

The name “Forgottonia” first came to Western Illinois in 1972 when 16 counties declared the creation of the independent nation of “Forgottonia” in protest of the lack of tax dollars returning to the region. The plan was to secede from the Union, declare war on the United States, immediately surrender, and then apply for foreign aid. It was nothing but political theatre, but the story was picked up by the national media and to everyone’s surprise, it worked!

FORGOTTONIA is a musical journey through the people and places of rural Illinois combining storytelling and live music, with the images of award-winning rural photographer Tim Schroll.

The information and activities in this guide have been carefully crafted to help you and your students explore the many ways a live theatre experience can create endless learning opportunities. Don’t forget to take advantage of the local resources listed to extend the play-going experience and make even more curricular connections for you and your students.

You will find these icons listed in the resource guide next to the activities that indicate curricular connections. Teachers and parents are encouraged to adapt all the activities included in an appropriate way for their students’ ages and abilities.



Learning Standards Related to FORGOTTONIA

Table of Contents

Pre-Show Conversation Starters

About Chris Vallillo Page 2

What is “Forgottonia”? Page 2

Comprehension

Sign of the Times Page 3

Learning Check Page 3

Foundations of Folk Page 4

Instruments of Americana Roots Music..... Page 4

Creativity

Your Forgottennia Page 5

Your Forgottennia Brainstorm Page 7

The Cigar Box Guitar Page 8

Summing Up

Resources for Students and Teachers Page 9

Pre-Show Conversation Starters

About Chris Vallillo¹

Chris Vallillo is a singer/songwriter, and roots musician who makes the people and places of **unmetropolitan** America come to life in song. Having spent the last 30 years in the rural Midwest, he has a natural affinity for American roots music. A master of finger style and bottleneck slide guitar, Vallillo weaves original, contemporary, and traditional songs and narratives into a compelling and entertaining portrait of the history and lifestyles of the Midwest.



What is Forgottonia?



The name "**Forgottonia**" first came to Western Illinois in 1972 when sixteen counties declared the creation of the independent nation of "Forgottonia" in protest of the lack of federal and state tax dollars returning to the region; specifically, inequalities infrastructure. Located between two large rivers, the region was essentially isolated without the promise of interstate or train service.

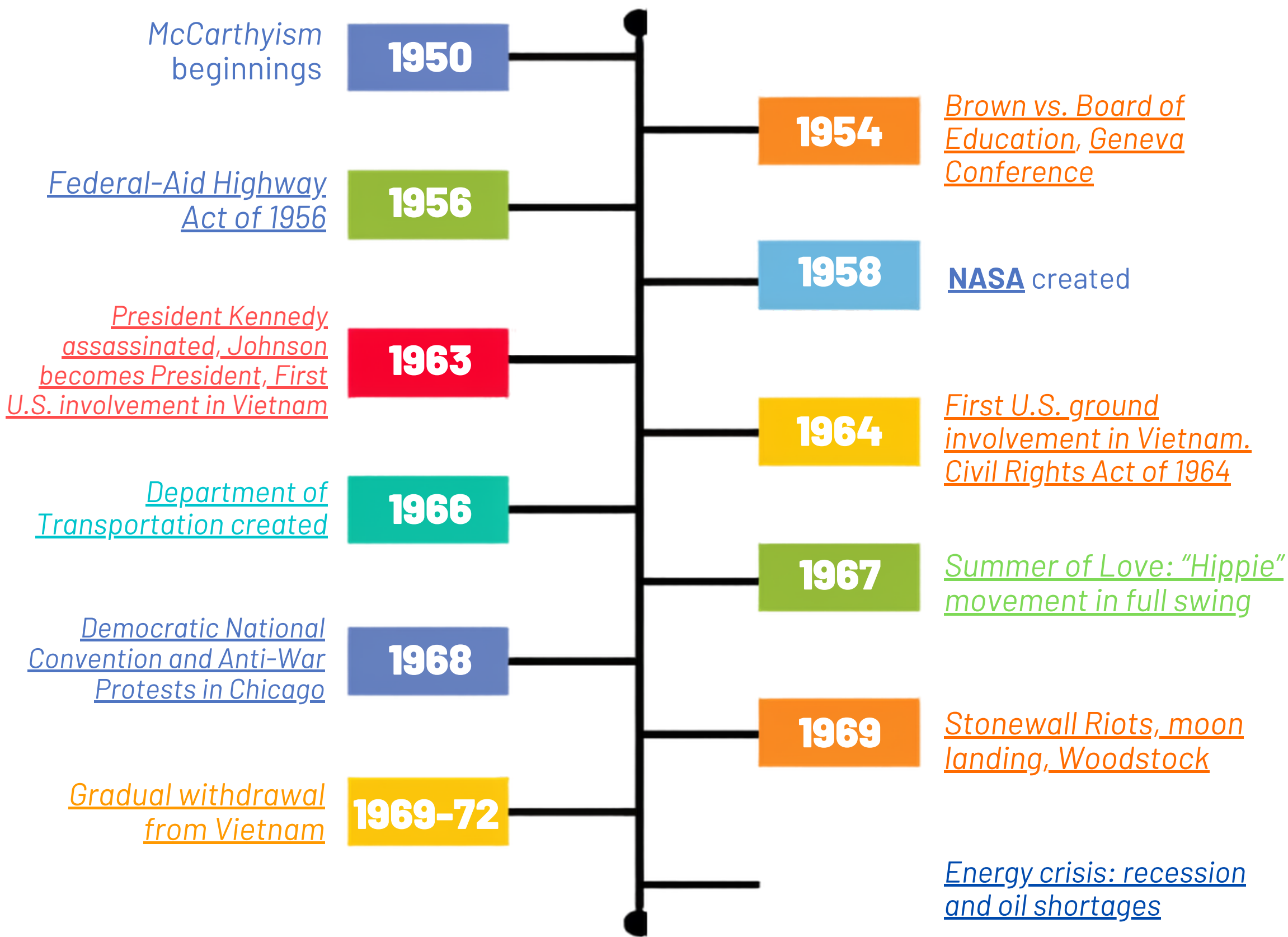
"The plan was to secede from the Union, declare war on the United States, immediately surrender, and then apply for foreign aid. It was nothing but political theater, but to everyone's surprise, the story was picked up by the national media and to everyone's surprise, it worked!"

"Forgottonia never did fully secede, but thanks in part to these efforts the movement succeeded. It drew national attention to the region's transportation and infrastructure plight. Amtrak brought trains service back to the area in 1972 and our region now enjoys Amtrak passenger train route to Chicago, and a much improved system of bridges and highways now allow for easier access to this little slice of Illinois".

Courtesy of www.chrisvallillo.com

Sign of the Times

The decades following World War II were a time of progress and change. Check out the below timelines and links below to learn more about the happenings in U.S. and how they may have contributed to the movement of Forgottenia.



LEARNING CHECK

- 1 What was a large negative outcome of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam?
- 2 Choose a major event leading up to "Forgottonia" and describe in 2-4 sentences how it is an example of a contributing factor to the movement and call to action.

- 3 True or False – The region known as Forgottenia seceded from the U.S. True ☐ False ☐

Foundations of Folk

- ▶ **American Roots Music** – covers genres from the first half of the 20th century in America. It covers: blues, bluegrass, cajun, classic country, early gospel, early jazz, polka, spirituals, western swing, and more!
- ▶ **Americana** – is the broad genre that includes many traditional American roots types of music, such as folk, bluegrass and country.
- ▶ **Folk music** – type of traditional and generally rural music that originally was passed down through families and communities. Just like folklore, folk music lives on via oral tradition; it's passed on via hearing rather than written.

Questions for students:

Based on these definitions, what do these musical styles have in common? Discuss: storytelling and heritage in music. How does that connect to the music you listen to today?

Instruments of Americana Roots Music

The instruments and styles used in Americana roots music derive from those of many cultures.

1 Bottle neck slide guitar - is a technique and style of guitar playing where typically a steel tube, bar, or glass bottleneck is worn on a finger and pressed across multiple strings to slide along the fretboard to produce a smooth sound. Rather than pressing your fingers on the fret to create chords or change the pitch, the slide blends out the string vibration. It's often described as whining, wailing, and is intended to mimic the human voice.

2 Banjo - created by enslaved Africans and their descendants, the banjo is a 4 -6 stringed instrument. Similar in shape to a guitar, the head is made of plastic or animal skin.

3 Fiddle - is a violin played in a different musical style. You will hear the fiddle played in folk, country, and bluegrass music.

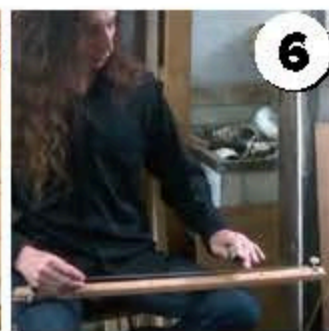
4 Jaw harp - most likely originating in Asia and also played by enslaved Africans in the American south, the jaw harp is played by placing the frame against the front teeth and flicking the spring with your hand. It looks similar to a tuning fork, and the tone can change based on movement of the player's mouth.

5 Washboard - This is exactly what you think it is! Used for laundry prior to washing machines, this wood and metal board is said to have originated as an instrument in the late 19th century from enslaved Africans in the Southern US. It is played with a thimble worn on the finger, or using tools like spoons or sticks.

Influential Instruments:

6 Diddley-bow – the instrument the bottle neck slide style is derived from, and it is rooted in African musical traditions. It consists of a single string of wire pulled between two nails, and mounted on a piece of wood. It is played with a bottle neck, and has a very similar sound to the slide technique we see today. See an instructional video of this influential instrument at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoxXX4EheY>

7 Hawaiian Steel guitar – invented by Hawaiian teen Joseph Kekuku, the guitar is played with a solid metal bar against the strings, similarly to how the bottleneck is used in American folk music. The player holds the guitar flat on their lap and plucks chords rather than strumming.



Your Forgottonia

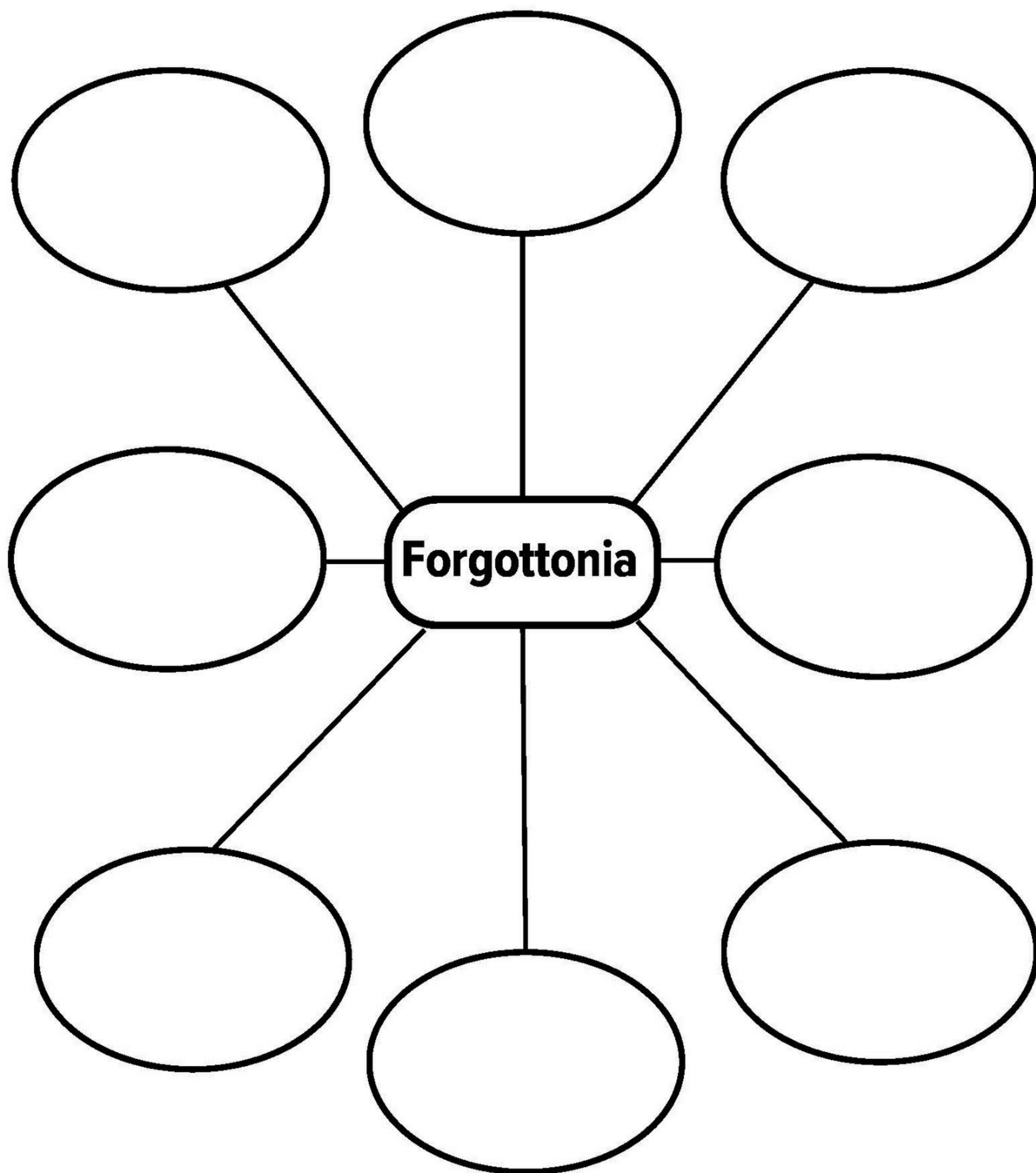
Consider...what if Forgottonia **DID** actually secede from the U.S., and become their own republic? Logistics aside, let's consider a few things a new "city" would need creatively. The "leaders" of Forgottonia had a few things created, but what would you create? These can be done in any order, but should be one cohesive image of **YOUR** Forgottonia.

Optional: Grab some paper and brainstorm! Use a blank sheet of paper to map out some initial ideas before you create your final project. Refer to the map on the following page that shows waterways and states that surround **"Your Forgottonia"**.

City Slogan	City Seal	City Motto
Come up with a slogan for your Forgottonia! A slogan is a promotional phrase that can change pending on what you want to share to bring your target audience to visit and invest in the city. You'll often find them on web marketing during various seasons to bring tourists to a specific area. Sometimes, slogans are so good they stick around for what seems like forever! You may recognize these famous brand slogans: ▶ "Just Do It" – Nike ▶ "You're In Good Hands" - Allstate ▶ "Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline" - Maybelline. Examples of popular city slogans: ▶ "Pure Michigan" - https://www.michigan.org/ ▶ "It's Your Happy Place" - Hershey, PA ▶ "Cleveland Rocks!" - specifically marketed the Rock n' Roll Hall of Fame, is now "This is The Land" - https://www.thisiscleveland.com/ Consider: ▶ Landmarks ▶ Ideals and goals of the region ▶ Tone (serious or performative) ▶ Target audience ▶ Length - short, sweet, and memorable – what you'd see on a sign entering the city	Also called a crest, seal, or coat of arms. You will find them for many cities and all states across the U.S.! This should encapsulate your city as a whole, and is meant to last for generations. State Seals/Symbols of the United States: https://statesymbolsusa.org/categories/state-seal  Dayton's City Seal: https://www.daytonohio.gov/1343/City-Seal-Description  Consider: ▶ Landmarks of the region ▶ Local symbols of the area ▶ Themes and colors ▶ Tone (traditional or more imaginative) ▶ Your slogan and motto ▶ Shape – crest, or other shape	A city motto is a more permanent and definitive way of sharing values and the story of where you call home. This can be a word, phrase, or short sentence. Popular Mottos: ▶ "The Sweetest Place on Earth" - Hershey, PA ▶ Dayton's Motto – You may have heard "Birthplace of Aviation" or "Birthplace of Next" ▶ Dayton Slogans/Nicknames – The "Gem City," "Land of Funk" Consider: ▶ Landmarks ▶ Ideals and history of the region ▶ Tone (serious or performative) ▶ Lasting impression – memorable and impactful

Your Forgottonia Brainstorm

Use this "mind map" to list landmarks, symbols, themes, colors, words, etc. **Add more bubbles if you'd like!** This can be used for all three, or feel free to create three separate maps, one for each component.

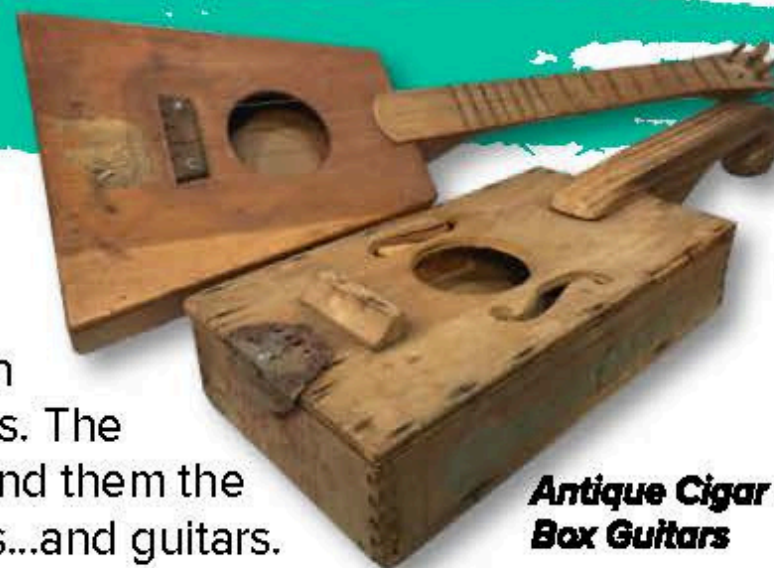


The Cigar Box Guitar

In the 1800's, instruments were not as accessible or affordable for most Americans. And if there is one thing an artist will do, is make art happen!

Though the box guitars date back to the 1840's, due to taxes on tobacco in 1862, manufacturers were required to use specific boxes to package cigars. The boxes were bountiful due to the popularity of the product, and makers found them the perfect size to create makeshift instruments like fiddles, banjos, mandolins...and guitars. This practice remained popular through the Civil War and early 1900's.

The cigar box guitar made a comeback in the 1930's during Great Depression and amongst those drafted in WWII. Today, they are more of a novelty due to high manufacturing processes and widespread availability, but their roots are important to the music we listen to and play today.



Antique Cigar Box Guitars

Make your own "cigar" box guitar using things you have at home and in your classroom!

Materials



- ▶ Empty tissue box or small rectangular food box (any other small box will do!)
- ▶ 3-4 large rubber bands, or stretchy craft string
- ▶ 1 empty paper towel roll for the neck
- ▶ Scissors
- ▶ Tape (or glue)
- ▶ Optional – any decorations you may want to add

Steps

1. If you are using a tissue box, simply peel off the cellophane to create the sound hole. If you are using a different box, draw a rectangle or square in the center.
2. For non-tissue boxes use scissors to cut out shape you drew for the sound box.
3. At the top of your box, trace the base of the paper towel roll, then carefully cut out the circle.
4. Place the roll inside the hole you have cut and secure it inside using tape or glue.
5. Place 3-4 rubber bands or add stretchy string around the box. Be sure to space them evenly across the sound hole from top to bottom. You may have to move your rubber bands a bit to fit around the "neck."

Optional: cut a slit on each side of the paper towel roll to slide around the rubber bands (shown).

Play! Feel free to paint your guitar, add stickers, or color designs. TIP: Decorate each piece before you add your rubber bands!

For a video demonstration of this **FUN** project go to <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/aJW9Buwys5E> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPMR5hHb3RQ>

