



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 John Biggers. Then, answer questions about it.

John Biggers 1924–2001

With a bent back and powerful hands, an African American man figures prominently in a large mural in Houston's Blue Triangle YWCA. To his left, Harriet Tubman leads a group of enslaved people to freedom. To his right, Sojourner Truth stands while children march proudly into a schoolhouse.

Dedicated in 1953, this mural—titled *The Contribution of Negro Women to American Life and Education*—was a milestone in the career of artist John Biggers. A longtime Houston resident, Biggers found his voice by depicting the heroic survival of his people. He said, "I began to see art . . . as a responsibility to reflect the spirit and style of the Negro people."

Biggers achieved recognition as an artist for his drawings and sculptures, but he is best known for his murals. These murals form a rich part of Houston's visual and public landscape at Texas Southern University, the University of Houston, Tom Bass Park, and Christina V. Adair Park.

In 1949, Biggers was named chairman of the art department at the institution that would become Texas Southern University. Over the next thirty-four years Biggers trained the next generation of African American artists and teachers that form a vital part of Biggers's legacy.

John Biggers left behind a body of work that as Maya Angelou stated, "leads us through his expressions into the discovery of ourselves at our most intimate level."

Check for Understanding: Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on John Biggers. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. What historical figures does John Biggers show in his mural *The Contribution of Negro Women to American Life and Education*?
2. Besides his own art, what else forms a part of Biggers' legacy?

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. **Creating Connections.** The 1950s saw many gains in the fight for civil rights. Which of those gains might be reflected in the subjects of Biggers' murals?