

Voices of Oklahoma

Teacher listener guide

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Humble Beginnings

Marques Haynes was born in Sand Springs in 1926 in a three-room “shotgun house” that had only kerosene lamps for lighting. He and his three older siblings all slept on the floor of the bedroom and were forced to use boxes to insulate the house. With his father leaving the family when Haynes was only four, his mother raised all four kids alone but worked hard and ensured that each one focused on their education and promoted Haynes love of basketball. That drive paid off, as Haynes become successful and joined the Harlem Globetrotters. Hear about Marques Haynes humble beginnings in chapters 2 and 3 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Born in 1930 inside a two-room frame house in Walters, future Oklahoma Senator Fred Harris and his family had a rough beginning. With four children in the middle of the worst depression the nation had ever seen, the Harris’ were barely able to make ends meet, at one point living out of the backroom of their father’s small store. Starting when Harris was around five years old, the entire family would go to Texas in the summer to pick cotton for extra money. At school, reading came naturally to Harris, who won a prize in first grade for the most books read. Hear about Harris’ humble beginnings in chapters 2, 3, and 4 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Born in 1945 and raised on her grandfather’s house on government granted land at Mankiller Flats in rural Adair County for the first ten years of her life, Wilma Mankiller and her family shared their land and resources with dangerous wild animals. Lacking plumbing of any kind on their isolated farm, the Mankillers got fresh water from a natural spring at which bobcats, mountain lions, wild pigs, and other animals would frequent. No roads existed in the area, forcing Wilma and her siblings to walk across wild land to reach school and other pockets of civilization. Hear Wilma describe her family’s isolated and poor early years in chapters 2 and 3 of her Voices of Oklahoma interview.

Barry Switzer was born in 1937 in Crossett, Arkansas in a shotgun house that lacked electricity or running water. Growing up, Switzer had an unconventional childhood in the racially diverse but poor community where his father served as the local bootlegger. He and his father befriended many members of the black community in Crossett and thought little of segregation before moving away from the town. Due to his father’s profession, Switzer carried the stigma of being a bootlegger’s son while growing up, but overcame it to become a successful football player and legendary coach. Hear about Switzer’s unconventional childhood and the stigma of being a poor bootlegger’s son in chapters 2-6 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Childhood Revelation

One of Oklahoma's most famous architects and historians, John Brooks Walton knew from the age of four that he wanted to be an architect. At that young age, Walton would spend his time studying the walls, floor plans, and furniture arrangements of every house he visited and committed them to memory for study. Hear more about Walton's early interest in architecture in chapter 3 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

As a young boy, four-time Oklahoma governor George Nigh was fascinated by politics despite not coming from a political family, and would spend his nights listening to Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats and declared when he was nine that he wanted to become a governor. For Nigh, who was first elected to public office when he was only twenty-three, there was no other path in life that he wanted or considered outside of public service. Hear more about Nigh's early dedication to politics in chapter 3 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

One of Oklahoma's most prolific artists, Charles Banks Wilson has been drawing practically his entire life. Routinely getting in trouble at school for his constant drawing, Wilson's parents encouraged his talents, and at the age of fourteen painted a posed life portrait of Will Rogers, which he later learned was the only one Rogers ever sat for. To hear more about Wilson's young interest in art, listen to chapters 2, 3, and 4 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Interior designer Charles Faudree discovered at the age of six an appreciation for flowers and furniture. While his grandmother taught him about different kinds of flowers and how to garden, Charles gained an appreciation for his aunt's French furniture. To hear more about Faudree's early interest in flowers and furniture, listen to chapter 2 of his interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Strong Mothers

A survivor of Auschwitz, Eva Unterman only lived through that trying ordeal thanks to the bravery and support of her mother, Estera Wolman. A strong and proud woman, Estera ensured that her daughter survived Germany's invasion of Poland, death marches, Auschwitz, and allied bombings to make it through the war not only safely, but with her spirit intact. Listen to Eva discuss her mother's strength in chapters 5 through 16 of her interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Bill Anoatubby was the last of six children raised by his mother, who had to care for them on her own following the death of her husband when Bill was only two. Despite only having an eighth grade level of education, Bill's mother worked hard to provide for her family while ensuring that her children remained committed to schoolwork and developing a future. Hear Bill Anoatubby discuss how his mother helped make him the man he became in chapters 2 and 4 of his interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Serving as one of Oklahoma's most prominent federal judges for several decades, Lee Roy West credits his mother Nicey with ensuring he made something of himself. While Judge West's father was an illiterate bootlegger who had no desire for his son to end up like him, it was his mother, who never completed the third grade and could barely read or write, who always pushed her son to complete his education. Calling her the "sole moral beacon" of his family, West is forever thankful for her strong will and raising him to always pursue his goals. Hear Lee Roy West discuss his mother's influence on his life in chapters 2, 3, and 4 of his interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Young Businessmen

At the young age of twenty-one, Hobby Lobby founder David Green became the manager of a Tomlinson, Gosselin and Young store (also known as T, G, & Y), which helped give him the experience he needed to start his own business when he was just twenty-nine. Starting with a \$600 dollar loan to support crafting picture frames, business soon exploded and diversified, and within two years Green opened the first Hobby Lobby in 1972. Hear more about Green's experience as a young businessman in chapters 3 and 4 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Oilman T. Boone Pickens began working and saving money as a paper boy, quickly picking up valuable business skills at a young age. After working at Phillips Petroleum for a few years after collage, Pickens founded his first business, Petroleum Exploration Inc., at the age of twenty-eight. Hear more about Pickens's experience as a young businessman in chapters 5, 7, 8, and 9 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Oilman Walter Helmerich began working for his father at Helmerich & Payne after graduating college at twenty-eight. Over the next several years Helmerich bought several smaller businesses and helped expand the company, and was named executive vice president when he was only thirty-one years old. Hear more about Helmerich's experience as a young businessman in chapters 13 and 14 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Stan Clark, the co-founder of Eskimo Joe's, graduated from Oklahoma State University in 1975 with a degree in business. Possessing an entrepreneurial spirit, he and his friend Steve File partnered up to start a bar a few blocks away from campus, securing a loan and renovating the building mostly by themselves. Eskimo Joe's quickly became a success and an iconic establishment in Oklahoma. Hear more about Clark's experience as a young businessman in chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Music at an Early Age

Musician and producer Tommy Allsup started playing music on a one stringed fiddle around the age of 5. As he grew up, Allsup learned to play more than one string and decided that he wanted to become a musician. Listen to more of Dillard's early experiences with music in chapters 3 and 4 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Singing and music were an integral part of singer Ernestine Dillard's family life as she grew up, with her mother's family enjoying singing while her father played guitar at parties. At the age of five, her aunt taught Dillard to sing and memorize her first song, "Can't No Grave Hold My Body Down", and she began to sing as part of her church's choir. These early experiences with performing would inspire and influence her later career as a singer. Listen to more of Dillard's early experiences with music in chapters 2 and 3 of her interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma's rockabilly queen, Wanda Jackson loved singing from a very young age. Her father began teaching her to play guitar when Wanda was only four years old, and after seeing female singers performing in big bands around Los Angeles, she resolved to one day be like them. Always eager to perform, she would regularly perform at church or school, eventually gaining more public exposure and winning a radio talent contest when she was only fifteen. Hear more about Wanda's early calling to music in chapters 2 and 3 of her interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

"Around three or four years old I first began to hear music. And, ultimately, when I moved on Oklahoma Street, Carver was north of me and I was right in the back of the music room of St. Malcolm's High School and I heard music on both sides. So I picked up my mother's black skillet, a knife, and a fork, and that was my first instrument."

- Jazz drummer Washington Rucker describing his childhood interest in music

Jazz drummer and member of the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame Washington Rucker knew that his path lay in music from a very early age. Surrounded and fascinated by music since the age of three, Rucker played his first musical instrument at the age of nine, utilizing his mother's skillet and a knife and fork for makeshift percussion. Hear more about Rucker's early calling to music in chapter 2 of his interview on Voices of Oklahoma.

Early Readers

“I don’t know why, but I was just a reader, and I was probably—the plain truth is as the years went by I went out for basketball. I was too short. Went out for baseball, and I couldn’t hit. My dad managed the Golden Gloves for twenty-two years and he stopped my first fight because I wouldn’t hit the boy back. And I just got on a bicycle. So there wasn’t anything else to do but read. And so— By the way, the library, aah, aah, that’s, that was my home away from home. On the way home from school I would stop at the library. I read all the series of books and so forth. And one day I brought a book up and the librarian said, “Not yet, Frosty, not yet.” It was an art book of nudes. And I was really curious about that.”

Journalist Frosty Troy loved to read from a young age. Unskilled at sports, Troy began reading as a way to alleviate boredom, but it quickly became his passion as a child. He would stop by his local library on the way home from school, at which he would read everything they had available. To hear more about Frosty Troy’s love of reading, listen to chapter 3 of his interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

For future senator Fred Harris, reading came quite naturally. In school, Harris won a quarter at the end of his first year for having read the most books in class after completing his classwork. His love of reading made such an impact on his teacher that when he visited her classroom as a senator she introduced him as the little boy who had loved to read. To hear more about Fred Harris’ love of reading listen to chapter 4 of his interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Land Run roots/connections to early settlement/covered wagons

Former governor Henry Bellmon's parents were among the first wave of settlers to arrive in Oklahoma during the late 1800s. As a child, Bellmon was told stories about the early days of settlement in the territory and the land runs that occurred. His father, George Bellmon, was brought to Oklahoma by his own father, and they lived in a dugout with his family for five years on the bank of the Beaver River for five years and dealt with dangerous conditions and animals. Henry's mother Edith arrived in Oklahoma Territory in 1907 with her family, who travelled from Iowa to Oklahoma in two wagons while their farming equipment came by train. To hear more about Henry Bellmon's parents and their lives as Oklahoma settlers, listen to chapter 2 of his interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

World War II codebreaker Catharine Kingsley's grandfather participated in the Oklahoma Land Run on April 22, 1889. Growing up, Kingsley heard many stories about the land run from her grandfather and other participants who lived nearby. Unlike many other settlers, her grandfather obeyed the rules of the land run and was not a "sooner" who entered the territory beforehand to stake out land. To hear more about Catharine Kingsley's family, their arrival in Oklahoma, and stories from the land run, listen to chapter 3 of her interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Businessman William Ross's grandfather George was among the many settlers who took part in the Oklahoma Land Run on April 22, 1889, but he took a different route from the popularized horse and carriage race. Owing to a dislike of horses, George rode a train into the territory and staked his claim just across the street from where the train stopped in what would become Oklahoma City. To hear more about William Ross' grandfather's experience in the Oklahoma Land Run, listen to chapter 3 of his interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Not all settlers arrived in Oklahoma during the land runs. The Perryman family were among the thousands of Native Americans who were relocated into reservations in the "Indian Territory" throughout the 1800s. Among the first wave of Creeks who were "voluntary" resettlers, the Perryman family put down roots along the Verdigris River. The Perrymans were connected to the settlement of Tulsee, which was the earliest root of the city of Tulsa. To hear more about the Perryman family's settlement in Oklahoma, listen to chapter 4 of Monetta and her son Robert Tepp's interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Darrell Stiles' ancestors were among the thousands of men and women who participated in the Oklahoma Land Run during 1889. For the Stiles, the event was hazardous, with Darrell's great-grandmother nearly losing her life during the run, but they eventually settled down and became one of Oklahoma's most prominent families. To hear more about the Stiles family's participation in the settlement of Oklahoma, listen to chapter 3 and 4 of Darrel's interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Giving aid during Depression

During the Great Depression, T. Boone Pickens' family remained relatively untouched by the economic troubles plaguing the nation. With their good fortune, the Pickens worked to give back to those who lost nearly everything. T. Boone's mother Grace would feed any out of work men who passed by their house in exchange for just a few minutes of work. She became so well known for her generosity that the Pickens' house was marked as a location for food that those in need could go to. For more about how the Pickens' family gave back during the Depression, listen to chapter 6 of T. Boone Picken's interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

The son of Coney Island founder Christ Economou, Jim Economou was only a child when the Great Depression struck, but he has vivid memories of how his father helped those in need during that time. Although their hot dogs were only five cents, many people were unable to afford even that and would come begging for food. Christ would always give what he could, even when it hurt his business to do so, and many of the people he helped came back after the depression ended to thank him for his generosity. To hear more about how Coney Island helped people during the Great Depression, listen to chapter 8 of Jim Economou's interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

A child during the Great Depression, neurosurgeon John Coates' witnessed his father commit many generous acts of charity during that period. Although his family lost most of their bank savings, the Coates owned a successful bakery and were able to stay housed and fed. Located near a train stop that carried many poor and hungry workers, Coates' father would have them line up at the rear entrance of his bakery so he could serve them, and never turned away a hungry worker. To hear more about Coates' family during the Great Depression, listen to chapter 4 of his interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Dust in the Dust Bowl

Astronaut William Pogue was a child during the Dust Bowl and remembers methods his family used to deal with the dust storms. Whenever a storm was about to hit, William's mother used wet gauze to make a filter for her children to put over their mouths to avoid getting sand and dust into their mouths, which William believes saved them from having health problems. To hear more about how the Dust Bowl effected William and his family, listen to chapter 3 of his interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Mary Joe Guthrie was still a child when the Dust Bowl hit Oklahoma. She vividly remembers how the dust storms would hit and last for over a day, covering everything inside and outside in a layer of dust and leaving a cloud the day afterwards. To hear more about how the Dust Bowl effected Mary and her family, listen to chapter 8 of her interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

During the Dust Bowl, WWII cryptographer Catharine Kingsley recalls her family being frequently assailed by dust storms. Often unable to see in front of herself while outside, Catharine recalls that being inside was not much better as the storms would get into the house and cover much of their homes and furniture in sand. Cleaning up after these storms was both futile and impossible, as more sand would enter the house once the next storm hit. To hear more about how the Dust Bowl effected Catharine and her family, listen to chapters 5 and 6 of her interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Lives influenced by Mentors

Eskimo Joe's co-founder Stan Clark inherited his entrepreneurial spirit from his father, Emerson Herbert Clark. In college and at the start of Eskimo Joe's, it was Clark's father who found opportunities for Clark and helped guide him through the early stages of his career as a business owner. To hear more about how Clark's father mentored him, listen to chapter 7 of his interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Legendary OU football coach Bud Wilkinson not only mentored many players during his time at OU, but other coaches as well. Football coaches from around the country came to Bud to seek his advice and knowledge on how to become better coaches for their teams. To hear more about how Bud coached the coaches, listen to chapter 10 of his son Jay Wilkinson's interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Sociologist George Henderson was one of the first African-American college professors in Oklahoma, an achievement he never would have accomplished without the influence of his mentor Professor Leonard Moss. Convinced that Henderson was a natural teacher, Moss got him a job as an adjunct professor at Wayne University and continually encouraged him to become a full time professor while spreading word of his talents through the academic community despite Henderson's reservations. Moss' influence eventually convinced Henderson to teach full time, and among those whom Moss put the word out to was Professor Richard Hilbert of the University of Oklahoma, who hired Henderson as the third African-American professor at the college and the first to live in Norman. To hear more about Leonard Moss' influence on George Henderson, listen to chapter 7 of Henderson's interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

While Eddie Sutton is a legendary basketball coach in his own right, he owes much to his coach and mentor Henry Iba at OSU. Having coached Sutton as a player, Iba was ecstatic when he returned to be a coach on the team, always being happy when one of "his boys" found success. Sutton credits much of his coaching style to Iba, who offered advice and encouragement to him whenever he needed it. To hear more about Henry Iba's influence on Eddie Sutton, listen to chapters 5, 6, and 7 of Sutton's interview with Voices of Oklahoma.

Songs from our Storytellers

Throughout the interviews on Voices of Oklahoma, several of the interviewees put their singing ability on display. Nora Guthrie sings her father Woody's song "This Land is Your Land", while his sister Mary Jo Guthrie and noted music historian Guy Logsdon sing another song of Woody's, "So Long, It's Been Good to Know Yuh". Roy Clark sings "Yesterday When I Was Young", which he performed at Mickey Mantle's funeral, while civil rights protester Joyce Henderson sings songs from the Oklahoma City lunch counter sit-ins.