

**Shawnee Town 1929 Museum  
Bousman Barber Shop Program  
Lesson Plan - Grades 3 through 5**

**Program Synopsis**

- The Bousman Barber Shop activity will take 20-30 minutes or longer depending upon the size of your group and how much time you would like to spend in the shop. You can elect to have your entire visit focus on this one activity. Please phone Sharron Uhler, Curator of Education, to discuss options to lengthen the activity and possibly meet more curriculum standards.
- This activity is designed for Spring third graders, fourth graders, and fifth graders.
- There were two barber shops in Shawnee in 1929. Homer Bousman's was the oldest. He started barbering in Shawnee in the 1880s. His shop stayed open until 8:00 or 9:00 PM on Saturday nights to accommodate the many who came into town to see a film at Mission Theater or go to a restaurant.
- As was the custom in the 1920s, Mr. Bousman cut men, women's, and children's hair. Women's hair salons had not come into their own yet. 1920s women went to barber shops to have their very long, beautiful tresses "bobbed" which was the fashion of the day. Hair was cut to chin length - quite a change!
- Mr. Bousman also gave massages and the back of his store was rented by a laundry company so people could drop off their clothes to be laundered.
- The barber shops in the 1920s were THE place to hear news and gossip about friends, neighbors, movie screen stars, politics, market prices for farmer's produce - you name it!

**Museum Activities**

The Barber shop activity is usually combined with 2-3 others of your own selection from the "A la carte" menu on Shawnee Town's website under "Education."

The activities will include the following:

1. The Interpreter (guide) will deliver a brief presentation on the Museum's barber shop pointing out various artifacts. We're particularly proud of our barber chairs since they are in such wonderful condition and come from the 1920s. A difficult find these days! She/he will ask the students to compare and contrast how members of their family shave today:
  - a. The type of razor they use - electric or manual, straight edge possibly
  - b. Use of shaving cream and after shave
  - c. Do their fathers and brothers ever go to a barber shop to have a shave or do they always shave at home?
  - d. The students are allowed to take turns sitting in the barber chair.
2. The Interpreter will also talk about the 1920s as a period when women had their hair "bobbed" - the hair was cut even with the chin. This was a fashion statement and a visual manifestation of young women setting aside the lifestyle of their

mothers and branching out on their own. This was considered very daring at the time.

3. Barber shops generally had a young man in the shop who shined shoes in a designated area. We know that Robert McCallop, an African American Shawnee resident, shined shoes in the barber shop as a boy in the 1920s.
4. Depending upon your time limitations, selected students may have their face shaved with a blunted straight razor or they may shine a very large man's shoe which will easily slip over their own. A clear wax will be used to prevent any stains. We ask that you select the students for one or both activities.

### **The students will:**

- Learn about the business of barbering in the 1920s which was a small business and its importance to the Shawnee community.
- Compare and contrast the Museum barber shop with their own.
- Observe that fashion can dictate the clientele of the shop itself. Women increasingly frequenting barber shops.
- Observe that some professions have a life of their own with music, slang, customs, and lore.

### **Curriculum Correlations**

Throughout all of the activities, students will become acquainted with the 5 Social Studies standards:

1. Choices have consequences.
2. Individuals have rights and responsibilities.
3. Societies are shaped by beliefs, ideas, and diversity.
4. Societies experience continuity and change over time.
5. Relationships between people, place, ideas, and environments are dynamic.

### **Pre-activity suggestions**

The purpose of these suggested activities is to familiarize the students with what Shawnee Town's Interpreters will be doing and to sharpen their analytical skills before they come.

- Have the students research the following (answers for you given in parentheses):
  - "two bits" (a quarter)
  - The tune and expression, "Shave and a Haircut" (The tune was first used in 1899 in a song called "At a Darktown Cakewalk" and the words appeared for the tune in 1914.)
  - Straight razor (a razor with a blade that can fold in)
  - Barber - How far back in history have we had barbers? (Barbers are sometimes referred to as the oldest profession.)
  - The red and white barber pole (Barbers started out as their own profession, but they were also surgeons who performed surgery or extracted teeth in the barber shop. The pole symbolizes the blood-stained cloth and the pole outside the shop advertised that this service was available.)

- The Museum's pole is red, white, and blue – Why has the blue been added? (Several answers – one in particular is patriotism for the three colors of the American flag.)
- Barbershop Quartet – How did this group of singers come to use the word “barbershop” as part of their name? (Please note that “Barber Shop” is two words when it is a business and one word when it is used to describe the singers, i.e. “Barbershop” Quartet.)
- Home assignment followed by a discussion in the classroom:
  - Do the students have a family member or family friend who went to an “old-style” barber shop? Ask them to interview that person about what it was like.
  - Does everyone in their family go to the same place to get their hair cut or do they try out new places?
  - How much does it cost for a haircut now? How about a haircut and a shave? (Reminder - in 1929 it cost a quarter).
  - What's the personal name of the person who cuts their hair? Do they visit with their barber or stylist while they're having their hair cut?
  - Do customers sit and visit in the shop? (Reminder - people came in and visited a lot in the barber shop).
  - Students will be asked to share some of their answers at the Museum.

### **Post-activity suggestions**

- Have the students compare and contrast how barber shops changed over the years. The ideal would be for them to visit an older barbershop or salon, talk with the barber, and compare and contrast the shop with the 1920s Bousman Barber Shop they saw at Shawnee Town.
  - Does the barber use a straight razor to shave his customers?
  - Do they have their certificate hanging on the wall or mirror from the school or college they attended stating that they have passed exams and are qualified to be a barber or hair stylist?
  - What other services do they provide today? (Massages, manicures, hair waxing, shoe shines, applying make-up, anything else?)
  - How much do each of the following cost: haircut, permanent, hair dying, shave?
- Bring in a pair of leather shoes and have the students compare them with the shoes they wear (probably some type of sport shoe). You can set up a shoe shine area in the class room where students can shine leather shoes and then “clean” their own shoes with soap and water.
  - How much would they charge for this service?
  - Is it important to shine their shoes now?
  - Do they shine their shoes at home?
  - Is it “fashionable” to have clean shoes now? It was in the 1920s.
  - For what types of occasions would people in the 1920s and/or today shine their shoes (job interviews, weddings, church services, etc.)
- Have the students bring in pictures from magazines of what they consider trendy hair styles today.

- What is “style”? What does “fashionable” mean? Is it important to be “in style?” Why or why not?
- Ask the students if they’re style setters. How? Do they want to be or is it more “stylish” to go against the trend?
- Show the students copies of the three pages on this link showing 1920s hair styles for comparison purposes. There are three – one each for women, boys, and girls.
- The hair styles or haircuts we select have always had a variety of names, often unusual and downright funny. Assign style names from the attached list to the students or have them select 5 themselves that they’ve never heard of and research them. Have students describe the style and tell its history.
- Students can research hair styles from other countries, map the styles they select on a world map and tell when and why each was popular in that country. Hair styles sometimes elicited changes in fashion or vice versa such as the 1920s “bob” and the “cloche” hat in this country. Can the same be said for any of the styles they selected?

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