



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 James Robert (Bob) Wills. Then, answer questions about it.

James Robert (Bob) Wills 1905–1975

Known as the “King of Western Swing,” Bob Wills was born near Kosse, Texas, in 1905. He grew up hearing the blues sung in cotton fields and country tunes played on his father’s fiddle. Wills spent his lifetime adapting new musical forms rooted in both traditions.

During the Depression, radio beamed live music programs across the country, building huge audiences. Wills’s fame began when he and his band—the Light Crust Doughboys—were heard on radio stations throughout Texas and Oklahoma.

Fellow Doughboy Milton Brown eventually left the group to form what has been called the first Western Swing band. But it was Wills’s relentless schedule of radio and live shows that spread Western Swing’s popularity.

By 1934, Wills had formed a new band, the Texas Playboys. To the traditional fiddle and guitar, he added steel guitar, brass, reeds, and drums, producing a bigger, jazzier sound. The Playboys’ “New San Antonio Rose” became a hit, catapulting them to national fame.

World War II interrupted Wills’s career, but he soon rebuilt his band in California, drawing big crowds and even appearing in Hollywood films.

Wills continued recording into the 1960s. At his death in 1975, he was acknowledged as a pioneer of a uniquely American musical genre—one that fused conventional string band sounds with the brass of big band, the swing of jazz, and elements of polka, bluegrass, and folk.

Check for Understanding: Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on James Robert (Bob) Wills. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. When did James Robert (Bob) Wills’s fame begin?
2. How does the episode describe the music that Wills pioneered?

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. **Taking a Position.** If you were going to name a band that played Western Swing, what name would you choose? Why?