



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 Belle Starr. Then, answer questions about it.

Belle Starr 1848–1889

When Belle Starr was shot to death in 1889, a newspaper declared her to be “a most desperate woman.” Her killer was never identified. Many suspected her son, whom Belle had recently beaten for mistreating her horse. Her unsolved murder was a fitting end to a life that was a whirlwind of violence, crime, and legend.

She was born Myra Maybelle Shirley in 1848 and at the age of sixteen moved to the North Texas town of Scyene. She kept company with notorious criminals, including Jesse James. She married three times to three different outlaws and even spent time in prison for stealing horses.

Though she was ruthless to her enemies, she had a great capacity to make friends, and she even mingled with the Dallas elite during the brief periods when her gunfights and thievery gave way to respectable living.

But it was only after her death, at age forty, that her legend grew. The *National Police Gazette* invented new stories about her, and her embellished reputation continued to inspire popular novels and western films long after her death.

Stories circulated depicting Belle as an elegantly dressed woman riding atop a black mare, in a feathered black sombrero, toting a Colt .45 pistol that she called “my baby.”

Instead of being remembered as a desperate criminal, she became a romantic symbol of the disappearing American West, known as “Belle Starr, the Bandit Queen.”

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

1. How was the reality of Belle Starr’s life different from the legend that grew after her death?
2. How did Starr become an inspiration for popular novels and western films?

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.** After her death, Starr’s reputation was embellished as her life story was dramatized and used as inspiration in popular novels and films. Why do you think that we tend to exaggerate stories about people from the past?