

The Mosaic Templars of America

Introduction

What do your students know about the Mosaic Templars of America, which is now recognized as one of the most significant endeavors in the history of Arkansas and Little Rock? Through this lesson plan students will be introduced to one of Arkansas's most successful African American fraternal organizations and businesses.

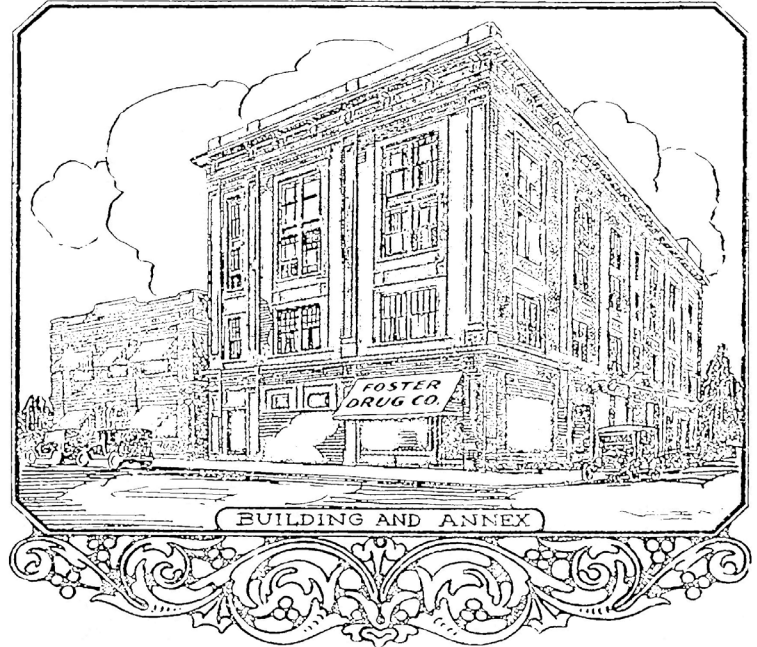
Background Information

The post-Reconstruction period in the South marked a time when race relations in America perceivably reached its nadir. The disfranchisement of African Americans, Jim Crow, and racism characterized the "nadir movement," which spanned from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. During this time period, African Americans strove to make sense of their histories and destinies.

As the struggle for social equality, economic independence, and political advancement ensued, fraternal organizations became increasingly popular in African American communities to provide mutual funds and insurance policies, self-help programs, social activities, and cohesion within the community. The Mosaic Templars of America emerged as one of the most successful African American fraternal organizations in Arkansas and one of the largest black-owned businesses in the United States by the 1920s.

During the "nadir movement," white-owned insurance organizations were reluctant to offer burial insurance policies to African Americans.

continued on page 2



Resources

Charles George. *Life Under Jim Crow*. San Diego: Lucent Books, 2000. (JUV)

John Williams Graves. *Town and Country: Race Relations in an Urban-Rural Context, Arkansas, 1865-1905*. Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1900.

Louis R. Harlan. *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Patricia and Fredrick McKissack. *Booker T. Washington: Leader and Educator*. Hillside, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 1992. (JUV)

Richard Wormser. *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow: The African American Struggle Against Discrimination, 1865-1954*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1999.

Continued from page 1

As a result, many African Americans publicly solicited for funds to bury their deceased family members. The Mosaic Templars of America, founded in 1875 by John E. Bush and Chester W. Keatts, sought to provide aid to the sick, offer burial and funeral arrangements to African Americans, and strengthen Arkansas's African American community politically and economically.

The name of the organization, taken from the Biblical figure Moses who emancipated Hebrew slaves, reflected the Templars ideals of love, charity, protection, and brotherhood. Likewise, the organization was originally called "The Order of Moses." However, in 1883, the founders of the organization revised the name to "Mosaic Templars of America" during the incorporation process. Modeled after the United States government, the organization consisted of an executive branch, a legislative branch, and even a judicial branch.

As founders of the Mosaic Templars, Bush and Keatts, both the contemporaries of other prominent African Americans leaders of the Post-Reconstruction era, shared similar backgrounds. Both from slave families, Bush and Keatts, served as civic and political leaders in Arkansas. Bush's political career included serving several terms as Receiver of the United States Office of Public Lands for Arkansas, where he unofficially promoted homesteading to African Americans. He was also involved in early protest movements against segregation, separate coach law proposals of 1891 and 1903, and a separate school-tax fund in 1905. Keatts began his career as a civic leader as a railway mail service clerk. By 1895 his political career had taken shape, and he was appointed Receiver of the Little Rock Traction and Electric Company. Afterwards, Keatts assumed the post of United States Deputy Marshal for the Eastern District of Arkansas, and

later the Deputy Constable of Big Rock Township, or present-day Little Rock.

By 1900, Mosaic Templars industries grew to include an insurance company, a building and loan association, a publishing company, a nursing school, and a hospital. The Mosaic Templars of America Headquarters Building, formerly located at West Ninth and Broadway Streets in Little Rock, housed six separate retail spaces on its first floor. A third floor auditorium, with balconied fourth floor, hosted dances, high school graduations, concerts, plays, and even movies. In 1913, a crowd of 5,000 people waited for Tuskegee Institute President, Booker T. Washington to deliver the official dedication speech for the Mosaic Templars of America Headquarters Building.

The Mosaic Templars experienced high levels of growth, claiming 120,000 members in 1918, 175,000 members in 1921, and 200,000 members in 1931. The Mosaic Templars touted dozens of lodges in Arkansas along with chapters in twenty-six states including Central America, Panama, and the West Indies, making it one of the largest black fraternal organizations in the United States.

The Mosaic Templars of America is now recognized as one of the great endeavors in the history of Arkansas and Little Rock. For nearly forty years, the Mosaic Templars of America Headquarters Building was the anchor of the thriving black social and economic district on West Ninth Street. Guided by the fundamental ideals of racial equality, economic parity, and self-help initiatives, the Mosaic Templars attained a peerless record of achievement. Unfortunately, however, like many businesses, the Mosaic Templars of America, failed during the Great Depression.

Related Activities

Grades K-4

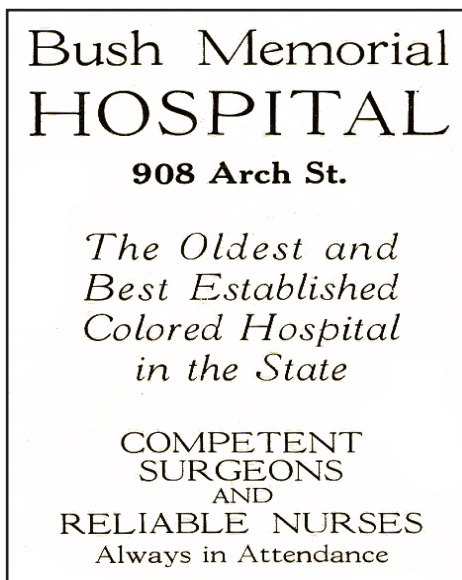
Objective: Recognize membership badges and create a badge.

Badges identified members of a fraternal organization. The Mosaic Templars of America badge, on the right, displays the name of the organization, the title of the member, and important symbols of the organization.

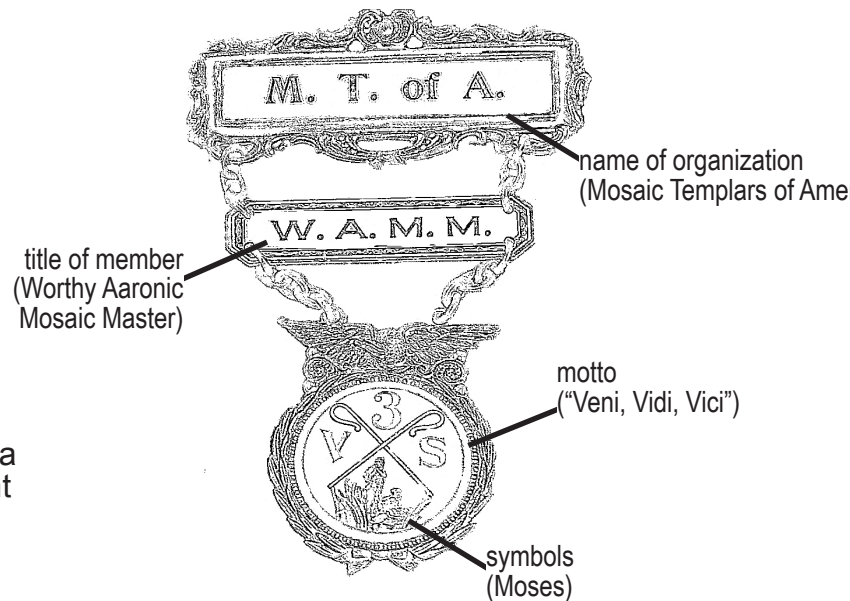
After studying the Mosaic Templars of America and researching other fraternal organizations in the United States, allow your students to design a certificate, badge, or banner that would represent an imaginary fraternal organization. Students should name their organization and create a motto. See chart on page 5.

A.1.4. Discovers examples of how people use art in their daily lives, in the work place, and within the community.

PPE.1.3. Analyzes the contributions of various groups to community, state, and nation.



Named in honor of Mosaic Templars Co-Founder, John E. Bush, the Bush Memorial Hospital served Little Rock's black community from 1918 to 1927. (Courtesy of the Bush Family. Mosaic Templars Cultural Center Community History Project Collection.)



Grades 5-8

Objective: Understand how to build a time capsule as a snapshot of life and give reasons to support the chosen items.

Sometimes time capsules were created and buried during the initial building stages of fraternal organization's headquarters buildings, churches, schools, or other important civic buildings. Likewise, the former Mosaic Templars of America National Headquarters Building contained a cornerstone that was opened after a fire destroyed the building. The objects inside the Templars' time capsule provided insight into the beliefs and values of the organization.

With your class, create a time capsule. Include letters, pictures, and other documents collected from your students at the beginning of the year. At the end of the year, open the capsule and allow students to reflect on the objects within the capsule.

PPE.1.4. Examines primary and secondary sources and experiences to understand historical and cultural perspectives.

Grades 9-12

Objectives: Understand Booker T. Washington's economic philosophy and influence on black business; Define and analyze ballads.

Born into slavery near Hale's Ford, Virginia in early 1856, Booker T. Washington rose to prominence as an educator, orator, and advisor to presidents. In 1881 Washington became the president of Alabama's Tuskegee Institute for African Americans, which emphasized vocational education such as agriculture, mechanics, and carpentry.

Some critics labeled Washington an accommodationist after his 1895 Atlanta Compromise Speech exclaiming that his ideals did not go far enough to uplift African Americans. In his speech Washington urged African Americans to "cast down your buckets where you are," in other words to endure the racial inequality of the South and eventually work towards economic independence.

In 1900 Washington founded the National Negro Business League (NNBL) to encourage the commercial, agricultural, educational, and industrial advancement and the commercial and financial development of African American businesses. Utilizing Washington's philosophy, the Mosaic Templars of America strove towards economic independence for African Americans.

Using Langston Hughes' poem, "The Ballad of Booker T. Washington," (on page 6) students should look for clues about Washington's ideals.

- What is the poem about?
- What is the tone of the poem?
- What literary devices does Hughes use?

After analyzing the poem, have students write a poem about the Mosaic Templars' work following the same format of Hughes' poem. Use questions on page 6 to guide a class discussion.

TCC.1.1 Analyzes and evaluates diverse historical perspectives as they relate to persistent issues.

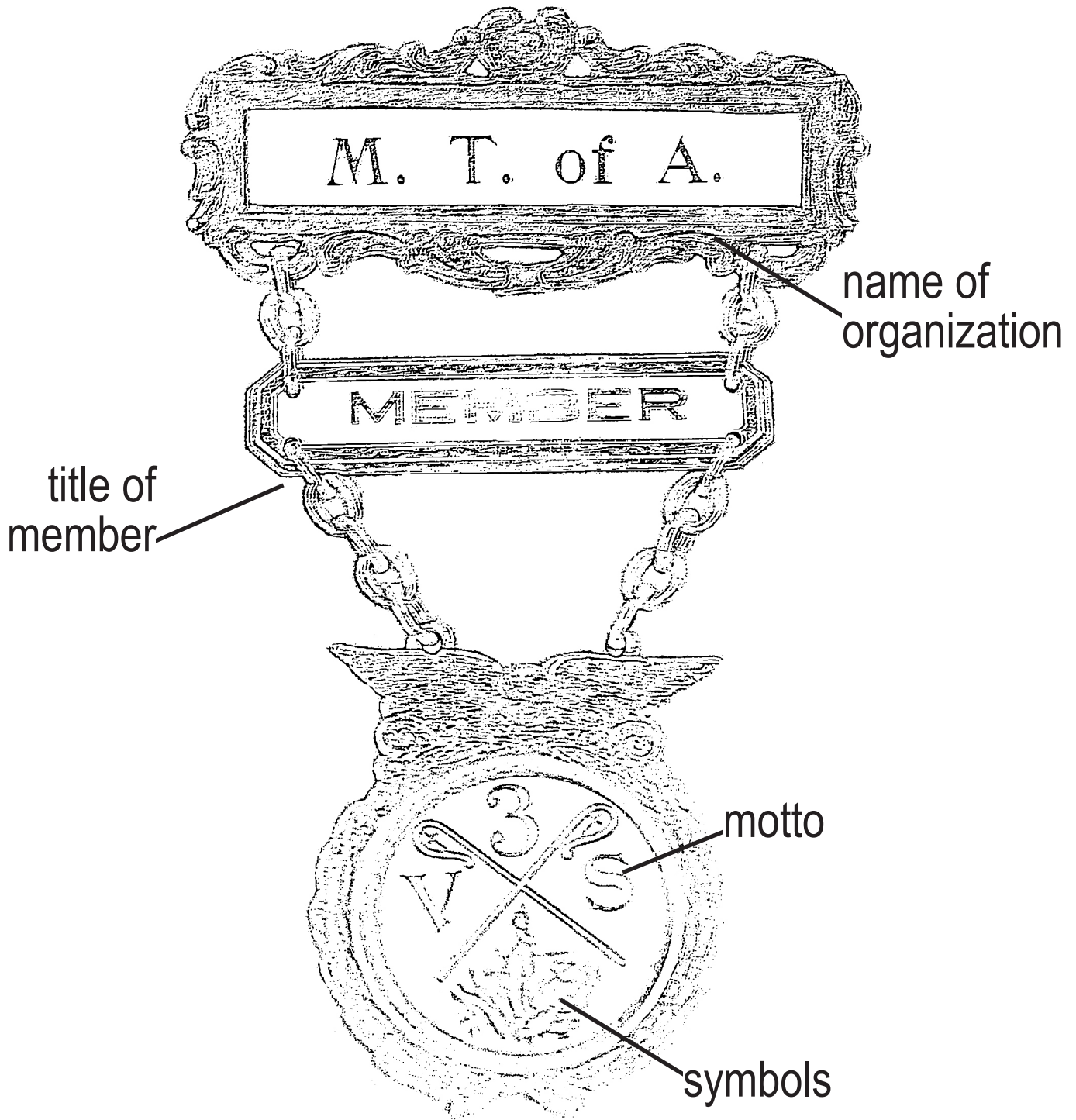
W.5.9.6. Writes poems using a range of poetic techniques, forms, and figurative language.

Answer Key

Answers to page 7 discussion questions.

1. The Jim Crow system refers to legalized segregation of whites and blacks particularly in the South.
2. The successes of the Mosaic Templars of America included the founding of a largely popular fraternal organization that achieved national prominence and the establishment of an insurance company, a building and loan company, and a hospital with nursing schools.
3. Booker T. Washington was an orator, educator, and presidential advisor who strove towards economic independence for African Americans.
4. The Mosaic Templars' contributions reflected the philosophy or ideals of Booker T. Washington because they promoted economic independence and entrepreneurial successes of African Americans.
5. The Mosaic Templars' businesses failed because of the Great Depression.
6. Answers will vary.

Mosaic Templars of America Membership Badge



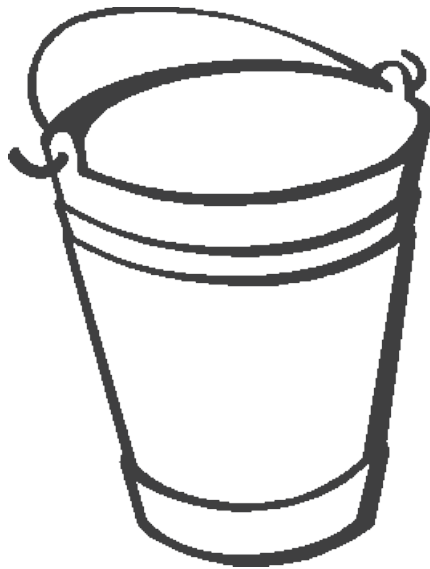
Ballad of Booker T.

by
Langston Hughes

Booker T.
Was a practical man.
He said, Till the soil
And learn from the land.
Let down your bucket
Where you are.
Your fate is here
And not afar.
To help yourself
And your fellow man,
Train your head,
Your heart, and your hand.
For smartness alone's
Surely not meet--
If you haven't at the same time
Got something to eat.
Thus at Tuskegee
He built a school
With book-learning there
And the workman's tool.
He started out
In a simple way--
For yesterday
Was not today.
Sometimes he had
Compromise in his talk--
For a man must crawl
Before he can walk--
And in Alabama in '85
A joker was lucky
To be alive.
But Booker T.
Was nobody's fool;
You may carve a dream

With an humble tool.
The tallest tower
Can tumble down
If it be not rooted
In solid ground.
So, being a far-seeing
Practical man,
He said, Train your head,
Your heart, and your hand.
Your fate is here
And not afar,
So let down your bucket
Where you are.

*Final Draft
Signed by
Langston Hughes
Monterey, California,
June 1, 1941*



Discussion Questions

1. What was the Jim Crow system?
2. What were the successes of the Mosaic Templars of America?
3. Who was Booker T. Washington?
4. How did the Mosaic Templars' contributions reflect the philosophy or ideals of Booker T. Washington?
5. Why did the Mosaic Templars' businesses fail?
6. *Thinking Critically.* In what ways do you think the rise of Jim Crow affected the development of black businesses in the South?



did you
know...

Members of fraternal organizations often wore badges as a proof of membership. Badges typically displayed the name, symbols, and motto of the organization. The badges of the Mosaic Templars of America feature several symbols of the Mosaic Templars, like the one above, including the “3 V’ S.” It abbreviates the Latin phrase “Veni vidi vici” meaning “I came, I saw, I conquered.”