



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 J. Mason Brewer. Then, answer questions about it.

J. Mason Brewer 1896–1975

Scholar and folklorist John Mason Brewer was born in Goliad in 1896. Over his fifty-year career, Brewer almost single-handedly preserved the African American folklore of his home state.

Brewer's grandfathers were wagoners who hauled dry goods across Texas. His father worked as a cowboy, traveling to the Indian Territories and Kansas. The stories they shared fostered Brewer's love of folk tales, while his mother, Minnie, a schoolteacher, inspired him to make scholarship his life's work.

When Brewer graduated from Wiley College in 1917, he worked as a teacher and wrote poetry. But he also collected the folk tales he heard at schools and churches, in general stores and barbershops—the places of everyday life for Black Texans.

While teaching in Austin in the 1930s, Brewer shared some of his tales with folklorist J. Frank Dobie. Impressed, Dobie arranged for their publication under the title *Juneteenth*.

Many more books followed, filled with folk tales that Brewer learned firsthand from people formerly enslaved in Texas and their descendants. Recorded in the dialect of their tellers, the stories revolve around preachers and overseers, husbands and wives, reflecting the hardship and humor of the "coming-up times" after slavery.

Brewer became the first African American member of the Texas Folklore Society and the Texas Institute of Letters. His books serve as a timeless record of Texas storytelling and powerful proof of what he called "folklore as a living force."

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

1. J. Mason Brewer became the first African American member of what associations for Texas writers?
2. How do the stories in Brewer's books reflect the everyday experiences of African Americans in Texas?

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.** How does folklore preserve and pass down valuable histories that might otherwise be lost?