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 Irma Lerma Rangel. Then, answer questions about it.

Irma Lerma Rangel
1931–2003

Irma Rangel was the first Mexican American woman elected to the Texas House of Representatives. Her insistence that, as she put it, you "can do great things if you focus on helping others" is a fitting summary of her decades of service.

Born in Kingsville in 1931, Rangel chose education as her first career, teaching in Texas, California, and Venezuela. In 1969, she earned a law degree and embarked upon a second career in politics.

Convinced that Mexican American women needed greater representation in government, she ran for a seat in the Texas House in 1976 serving a region in deep South Texas. She won that election and held the office for the rest of her life. In 1993, she became the first woman to lead the Mexican American Legislative Caucus.

Rangel focused her remarkable political acumen on education and social welfare. In 1997, she accomplished her core legislative achievement, the Top Ten Percent Plan, which expanded accessibility and increased diversity in the state's public universities.

In 2001, she helped establish the College of Pharmacy at Texas A&M–Kingsville, which was the first professional school in South Texas. Upon her death in 2003, the school was renamed in her honor.

Reflecting upon her career, Rangel once said, "I couldn't be something other than what I had been born to be."

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

1. What was Irma Lerma Rangel's first career?

2. Rangel became the first woman to lead what group within the Texas Legislature?

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.** How might Rangel's Top Ten Percent Plan serve as a good example of her remark that you "can do great things if you focus on helping others"?