities.
- Have partners host or contribute to community screening events and discussion events. Create other meaningful engagement activities that serve your community with your partners.
- Partner around music events and concerts that have connections to country music.
- Serve as local experts on panels or suggest representatives to provide historical context and diverse points-of-view in the discussion about country music and your region.
- Provide content or support social media efforts around events or larger engagement activities.
- Utilize partners as experts that may provide story ideas, helping to solidify local connections to your region's country music story.
- One member station is partnering with an organization to host line dancing, while another is planning a karaoke event. Get creative and have fun when creating some of these additional experiences around screenings!



The Original Carter Family, from left: A.P., Maybelle and Sara Carter, c. 1930

CARTER FAMILY MUSEUM



Anniston, Alabama, 1900

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

How to Set Up a Screening

REACH OUT TO PARTNERS: For a screening event, partners may:

- Be able to serve or provide advice on local experts for a panel discussion.
- Provide opportunities to host the event.
- Help you reach new audiences and share information to their networks.
- If possible, give your partners opportunities to host a table or provide information and resources at an event.

RECRUIT THE RIGHT FACILITATOR: Recruit a host or moderator who can facilitate an interesting and respectful discussion after the screening, drawing out answers from the panel that are suitable for the audience. Your host need not be an expert in the field, but rather someone who can facilitate discussion, draw stories from panelists, and keep an upbeat and curious tone. A good host or moderator should plan on previewing the screener in advance to prepare. Local reporters, journalists, and radio DJs are often good moderators. They are experts at interviewing diverse subjects, connecting with audiences, and keeping conversations focused and on track.

SELECT PANELISTS: Recruit local storytellers, musicians, and subject matter experts, and invite them to participate in a discussion about country music, exploring your region's own history. Remember that country music comes from diverse origins and influences. Try to reflect this diversity when selecting panelists!

ALLOW FOR INFORMAL POST-SCREENING DISCUSSIONS: Allow time for audience members to mingle after the screening, to informally continue the conversation and connect with each other.

TIPS FOR THE FACILITATOR

PREVIEW THE SCREENING REEL that will be presented at your event. Think about your audience and the expertise of your panelists. Design questions and conversation topics that keep your audience engaged and informed.

INQUIRE ABOUT PROPER NAMES AND PHONETIC PRONUNCIATION for guest panelists and/or community partners prior to the screening.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT! Review some of our suggested questions in this guide for ideas on how to spark a discussion. Think about some of your own questions that you might like to add to the conversation.

LISTEN TO YOUR PANELISTS AND YOUR AUDIENCE with respect. Keep an open mind, be fair and allow everyone to speak, but be mindful of the time and keep the conversation moving.

AT THE EVENT, BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR ROLE as the facilitator, keep the discussion moving and ask questions that promote discussion.

Screener

There are two screening reels available for community engagement events, a 45-minute version and a shorter 35-minute version.

These engagement screeners provide an overview of the entire *Country Music* series from an introduction with artists contemplating what is country music through a series of segments featuring stories about Hank Williams, Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, Emmylou Harris, Vince Gill, Garth Brooks and more.

Suggested Discussion Questions by Theme

To facilitate a discussion using the series, ask questions that pertain to what you saw in the screener, and try to build connections to your local music history. Here are some suggested questions that can act as a starting point to engage panels and participants.

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT *COUNTRY MUSIC, A FILM BY KEN BURNS*

- The songwriter Harlan Howard said country music is “three chords and the truth.” What did he mean? What is country music to you?
- What was it about Hank Williams music that touched people—the “Hillbilly Shakespeare” as Rodney Crowell calls him?
- Although Loretta Lynn didn’t consider herself a feminist, artist Jack White says of her song “Don’t Come Home A Drinkin’ With Lovin’ On Your Mind”, “There’s nothing more feminist than that.” How does art reflect changes in society?
- How did Loretta Lynn’s songs connect with her audience? Why was she an important figure in the history of country music? How did/do her songs change or inspire her audience?
- How has country music evolved since the early beginnings of the Carter Family up through the chart-topping popularity of Garth Brooks and to today?



Loretta Lynn and her husband Oliver "Doolittle," 1965

PHOTOGRAPH BY LES LEVERETT

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

- What are the music stories from our community?
- What is our connection to the greater story of country music?
- Who are some of the most historically important figures in country music from our region?
- What was country music's influence here? How did our community influence country music?

MUSIC GENERAL

- Every culture in the world has its own form of music. Although each culture is different, music unifies us and has been used throughout history for enjoyment, for celebration, for worship, and for special occasions. Why is music so important to our culture and our lives?
- What are the country music stories that speaks to you? What song originally hooked you? What moves you?
- Why is music linked to our cultural identity?
- How do you feel women are portrayed and represented in country music?
- Why is music such an important part of our nation's narrative?
- How does music shape us?
- Why do songs elicit strong feelings and memories?
- What are some songs that got you through difficult times? Why do you think music helps us work through these emotions?
- What are some of the earliest country songs that you remember hearing? What type of memories does that bring back to you?
- What got you interested in music? Was there a moment? A song? A musician?
- How does music bring us together?
- Country music has endured and thrived. How much of a role does innovation and technology play in the evolution of country music?



Hank Williams and Hank Williams Jr., 1950
COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

QUESTIONS FOR SONGWRITERS AND MUSICIANS

- What makes a great piece of music?
- What have been your inspirations?
- What would the world be like without music?
- What's your favorite part about being a songwriter?
- What's one thing you wish music fans understood about songwriters?
- How did you know you had a talent for songwriting?
- To what extent do you draw influence from areas outside music (such as politics, religion and so on)?
- What is the biggest sacrifice you've had to make for your art?
- In the film, Vince Gill says, "I don't know whether you write the song, or the song writes you." What does he mean by that?
- The way that we enjoy country music has changed over the ages, from gathering together to play music to radio and TV, to large venues. How do you see innovation and technology influencing changes in country music? Or influencing your singing and songwriting?

QUESTIONS FOR THE AUDIENCE

- What do you want to know about country music that you don't already know?
- Before watching the film/clips, what was your impression of country music?
- After watching the film/clips, what did you learn that surprised you?
- If you were building a soundtrack for your life, which country music songs or artists would you include?

Other Activity Suggestions

Screening events are one important type of activity to engage your local community. As you plan your station's engagement, consider these other activities as well:

STORY COLLECTION

Country music is part of our nation's history and culture. It spans regions, generations and music genres. Dig into your local history and find the people who contributed to the history of country music in your community. Everyone has a story to tell. Interview historians, museum curators, musicians, music-lovers, songwriters, producers, and everyday people.

Reach out to partners for ideas and suggestions. Create opportunities for partners to capture stories with coaching and providing toolkits, guidelines, field kits and/or through using iPads or other mobile devices. Collect and share these stories online and as on-air interstitial material; work with partners to share on their own digital and social media platforms to create stronger relationships with your community and build new audiences. For a further extension of this activity, consider engaging high school and university students in story collection.

WORKSHOPS

Celebrate and continue to support an interest in music by creating workshops in songwriting, singing, music, or poetry with work from local professionals.

CONCERTS

A perfect opportunity to connect and engage around country music might mean partnering with local venues on hosting concerts. Show a clip from *Country Music*, showcase local musicians, and ask them to participate in a story collection activity or to be a guest speaker at a screening.

VIEWING PARTIES

Promote viewing parties in your community and/or host a Viewing Party at your station to kick off the series.

TIPS FOR PROMOTING VIEWING PARTIES: Viewing parties are opportunities to watch episodes of the film with friends and family, be it large or small! Invite neighbors and friends over to watch an episode (or more) of *Country Music* at your home, school, bar, church or community center. Just make sure you have a TV (and check your AV equipment ahead of time). Plan to talk about the film afterwards. Get a discussion going by asking the attendees what they learned, or what they found particularly emotional or moving. To get more formal, you can bring in someone as a guest to lead a discussion.



Minnie Pearl, c. 1945

ED CLARK COLLECTION



Charley Pride, c. 1965

NASHVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



Johnny Cash at his home in California, 1960

SONY MUSIC ARCHIVES

Additional Information and Support

- Official PBS Webpage: [PBS.org/countrymusic](https://www.pbs.org/countrymusic)
- Promotional assets are available on the [PBS Source](#)
- Additional assets: WETA Dropbox at <https://bitly.com/CountryMusicDropbox>
- Additional assets can be found on the [PBS PressRoom program page](#)
- My Country Music Song Initiative: Look for country song favorites and playlists with links on the *Country Music* site at [PBS.org/countrymusic](https://www.pbs.org/countrymusic) and UNUM at [PBS.org/kenburns/unum/](https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/unum/)
- To request a screener for a station event, visit: <http://bit.ly/CountryMusicRQ>

Supplemental Reading Lists and Resources

- Bill C. Malone & Tracey E.W. Laird, *Country Music USA: 50th anniversary edition*
- Country Music Association website: [CMAworld.com](https://www.cma.com)
- Grand Ole Opry website: [opry.com/history](https://www.opry.com/history)

For questions on engagement, assets or the screener, please reach out to the engagement team at WETA: Amy Labenski at alabenski@weta.org, Stefanie Malone at smalone@weta.org, or Chloe Kougias at ckougias@weta.org.

PBS Passport

Beyond the broadcast of *Country Music*, stations have the opportunity to engage audiences on the PBS Video App as well as their local video portals. Starting on the night of its premiere, the film will be available for catch-up streaming (FVOD) and PBS Passport streaming (MVOD). *Country Music* will stream in PBS Passport through February 28, 2020, the full streaming schedule is available on MyPBS.



By promoting streaming, stations can attract new viewers and activate new members with the film's availability in PBS Passport. A host of promotional assets are available in the *Country Music* section of [PBS Source](#).

THANK YOU for bringing your local stories and histories to the center stage and creating a nationwide community around *Country Music*. None of this would be possible without the hard work of your station and others across the country.

