



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 John Avery Lomax. Then, answer questions about it.

John Avery Lomax 1867–1948

Folklorist John Lomax spent his life collecting songs. According to one writer, Lomax would find the music among “chuck wagons, on levees and railroads, in the saloons, churches, and penitentiaries of the South and Southwest.”

John Lomax’s lifelong commitment to preserving folksong began when he first heard cowboy ballads near the Chisholm Trail in Bosque County, Texas. He graduated from The University of Texas in 1897 and later attended Harvard University.

Lomax’s first book, *Cowboy Songs*, was published in 1910 and introduced standards such as “Home on the Range.” His later books broadened the collection to include prison songs plus African American spirituals and blues. Lomax was fascinated by the songs and folklore of those groups at the margins of American society.

John Lomax and his son Alan recorded thousands of songs and helped launch the musical careers of Muddy Waters, Woody Guthrie, Jelly Roll Morton, and a Louisiana convict named Huddie Ledbetter, more commonly known as Leadbelly.

Although early scholars generally viewed folk music as an unchanging tradition, Lomax demonstrated its creative process. He highlighted how centuries-old songs became new American stories as singers added extra verses, different melodies, and new plot twists.

Upon his death in 1948, the *New York Times* quoted the poet Walt Whitman: “If anybody ever did, John Lomax really heard America singing.”

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

1. Identify three of the unusual places where John Lomax “found” music.
2. According to scholars, folk music was an “unchanging tradition.” How did Lomax challenge this conclusion?

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 might some groups use oral histories, like folk music, to preserve their culture?