

# 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 sit at our Thanksgiving tables grateful for the privileges we enjoy and the responsibilities we share as Americans. Where did your family's American journey begin and where are you now?

These exercise options are designed to help your family recall and record your American Journey stories. Please take some time over the Thanksgiving holiday to recount your family's American stories.

### **Option#1:**

#### **A Live Conversation at the Thanksgiving Table**

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

### **Option#2:**

#### **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.

One way is through your family Thanksgiving meal traditions. 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 on the table. Put a picture of Aunt Sally next to it, along with the recipe and ask those who knew her to share one brief recollection as each person takes one spoonful in her memory.

### **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 over time?
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?
19. How did the family change over time?
20. Any adventure stories you can re-tell?
21. What kind of educations did they have?
23. What did they value most about being American?
24. Do you have any mementos or photos of our ancestors?



### Option#3: Interviews in Advance

Have children interview elder family members using the suggested interview questions as a guide. In person use video, take notes, or audio recorders. For long distance try phone or skype to connect. Ask children to make video presentations or write or talk about what they learned at some point during the holiday.

### Option#4: A Thanksgiving Family Story Album

Create a family Thanksgiving album filled with family photos, stories, recipes, favorite dinner menus, and other mementos of Thanksgiving. Add a page of family history each year, recalling important moments such as 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 this wonderful on-line resource for help with your family records and genealogy.

**Ellis Island** was the first gateway into America for millions of immigrants. If your family entered America here you may be able to use their excellent search engine to find the official entry document, ship register listing your ancestor(s) and a picture of the ship they came in on.

### Other Online Resources

**Storycorps.org** has wonderful tools to help families tell their stories.

**Realamericanstories.com** features many inspiring video stories from ordinary Americans about their family, work, heroes and why they love America.

**Proust.com** uses unusual and fun questions to help you tell and share family stories.

### 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 Lineback

[www.freedomsfeast.us](http://www.freedomsfeast.us)

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### Other Ideas

Put up a world map and use stickies to mark the ancestral countries of origin for you and your guests. Mark all of the places in the US where you and your guests and their family members have lived.

What do you notice? 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 many ways to tell family stories. For instance, think about the homes or places your family has lived in, the 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.

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

Thanks to our partner CMOM: The Children's Museum of Manhattan for their year-round 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 family and friends!

