



Moss Hart

HIDDEN HERO OF HISTORY

Listen to the story: <https://jonincharacter.com/moss-hart/>

Moss Hart was an award-winning playwright, librettist (a person who writes scripts and music for musicals), and director for the Broadway stage and Hollywood films.

Moss Hart was born in 1904 and grew up in The Bronx in New York City where he lived in a tenement building. Tenements were low-rise buildings with multiple apartments, which were narrow and typically made up of three rooms. Immigrants in New York City often lived in tenement housing because rents were low.

Moss's Aunt Kate loved going to live theater productions and she'd often take Moss with her to see a show. Going into downtown New York City, young Moss loved seeing Times Square and the lights of Broadway. His first time going there happened to be the day World War I, a very big and terrible war that took place between many nations, had finally ended.

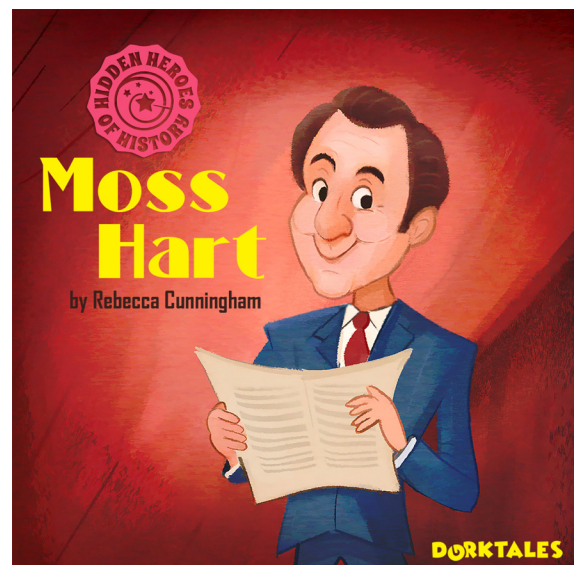
Moss witnessed people throwing confetti out of their windows, soldiers and sailors dancing on top of taxi cabs, and others hugging and dancing in the streets. It was a new day in the United States of America. There was so much joy all around and a new sense of hope everywhere. It sparked a sense of hope in Moss's heart too. His dream was to open a show on Broadway one day.

The year after seeing Times Square for the first time, Moss had to drop out of school to take care of his parents and younger brother. His family never had much money. His dad was trained to make cigars but was suddenly out of work when a machine that rolled cigars was invented.

Moss started working at different jobs and by the time he turned 17, he finally found a job in the theater. He was an office boy for a theater producer named Augustus Pitou. An office boy was usually a young man who recently left school and was employed in an office to perform simple tasks, such as running errands and doing odd jobs.

It was while working for the producer that Hart, under a pseudonym (a made-up name), wrote a play produced by Pitou called, The Hold-Up Man or The Beloved Bandit. Moss's boss read the script, loved it, and without knowing that the teenage Moss Hart wrote it, decided to put it on stage.

Unfortunately, The Beloved Bandit was a huge flop and Augustus Pitou lost \$45,000. That would equal almost \$800,00 today. Eventually he found out that Moss wrote the play and he was fired.



But just because he had one failure didn't mean that Moss gave up on his dream to work in theater. He tried again and kept writing.

His next play, *Once in a Lifetime*, caught the interest of another theater producer who wanted to bring it to Broadway. He insisted that another playwright named George S. Kaufman work with Moss on the script. After six months of writing together, *Once in a Lifetime* had its Broadway premiere. It was a huge success!

This first Broadway production led to a 10-year theatrical partnership between Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman. They went on to write many shows together including *Merrily We Roll Along*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, and *You Can't Take It With You*!

The team of Kaufman and Hart won the Pulitzer Prize for *You Can't Take It With You*. The Pulitzer Prize is regarded as the highest national honor a writer can achieve. It is awarded each year for outstanding achievement to U.S. journalists, authors, playwrights and composers.

Moss continued his artistic pursuits throughout his life. He wrote with other celebrated creatives like Irving Berlin. He directed famous musicals *My Fair Lady* and *Camelot*. And then he'd move from the stage to the screen. He wrote screenplays for many movies including *A Star is Born* starring Judy Garland, the actress famous for another classic film, *The Wizard of Oz*.

Moss Hart took all the stories from his life—his childhood in the Bronx, his Aunt Kate, his first play with producer Augustus Pitou—and wrote an autobiography called *Act One*. An autobiography is a book a person writes about their own life. The book was a huge hit and to this day, it is one of the most widely read autobiographies by a person in the theater.

Moss Hart was one of the most talented figures in American theater history and one of the most successful authors of the 20th century. His life has inspired generations of playwrights, directors and actors to pursue their own creative careers.

Glossary

Playwright: A person who writes plays.

Librettist: A person who writes scripts and music for musicals.

Director: Someone who oversees and guides the making of a play or movie.

Broadway: A famous street in New York City known for its many theaters and live performances.

Tenement: A type of building with many small apartments.

Times Square: A famous area in New York City known for its bright lights, big billboards, and lots of theaters.

World War I: A major war that took place from 1914 to 1918, involving many countries.

Autobiography: A book that a person writes about their own life.

Screenplay: The script of a movie, including dialogue and instructions for actors and directors.

Producer: A person who manages the making of a play, movie, or other performances, including financing and overseeing the project.

Give it Some Thought

- How did Moss Hart's early life in a Bronx tenement shape his dreams and ambitions?
- How do you think Moss felt when he had to take on adult responsibilities at a young age?
- Why is it important to keep trying even when things don't go as planned, like Moss did after his first play failed?
- What motivated Moss to keep writing and pursuing his dreams despite setbacks?
- What part of Moss Hart's story did you find most interesting or inspiring? Why?
- If you could ask Moss Hart one question about his life or work, what would it be?
- How can Moss Hart's story teach us about the importance of following our passions and helping others along the way?

Use Your Imagination

Choose one or all these activities to help you understand and connect with Moss Hart's story.

Write a Short Play

The Dorktales Storytime podcast story of Moss Hart's life was told as a play. Now it's your turn to write a short play or scene inspired by his story. Write about a moment in his life, your own life, or create a fictional story with themes of perseverance and creativity.

Design a Theater Poster

Create a poster for one of Moss Hart's famous plays, like *You Can't Take It With You*, *My Fair Lady* or *Camelot*. Include the title, a catchy slogan, and a colorful picture.

Make a Journal Entry as Moss Hart

Pretend that you are Moss Hart and write a journal entry as him after something important happened in his life. Here are a few examples: after he got his first job in the theater, after his first play flopped, or when his first Broadway show was a success. Listen to the episode again for more ideas to write about.

Create a Collage

Using old magazines, newspapers and your art supplies, create a collage that represents Moss Hart's life and career. You can include images, words and symbols that relate to his story.

