
"FAMILY TREASURES"

TO THE TEACHER:

This project comes from the Canadian Museum of Civilization's **Family Treasures: Project Guidelines for Teachers, Students and Curators**.

This activity seeks to interest children in museums by demonstrating the link between family treasures and museum collections. The project fosters communication skills and enhances a number of study areas including history, literature and social studies.

Family Treasures is a most flexible and adaptable project. Your version can be as simple or as elaborate, as you choose. It would work well in a unit emphasizing the nature of and differences/similarities between families, local history, or Canadian culture and cultural preservation.

KEYS TO SUCCESS:

1. The term "treasure" (e.g. special things) should be defined so that every child can find one at home.
2. Active participation by family members is essential to this inter-generational project.
3. The "treasure hunt" should result in a product, whether it's a class *Family Treasures* book, incorporating children's research and photographs or drawings of their treasures; a display of the various treasures with accompanying written material; audio or video recordings of children discussing their findings, or a combination of any of these products.
4. Visit if possible, the local museum to make students aware of the relationship between family treasures and museum collections.

LAUNCHING THE PROJECT:

1. Send a letter home explaining that family involvement is essential.
2. Ask parents to select a family treasure which is important for personal reasons. Treasure should be something that the class can easily find in their home. For example: an embroidered shawl, pocket watch, cooking pot passed on from generation to generation, an old photo. If the treasure is large or fragile take a photo of it instead.

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3. Bring one or several of your own family treasures to class and tell the students why it is important to you. This will give the class an idea of what they should be looking for.
 4. Distribute guidelines to older students or interpret them for younger ones (see "*Family Treasures Guidelines for Students*").
 5. Be prepared to help the student who cannot find a family treasure. Suggest that parents could be interviewed about some special event in their lives—a piece of family folklore, a treasure in itself. If that's not the solution, then the student could bring something precious to him or herself.
 6. To make the connection between family treasures and museum collections, arrange for a class visit to the local museum, and look at objects on display.
 7. Think of incentives to spark student interest. You might invite a local celebrity to bring a special treasure to show the class, or a local journalist to demonstrate the art of interviewing. (A local journalist could also provide some media coverage for your project)
 8. Suggest older students do research in the school library to find background information about the places and the time periods from which their treasures came.

**"SHOWING OFF" YOUR
FAMILY TREASURES:**

1. Create a display like the ones you saw at the museum or arrange a class treasures exhibition and invite the whole school and student's families or co-operate with other teachers in your school to plan a "science fair" type of treasures exhibit.
2. Have students write text to go with their treasure.
3. Invite family members who own the treasure to talk about them during the exhibition.
4. Make a class treasure book with photos and. (see "*Compiling a Class Family Treasures Book*" on the next page).
5. Make a video of students talking about their treasures. A parent might be able to assist you. Try and incorporate this into the exhibit to make it a multi-media event.

**COMPILING A CLASS
FAMILY TREASURES
BOOK:**

7. Explore the possibility of transferring your exhibit to the local museum, community centre or library.
1. Make pages out of brightly coloured construction paper cut to fit a three ring binder.
2. Students can hand write or use a computer to type their stories.
3. Take two photos of the treasure if possible: one close up and the other of the student with it. If photography is not a possibility, students could do drawings of their treasure.
4. Ask students to design their own page(s) once you have decided the overall structure of the book. Make borders for the pages and have the kids cut their photos and stories in imaginative shapes and then paste them on.
5. Encourage student creativity by asking for suggestions about the design of the cover and title page (a collage is one possibility).
6. Decide on the information to be put on the cover or title page (book name, school, class division, year, dedication, etc.) and on the end pages (a "thank-you" to volunteers, a class photo, biographies of the student "authors", a summary of what the class gained from the project, quotes from students, etc.).

NOTE:

Estimate all foreseeable costs of book production before you begin the project. Who will pay for paper, binder, film (purchase and developing) and lamination?

Parents could help in taking photographs, typing/word-processing, punching holes in pages to fit the ring binder, lamination, etc.

Allow six to eight weeks for research, writing, typing, photography, design and lay-out, lamination, etc.

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GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS:

You are invited to go on a very special treasure hunt-in your own home, or perhaps your grandparents' or some other family member's.

First, you have to find a family treasure. Then the real detective work begins. Why is the treasure so precious to the person who owns it? What is the story behind the treasure?

You will interview people in your family: your parents, your grandparents, maybe an aunt or uncle. This kind of research is called oral history, for it involves listening to people's stories and recording them. It's also material history because it deals with objects and the reasons why they are important.

Through your detective work- your research -you will be doing something exciting and important: discovering part of your family's history and writing it down so that this story will not be forgotten.

CHOOSING A TREASURE:

1. Give your family as much time as possible to find a treasure for this project. Talk to your relatives as well as your parents, if you can.
2. The treasure should be important to somebody, for *personal* reasons. If it has been passed down from one person to another in your family, that's terrific. But the treasure doesn't have to be very old or worth any money. It could be a child's toy, a souvenir teaspoon, a watch, a prayer mat, a war medal, an embroidered shawl, a cooking pot, a tool set, a necklace, a family photograph, a book...What ever it is, it should matter a lot to the owner.
3. Your family treasure should be something you can easily take to school for "show and tell". That means it should be small and easy to carry. Please don't choose things that are breakable or worth lots of money.
4. If however, the only family treasure available is large or fragile-a chair, or big china bowl for example -you could take a photograph of it and bring the picture to school.
5. Find out if your family has any photographs, newspaper clippings, letters, etc. about the treasure. The more you know about your treasure ahead of time, the better your interview will be.

INTERVIEWING THE FAMILY:

1. When you have found the right treasure, write out your questions ahead of time and show them to the person you will interview. People need time to think...and remember.
2. Choose the right time to do your interview, when people are relaxed and in a good mood. People who are tired or hurried won't give you the necessary time or attention. Ask your parents or relatives when you could get together. Tell them you need about half an hour. (You might need longer.)
3. You may find it's best to interview two -or more- family members at the same time. One person's memories may "trigger" another's. But if the person you really want to talk to is shy, and won't say much when other people are around, do the interview with her/him alone.
4. Find a quiet place to do your interview, away from the telephone and the doorbell. Turn off the radio and the TV. Close the window if traffic is going by. You want people's full attention!
5. Use an audio cassette recorder if one is available-and if the person being interviewed agrees. A small machine with a built-in microphone is best. People often forget that the machine is there.
6. If you don't have a tape recorder- or if someone refuses to be recorded -don't worry. You can take notes. Try to write down important things in the person's own words, if possible.
7. If you are using a recorder, test it before you use it to make sure it is working. Check again during the interview. Put a cassette which runs for at least thirty minutes, so you won't have to interrupt the conversation to turn the tape over. Interruptions can spoil the mood of the interview.
8. Whether you are recording the interview or taking notes, be a good listener! Make sure someone's finished what they have to say before you jump in with another question.
9. When you've finished your interview, play back the recording or read your notes aloud for the person to hear. It's possible they will remember something extra to tell you.
10. Your notes or cassette are an important family record. Your family will be glad one day that you did the interview. Write down the date, the place, and the person's name, and note it on the cassette label and case.

WRITING THE STORY:

1. If you have recorded the interview, listen carefully for “key” phrases or sentences which you can quote. Using people’s actual words is the essence of oral history, and that’s why oral historians record interviews whenever possible.
2. If grandfather said, “That wolf and I were eyeball to eyeball for two minutes, but it felt like two hours,” it’s important to put that in your story. Oral history brings family stories to life!

SOME QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK:

1. Who owns the treasure now?
2. Why is it important to you?
3. How old is it?
4. Who was the first person in your family to own it?
5. How did that person obtain it?
6. Was it obtained in Canada? If so, what part of Canada? What particular place?
7. If it came from somewhere else, from what country, and what particular place?
8. Was the treasure handmade or mass-produced?
9. Who made it?
10. What is it made of?
11. What was the treasure originally used for?
12. Is it still being used in the same way?
13. Did you know anything about this family treasure before you started this project?