

Brenda Lee: DYNAMITE

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TEACHER'S EXHIBIT GUIDE



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The Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum honors Little Miss Dynamite's achievements in an exhibit featuring artifacts and multimedia from her exciting career. Brenda Lee is one of the most beloved entertainers in the world. From child star on the *Ozark Jubilee*, to rockabilly

teen queen, to pop entertainer, and finally returning to her country music roots, Lee's career has seen multiple reinventions. Most of her hits, including "I'm Sorry" and "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree," were recorded in Nashville with legendary producer Owen Bradley.

Short Biography

Brenda Lee was born Brenda Mae Tarpley on December 11, 1944, in Atlanta. Brenda sang from the time she could talk. One of her earliest memories is of performing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" at one of her father's baseball games. At four, the talented youngster got her first taste of success when she won top prize in her older sister's school talent show. Within days, Brenda was singing on a local radio station. As a six-year-old, Brenda made her television debut, singing Hank Williams's "Hey, Good Lookin'," on Atlanta's *TV Ranch* country music program.

Tragedy struck in 1953, when Brenda's father died from an injury received in a construction accident. The following year, her mother got Brenda a paying gig on a local television program in Augusta, Georgia. The program's director suggested she shorten her name to Brenda Lee to make it easier to remember. Brenda's big break came on February 23, 1956, when Red Foley, host of *Ozark Jubilee*, saw her perform and asked her to appear as a regular on his program. Later that year, Brenda was offered a record contract with Decca Records. Though her first album was not commercially successful, she continued to appear on network television, and became known nationally. She even became the youngest headliner ever at the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas.

Though Brenda's music was very popular in the country music genre, she identified more with rock & roll. She released several songs in a rockabilly style, which mixed country music with rock & roll. Her hit "Dynamite" inspired a new nickname for her—"Little Miss Dynamite." In 1960, "I'm Sorry" became Lee's first #1 hit. It was followed by "I Want to Be Wanted," and "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree." In the next decade, she had more hits on the *Billboard* charts than any other female artist. Brenda's popularity in both country and rock earned her membership in both the Country Music Hall of Fame (1997) and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (2002).

Brenda also tried her hand at acting in Hollywood. She appeared on several television shows and in a movie called *The Two Little Bears*. Brenda was never quite comfortable

acting in front of a camera but enjoyed acting on stage for regional audiences in productions like *Bye, Bye Birdie* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

By the late 1960s, Brenda's music wasn't as popular as it once was. However, another break came in 1973 when Lee's recording of Kris Kristofferson's "Nobody Wins" rose to #5 on the country charts. Brenda continued to record country songs, and achieved eight more Top Ten country hits.



Brenda not only achieved success in America, but was also popular overseas. She even recorded her music in several languages and performed in countries like Brazil and France. In 1965, Japanese songwriters sent Lee "One Rainy Night in Tokyo." After learning the song phonetically, she recorded it in Nashville and sent it back to them. A few months later, it was a #1 hit in Japan. Today, the song is considered a Japanese standard. Lee fell in love with the Japanese people and their culture, returning to Japan many times.

Brenda Lee is still recording songs today. She released an album of gospel duets in 2008, featuring other country music stars, and in 2009 she received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. She continues to perform, especially during the holiday season, but chooses to spend more time with her husband, daughters, and three grandchildren. She also enjoys promoting various Nashville charities and working in her garden.

Classroom Activities

The following activities are designed to help students further explore Brenda Lee's life and career. Suggested charts and diagrams can be copied on the board or a transparency.

1. Create a Family Tree

Brenda's family is very important to her. She has two daughters and three grandchildren, with whom she loves to spend time. Create a family tree with a branch for each of your relatives. Consider adding siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Don't forget to put yourself on the tree! Next, list each person's favorite song on their branch. If you don't know their favorite song, ask. What do you notice about the songs you listed? How are the songs different? How are they similar? Have you heard all of the songs? If not, research them online or at the library.

Name	Relationship	Jobs/Contributions

2. How Do You Help Out?

Brenda grew up in a family that didn't have much money. She earned money for her family by performing for the public. How do you help your family? Are there certain responsibilities you have around the house? How do other members of your family contribute? In the chart below, list the names of several members of your family, how they are related to you, and their family responsibilities.

3. Find It on a Map

Brenda Lee traveled all over the world singing in front of large audiences. List some of the places significant in Brenda's life. Locate each place on a map of the U.S. and the world. Answers should include Atlanta, GA; Augusta, GA; Brazil, Japan, Las Vegas, NV; Nashville, TN; Cleveland, OH; and Paris, France.

5. Make a Difference

Brenda Lee made a big impact on the world through her singing. Though you may not be a performer, there are ways you can make a difference in your community. Pick a cause you care about like animals, the environment, or homelessness. Why is this cause important to you? Choose a goal related to your cause. What steps will you need to take to accomplish it? Describe how you can create change in your community.

4. Holiday Songs

Brenda Lee sings a popular holiday song called "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree." Find a recording of this song online or at the library. Have you ever heard this song before? Do you like it? Why or why not? What is your favorite holiday? Are there any special songs you sing for this holiday? Write down the lyrics. What do the lyrics tell you about the holiday? Write your own holiday song or poem using some of your favorite holiday memories as inspiration.

6. Child Stardom

Brenda experienced tremendous success as a child performer. List other child stars you know who sing or act. What would be easy or hard about being a star as a child? Would you rather be a success as a child or as an adult? Explain.

Helpful Books, CDs, and Web Sites

Books

Bufwack, Mary A., and Robert K. Oermann.
Finding Her Voice: Women in Country Music, 1800-2000. Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 2003.

This book explores the contributions of women in country music over two hundred years. It contains much information about Brenda Lee and the role she played.

Malone, Bill C. *Country Music U.S.A.* 2d ed. University of Texas Press, 2002.

This book provides an in-depth look at country music's history from its folk roots through the year 2000. Malone mentions Brenda Lee in his discussions of rockabilly music and the *Ozark Jubilee*.

Will the Circle Be Unbroken: Country Music in America. Edited by Paul Kingsbury and Alanna Nash. DK, 2006.

Full of photographs of country music albums and artifacts, this book discusses the history of country music through artist biographies, timelines, and stories. Included in the book is a profile of Brenda Lee and information about her time on the *Ozark Jubilee*.

CDs

Lee, Brenda. *The Definitive Collection.* MCA Nashville 004738

Lee, Brenda. *Anthology (1956-1980).* MCA Nashville 10384

Web Sites

www.countrymusichalloffame.com

www.brendalee.com

Children's Literature

You may choose to discuss young people who have made a difference—like Brenda Lee—in their community or the world. The following books can assist you in generating a class discussion on the topic.

Pre K-2nd

D'Amico, Carmela and Steven. *Ella Sets the Stage.* Arthur A. Levine Books, 2006.

Holabird, Katharine. *Angelina Ballerina.* Viking Juvenile, 2006.

Hopkinson, Deborah. *Girl Wonder: A Baseball Story in Nine Innings.* Aladdin, 2006.

Isadora, Rachel. *Young Mozart.* Puffin, 1999.

McBrier, Page. *Beatrice's Goat.* Aladdin, 2004.

3rd-5th Grade

Girard, Linda Walvoord. *Young Frederick Douglass: The Slave Who Learned to Read.* Albert Whitman & Company, 1994.

Hopkinson, Deborah. *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt.* Dragonfly Books, 1995.

Kerley, Barbara. *What to Do About Alice?: How Alice Roosevelt Broke the Rules, Charmed the World, and Drove Her Father Teddy Crazy!* Scholastic Press, 2008.

6th-8th Grade

Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl.* Bantam, 1993.

Freedman, Russell. *Out of Darkness: The Story of Louis Braille.* Sandpiper, 1999.

Burnett, Frances Hodgson. *The Secret Garden.* Signet Classics, 2003.

9th Grade and Up:

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street.* McGraw-Hill College, 2000.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006.



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