



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 Edna Ferber. Then, answer questions about it.

Edna Ferber 1885–1968

In the 1920s and '30s, Edna Ferber was one of the most widely read writers in America. She won the Pulitzer Prize for her 1924 novel *So Big*. Another of her novels, *Show Boat*, became a popular musical and a hit film. But perhaps no other work of Ferber's is remembered as well—at least in Texas—as *Giant*.

Published in 1952, *Giant* tells the story of a young Virginia woman named Leslie Lynnton who marries a wealthy Texas cattle rancher. Readers see Texas through Leslie's critical eyes.

Texans' excessive spending and the state's "mania for bigness" are not overlooked by Leslie. She also points out the ranch's success depends on Mexican laborers, who are poorly paid and badly treated.

The *Dallas News* called *Giant* "a slander on Texas," and the *Texas Observer* pronounced it a "richly-conceived and rottenly written book."

But *Giant* became a success—as did the 1956 movie filmed in Marfa starring Rock Hudson, Elizabeth Taylor, and James Dean, whose character was based on the flamboyant Houston oil tycoon Glenn McCarthy.

The film was especially popular in Texas. *Giant* set attendance records at Dallas's Majestic Theater. One reviewer wrote, "*Giant* was the biggest witch's broth . . . to hit . . . Texas since the revered Spindle blew its top."

Once hailed as one of America's greatest writers, Ferber's critical status has since faded. But her Texas epic remains a landmark in the state's cultural history.

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

1. In Texas, what is Edna Ferber's best-known work?
2. How did the initial reviews of the book in newspapers compare to its popularity with the public?

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. **Making Inferences.** Why do you think Ferber chose *Giant* as the title of her book?