

OUR AMERICAN JOURNEY

Telling Our Family Stories

One of the greatest gifts we can give our children and grandchildren is the story of our family's American journey. Whether we were already here as Native Americans, arrived as immigrants or were brought here as slaves, we all have a beginning to our American stories. We have been adding to those stories ever since. We gather at Thanksgiving grateful for the privileges we enjoy and mindful of the responsibilities we share as Americans. Where did your family's American journey begin and where are you now?

Consider the options below to help your family recall and record your American Journey stories. Start where you know the answers and begin your story there. Please take some time over the Thanksgiving holiday to share your family's American stories.

Option#1:

A Live Conversation at the Thanksgiving Table

Make a permanent record of your family's American story as the oldest child at the Thanksgiving table asks the oldest adult a few of the suggested interview questions during the meal. Video or audio record the conversation.

Option#2: Interviews in Advance

Have children interview elder family members using the suggested interview questions as a guide. Interviewers can use video, audio, or take notes. (see our suggestions for good video/audio platforms). Ask children to make presentations about what they learned at some point during the holiday.

OUR FAMILY'S AMERICAN JOURNEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who came to America first?
2. Where did they come from?
3. When did they come?
4. Why did they come?
5. How did they get here?
6. Did they tell you anything about life before coming to America? If so, what?
7. Did they come with anyone? Who? Why?
8. What did they bring with them when they came?
9. Where did they settle? Why?
10. Did anyone help them?
11. What was it like at first?
12. How did they make a living at first? Later?
13. How did life change overtime?
14. Did they join a church? Synagogue? Mosque? Other religious community?
15. Did they do volunteer work? If so, what? Why? Did they help others in their same immigrant community or family?
16. Did they serve in the military? In wartime?
17. Any love stories?
18. How did the family change overtime?
19. Any adventure stories you can re-tell?
20. What kind of educations did they have?
21. What did they value most about being American?
22. Do you have any mementos or photos of our ancestors?



Option#3:

Honoring the Memories of Those No Longer With Us

Ask participants to share stories about the people who are no longer present for your Thanksgiving. (See [A Memory Harvest](#)). Think about meals and other family traditions. For instance:

If you serve a green jello mold because Thanksgiving was Great Aunt Sally's favorite holiday and this was her special dish, make it a centerpiece of your celebration. Share a picture of Aunt Sally along with the recipe, and ask those who knew her to share one brief recollection as each person takes a serving (real or virtual) in her memory.

Option#4: A Thanksgiving Family Story Album

Create a family Thanksgiving album filled with family photos, stories, recipes, favorite menus, and other mementos of Thanksgiving. Add a page of family history each year, recalling births, deaths, weddings, anniversaries, graduations, and achievements. Attach a family tree.

Knowing our family roots helps ground us as our families spread out geographically, grow and change. Use <http://www.ancestors.com>, for help with your family records and genealogy.

[Ellis Island](#) was the gateway into America for millions of immigrants. If your family entered America here, try their excellent search engine. You may find the official entry document and ship register listing your ancestor(s) along with a picture of the ship they came in on.

Online Resources for Lasting Interview Memories

[StoryCorps](#) has wonderful tools to help families tell their stories, and since 2015, founder Dave Isay has sponsored the [Great Thanksgiving Listen](#) to encourage teens to use the Storycorps app to gather the stories of our nation's elders over the Thanksgiving Holiday.

Check out [Megilla.com](#) for a video based storytelling app (each video is 3 minutes or less). Can be initiated by an interviewer or be completed solo.

Books

[To Our Children's Children: Preserving Family Histories for Generations to Come](#) by Bob Greene and DG Fulford
[The Legacy Guide: Capturing the Facts, Memories, and Meaning of Your Life](#) by Carol Franco and Kent

Other Ideas

Put up a world map and mark the ancestral countries of origin for you and your guests. Mark all of the places in the US where you, your guests and family members have visited or lived. (You can do this virtually too!)

Who has traveled farthest? Moved the most? Where does everyone live now? What are the differences and similarities between places? Who has been in the US the longest? Who came here most recently? How do those stories differ?

There are so many ways to tell family stories. Think about the homes your family has lived in, jobs family members have had, or recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation. Tell the story of those homes, jobs or recipes and you have a new way of understanding your family over time.

Family stories help us to understand who we are and want to be. Research shows that children who know their family stories are more emotionally resilient. Part of raising great citizens is making sure that our children and grandchildren know what America means to our family. Enjoy learning about and sharing your family's American journey!

Thanks to our partner CMOM: The Children's Museum of Manhattan for their collaboration on "Raising Citizens." Please visit us on Facebook to share your experiences and visit Freedom's Feast again on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Have a safe and memorable Thanksgiving with friends and family.

