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# Families

## In Search of Our Past

Every family has a unique and fascinating past. The activities in this book will encourage students to investigate their families and their stories. They will learn the necessary skills that will help them seek out and discover this enthralling yet hidden past. When they have finished, they will know more about their families, and more importantly, they will know more about themselves.

Like an archaeologist, the students will have to examine many pieces of information, analyze them and fit them into the total puzzle of their family history. As they dig deeper into their families' past, they will also unearth rich knowledge about the culture, standards and ideas of days gone by.

Each section of this book deals with a different aspect of family history or with those relevant public records. Knowledge of how to use these records will help them discover and document their own personal story of how they became who they are. This book will provide them with all the necessary background knowledge, skills and tools for an intriguing and rewarding dig into their family history. How far they dig is up to them.



Name \_\_\_\_\_



# *Families*



In the space below, draw everyone whom you consider to be part of your family. Use stick figures to represent family members.

Look at your drawings. Did you include grandparents, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and cousins? Did you include relatives who have died?

Name \_\_\_\_\_



# Families



The preceding exercise helped you decide who makes up your family. Every family situation is different. Times have changed. Traditionally, a family was viewed as consisting of a father working at a job and a mother raising the children at home. This is no longer the most common family unit. Here are definitions of some family terms.

**nuclear family:** a family unit of parents and dependent children

**extended family:** a social unit of a father, mother, dependent children and other relatives (often representing several generations) living together in one household

**blended family:** a family unit created when two divorced or widowed parents with children marry

**adoptive family:** a family unit containing children legally added to household through adoption

**ancestor:** a person you are descended from, e.g., grandfather, great-grandmother, etc.

**descendant:** the offspring of an ancestor

Some family terms were used differently in diaries, letters and wills of the 1600s and 1700s. For instance, *brother* might have referred to a “brother in church,” rather than a blood brother. The term *sister* was often used in the same way. Even more common and vague was the term *cousin*. This term was used when talking about nearly any relative who was not as close as son, daughter, brother or sister.

Here are some terms of social rank used in the 1600s and 1700s.

**Mr.:** *Mr.* was used in colonial America as a title for men of high social standing who owned land or held an important civil office.

**Mrs.:** *Mrs.* appears frequently in old records as an abbreviation for *Mistress*, a title given to a girl of the 1600s who came from a socially prominent family. It was also given to married women.

**goodman/goodwife:** These titles were given to respected men and women in the Puritan community. These titles, however, did not rate quite as high as the more respected titles, *Mr.* and *Mrs.*

**deacon:** In Puritan New England, *deacon* was the highest ranking title because a deacon was the highest ranking member of the church. The Puritans had a devout respect for God and for those who served God and church.

**widow:** A widow was (and is) a woman whose husband has died.

**freeman:** Many people earned their passage to America by contracting to work for a certain number of years. This practice was called indenture. People who served out the contract period, usually three to seven years, were then released from their indentures. They became free. Freeman had the same rights as other free people.