



Student Name:  
Class Period:  
Date:

## Meet the Originals

*Texas Originals* is a radio series about people who made an impact on Texas. You can hear it online and on radio stations around the state. Read or listen to the episode on Nettie Lee Benson. Then, answer questions about it.

### Nettie Lee Benson 1905–1993

Librarian and historian Nettie Lee Benson rose from a bookish South Texas childhood to assemble one of the world's leading archives for research on Latin America.

Born in 1905, Benson grew up on a family farm outside Sinton, not far from Corpus Christi, and earned her undergraduate degree from The University of Texas at Austin. In 1925, she took a teaching job in Monterrey. There, as she later explained, she “drank the waters of Mexico,” and her lifelong interest in Latin America blossomed.

Benson became the director of UT's Latin American Collection in 1942. In 1960, a group of libraries chose her to travel Latin America to acquire rare books and manuscripts. Her supervisor balked, but university president Harry Ransom intervened, giving Benson a generous budget to acquire materials for UT.

Ransom's gamble paid off. When Benson left on her first collecting trip, UT's Latin American holdings totaled around 60,000 items. By her retirement in 1975, they held over 300,000. UT's Latin American Collection, now named in Benson's honor, stands as one of the leading centers for scholarship on the region.

In 1979, Benson received the Order of the Aztec Eagle, the highest honor Mexico bestows on foreign nationals.

Benson dedicated her life to preserving Latin American history and culture. Now, scholars from around the world visit the Austin library bearing her name.

**Check for Understanding:** Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on Nettie Lee Benson. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. What started Nettie Lee Benson's interest in Latin American history and culture?
2. How did Benson increase the Latin American holdings at UT Austin?

**Going Further:** Write or discuss your answer to the question below, supporting your answer with evidence from the episode or additional information you have learned in class.

3. **Taking a Position.** Do you think that it is okay to take materials like Benson acquired, or should they remain in their countries of origin? Explain.