

# Kid Genealogists

Inspiring the Next Generation

rootstech  2017  
Session RT8918

Additional syllabus materials and links are available at our class webpage: [FamilyLocket.com/kid-genealogists-rootstech/](http://FamilyLocket.com/kid-genealogists-rootstech/)



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"Find a way to take your passion for family history, and pass it on to subsequent generations and especially to our children - who need it in order to believe that they can have a life of passion, that they can control, with dignity, happiness, and togetherness."

Bruce Feiler (RootsTech Keynote Address, Feb 2016)

## Why teach family history and genealogy to children?

When teaching children to value family history and become genealogists, it's helpful to know why you're doing it. Here are some of the reasons we teach family history and genealogy to children:

- Knowing family history strengthens children by increasing their resilience and self-esteem
- Researching genealogy is a positive hobby that helps children develop critical thinking skills
- Learning personal family history within the historical context helps children connect to history
- Learning genealogical skills enables children to carry on your research
- Repeating family stories and traditions with children ensures that the traditions are preserved
- Sharing anecdotes from ancestors about values important to your family strengthens family culture
- Discovering and preserving family history together is a unique way to have fun and bond with children

## What are the best ways to engage children in learning?

To truly inspire the younger generation of genealogists, it's crucial to keep them engaged. [According to education experts](#), student engagement occurs when children are behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively involved in learning. To engage our "students," we can:

- Tell stories
- Incorporate technology
- Provide autonomy
- Foster collaboration
- Build rapport with them
- Challenge them
- Understand their likes and dislikes
- Make it meaningful

The last method, making it meaningful, is especially important. When introducing a new concept, we can make it meaningful by relating the new concept to a child's current knowledge, interests, and experiences. To make family history meaningful, we can incorporate it into pastimes that children already enjoy. Children love **stories**, **projects** and activities, and **playing**. We'll share several ideas for teaching children family history in these three categories.



# Stories

Do your stories pass the campfire test? Do they have the emotion, the passion, the pain in order to endure?"

Bruce Feiler (RootsTech Keynote Address, Feb 2016)

## 1. CREATING KID-FRIENDLY ANCESTOR STORYBOOKS

An enormous amount of work and dedication go into compiling large family histories. We should be sharing the treasured information in them often. What good are they to us up on the shelf? If cracking the big family history book isn't happening in your family right now, make a kid-friendly version! Read it at bedtime, family night, or family dinner.

Children's books need illustrations. It would be great to use actual photographs, but what if you don't have any? Here's one solution: [www.storyboardthat.com](http://www.storyboardthat.com). It's a simple way to create characters and customize them with different poses, clothing, skin, eye, and hair color. Another solution is to ask the artistic member of your family to illustrate the story. Many 5-18 year olds are talented artists!

What if you only have names and dates? Fill the gaps in the story with historical context. Research the time and place that your ancestors lived and write about historical events may have affected their lives.

## 2. USING HEIRLOOMS TO TEACH FAMILY HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

Most children are tactile learners. They make cognitive connections through touch and by using and developing fine motor skills. Heirlooms are real, tangible items that connect generations of family members. Allowing children to touch, hold, and use family heirlooms gives them a physical connection to their family's past. Everyday household items make the best heirlooms for children to explore.

To a child, 'The Past' is not that long ago. Heirlooms do not necessarily have to be antiques to form an impression on a child and teach them about family history. Combine heirloom exploration with photos of the people who once owned the heirloom. Talk about where and when the heirloom was made and how it was (and is still) used.

## 3. MULTIMEDIA FAMILY HISTORY STORYTELLING

Today's younger generations seek visual, fast-paced, easily-accessible information and entertainment. Make your family history appeal to the younger generations of your family by sharing short (3-5 minute) stories with them in a multimedia video format. Here is a simple formula to follow:

- Choose your story: select a story about an aspect of an ancestor's life (not a full life history)
- Write the story: a paragraph or two will do; very little text is needed to record 3-4 minutes of audio
- Record the story: using just your voice recording app on your smart phone.
- Select images: about 10 per minute of video; images can be used more than once in a video, you can find public domain or Creative Commons images to supplement your family photos
- Choose background music: public domain or Creative Commons music
- Make title and credits pages with Keynote or PowerPoint
- Pull together your video with iMovie or another video editing program
- Collaborate! Involve family members in this process, then they are invested and excited to see the video and share it



# Projects

“Find a way to make sure that these stories are not just something that are living inside the computers, but are every day.”

Bruce Feiler (RootsTech Keynote Address, Feb 2016)

## 4. FAMILY PHOTO COLORING PAGES

You can create a coloring page from a family photo using any of these four tools:

1. [Pixlr.com](#): best for difficult images (low quality, blurry, poor contrast, etc.) Anyone with a web browser can upload a photo to this photo editing program. Follow a 5-minute [instructable](#) and voila! You have a coloring page ready to print, for free. Pros: No need to download software. Works well even for low quality, poor contrast photos. Cons: Requires following detailed instructions, not as simple as others
2. [ReallyColor.com](#): Simply upload your photo and you're done one minute later. Pros: Very simple, web based, easy to customize. Con: Not free (\$1.49 for one coloring page, or \$0.39 per page if you buy ten)
3. [BeFunky.com](#): Simple web tool or mobile app. Pros: Easy to use, free option available on mobile app. Cons: Costs for web version (\$4.95 per month or less if you pay annually when using the web browser)
4. Your own software: Picasa - one step to turn your photos into coloring pages - click “pencil sketch.” Photoshop: follow this [tutorial with three simple steps: filter - sketch - photocopy](#).

## 5. HANDS-ON TIMELINES

Understanding the passage of time is a skill to be learned. What is a year? What is a decade? Hands-on timelines help children visualize the abstract concept of the passage of time and the vocabulary associated with time. Assembling a timeline of a person's life helps children learn about major life events and accomplishments. Timelines create a story of our ancestors' lives.

The “Shoebox Timeline” activity allows the child to be the principal creator of the timeline. The story of an ancestor's life comes alive through the child's artwork. The “Ancestor Cup Timeline” activity is a simple, inexpensive way in which to introduce a child to photos, newspaper articles, and other primary source documents related to an ancestor. The cups can be easily manipulated by the child, and it is a great activity for teaching children how to arrange events chronologically.

## 6. MAKING HISTORY PERSONAL BY INCORPORATING FAMILY HISTORY

Can children learn that the big events of history involved real, everyday, average people who participated in and were affected by these events? Yes! This can best be done through a study of our ancestors in their place in history. When genealogy is incorporated into a study of history, the history is no longer something far distant and disconnected from us. It becomes personal, a direct link between you and the past.

- What? In conjunction with school studies, on the historic anniversary of an event, on a visit to a place of historic or family historic significance, when reading a book set during a particular time period
- When? Weekend afternoon family project, dinner table conversation, on vacation, driving around town
- How? Look at photos, look up dates, look up records related to that ancestor during that event, make a spreadsheet to see and organize the data, share on social media



# Playing

“Are we so involved in the facts and figures of family history that we forget to pull out a theme? And draw out the lessons we want others around us to learn?”

Bruce Feiler (RootsTech Keynote Address, Feb 2016)

## 7. ROLE PLAY AND PRETEND PLAY

Role play and pretend play enhance imaginative skills and are important parts of a child’s social-emotional development. The “Ancestor Puppet Theater” activity encourages children to place themselves in the past and imagine what life was like for their ancestors. The activity is an interactive way to introduce children to old photos depicting the people and places within their family’s history.

Role play can help children learn about and understand genealogical documents. The “Learning about the Census” activity introduces children to the logistics and goals of census-taking. Dress-up and role play can be fun, interactive ways to learn about historical figures, including our ancestors.

## 8. LITTLE FAMILY TREE APP

The Little Family Tree app was created to take all the wonderful family history that adults are putting in online family trees and bring it back down to a form that young children can interact with to learn about their heritage. Today’s children intuitively understand how to use touch devices such as smartphones and tablets. Little Family Tree brings a child’s personal family history to them through this learning medium in ten fun games and activities.

Playing Little Family Tree will help children learn to:

- Identify family members by name, relationship, and picture
- Understand who and where they come from
- Recognize and navigate a family tree

The data and photos used in the games comes from your online family tree at *FamilySearch* or *MyHeritage*. Download the app for FREE from your favorite mobile device app store. More information, tutorials and app store links at [www.littlefamilytree.com](http://www.littlefamilytree.com)

## 9. FAMILY MAP GAME

Using a map of the world and other maps relevant to your family, create a simple “Where in the World” family map and trivia game to teach children about the setting of their family’s history. Create cards with questions such as, “Where did Grandpa Dyer serve in the Army during WWII?” and “Where did Great-Grandmother emigrate from when she came to America?” Players place a marker on the map to answer. Children will enjoy playing a game that is personal to them while learning about their ancestors.

Social studies standards from the early grades through high school include geographical understanding. Help your children gain knowledge of maps, world locations, and cultures. As you continue to research your ancestors, you can create more trivia question cards to add to the game. For example: “The birth record for Grandfather Royston is kept in Lubbock County of this state, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest in the country.” Answer: Texas

For older children, connect to themes that they are already learning about in school. For example: “Grandpa Shults left his childhood home for California with a group of people nicknamed after this south central state during 1930s.” Answer: Oklahoma. Check the social studies [learning standards](#) in your area for inspiration.

