



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 Tom Lea. Then, answer questions about it.

Tom Lea 1907–2001

A mural in the El Paso Federal Court House named *Pass of the North* typifies the work of Texas artist Tom Lea. Larger-than-life figures representing El Paso's many inhabitants—a Mexican vaquero, a conquistador, Apache Indians, and pioneers—all range across the courthouse wall. Behind them, stark desert light illuminates a mountain range, while storm clouds threaten in the distance. In Lea's paintings, viewers see the light, space, and stillness of his beloved Franklin Mountains, as well as the energy, motion, and even violence of life.

Born in 1907, Lea grew up a part of El Paso's colorful history. His father was the city's mayor, and when Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa placed a bounty on Mayor Lea's head, young Tom traveled to school with a police escort.

Lea studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and during World War II, he traveled with the 1st Marine Division as a reporter for Life magazine. His paintings of Pacific battles brought home the emotional toll of warfare.

Lea also illustrated books for friends, including fellow Texan J. Frank Dobie. After the war, Lea began writing books of his own. Two of his novels, *The Brave Bulls* and *The Wonderful Country*, became successful Hollywood films.

But Lea is most remembered for his paintings inspired by West Texas subjects—the diverse cultures, the austere desert mountains, and what he once described as “the wonderful, ever-changing light on the structure of the world.”

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

1. Name four types of people represented in Tom Lea's mural *Pass of the North*.
2. What did Lea do during World War II?

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.** What do you think the title of Lea's famous mural in El Paso, *Pass of the North*, means?