Documenting Family Memories

Leader’s Guide

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Lesson Objectives

As a result of participation in this program, participants will be able to:

• Identify a variety of ways to document family memories.
• Learn practical strategies for beginning to document family memories.
• List at least two projects they plan to develop to document family memories.
• Plan a family meeting to discuss the family's ideas for documenting family memories.

Handouts

Materials to be made available should include: (1) Leader’s Guide – one per club; (2) Member’s Guide – one per member; (3) Optional activity handouts – one set per club, including the Chronology Activity, Videotape Activity, Oral History Activity, and Essay Activity; (4) Evaluation – one per member.

Time Schedule

Introduction (5 minutes)

Roll Call Ideas:

• Ask the questions: (1) What are some family memories you've experienced that have been most meaningful to you? (2) What are some family memories that you would like to preserve for the future?
• Share a meaningful personal experience with either experiencing a unique family memory or documenting a family memory.
Key Concepts —
Ways to Document Family Memories

To Say:
Learning to swim, becoming engaged, sharing presents at Christmas—these are the types of family memories that we love to share and remember. Often we want our children and grandchildren to know about the lessons and memories of our lives, but we have not taken steps to capture these memories and make them available to future generations. How can we capture these memories and document them for our families to remember? This lesson is intended to share some ideas and learning activities related to documenting family memories.

Going through the lesson:

To Do:

Go through material on “Ways to Document Family Memories.”

Discuss in your own words the following:
(1) Non-written history
(2) Easily written records
(3) Longer written records

What is the experience of participants with such ways of documenting family memories? What would they like to learn more about?

You may use any variety of props, examples, or materials to demonstrate these different types of records. Since we cannot provide journals, letters, etc., each FCE leader should take the lead in either (a) gathering appropriate examples, or (b) encouraging lesson participants to bring examples of the records identified to share.
Learning Activity —
Chronology Activity; Videotape Activity; Oral History Activity; Essay Activity

To Say:
A variety of ways to document family history have been mentioned; we would like to introduce one or two that might be fun and interesting.

To Do:
Have participants engage in a learning activity:
   a - Chronology Activity
   b - Videotape Activity
   c - Oral History Activity
   d - Essay Activity

Discuss the goals they would like to set for documenting family memories.

Do Lesson Evaluation
Conduct the lesson evaluation that is provided.

Ideas for Club Activities
• Sponsor an activity where participants bring different family records and histories to share with one another and discuss ideas or projects they might work on for documenting family memories.
• Set up a booth or a display which highlights different methods of documenting family memories.
• Take a trip to a local museum, library or other venue which highlights family history.
• Invite a speaker to come and discuss ways to document family memories.

Ways to Document Family Memories

Many people don’t compose their personal histories because they think the only acceptable kind of history is a long, written story. And they do not know how to write such a story well, or for other reasons they simply do not feel inclined to put words on paper.

Even people who are able and willing to write often are unable to produce a lengthy (or even concise) life summary.

The fact is that written personal history is but one of many different kinds of valuable personal history that a person might compile. A written history is highly desirable; would that we all could write one. Yet even a written history can take many different forms; an individual might well be able to compose one of them with confidence.

Nonwritten History

Photographs
People often photograph those events and people in their lives which they count most important. That is why photographs, properly mounted and labeled, are priceless personal history.

Scrapbook Materials
Scrapbook materials are a vital part of one’s history because, as with photographs, people tend to save mementos related to the most significant happenings of their lives. Nevertheless, they pose a problem because they come in such a variety of shapes and sizes that they are hard to sort, mount and preserve.

Drawings, lists, charts, diagrams, collections, arts, crafts and other evidence of hobby and pastime activities
Graphic evidence of what people do in their ordinary or spare time reveals much about those people. Much of the essence of who we are is expressed in such regular activities.
Oral History
People reluctant to write their life histories (including perhaps yourself) may be willing to “talk” them. Through the convenient cassette (or even video-cassette) recorder, the best parts of your life, if not your entire life story, can be preserved for many years.

Collection of documents and other official records
Records and documents represent official or important events in your life. When systematically collected and organized, they can tell much about you that is significant.

Easily Written Records

Chronologies
A chronology is simply a list of important events in a time sequence. Chronologies are valuable because they provide a quick historical overview.

Transcribed Oral History
Transcription of the spoken word from recording tape into writing, though a tedious and time-consuming task, is nevertheless worth the effort. However, many changes must be made in the conversational style to turn it into coherent written history. The transcriber should retain as much as possible the essential and authentic wording of the informant while making appropriate modifications that assure readability.

A Diary (day-book type)
A diary is a highly concise record of daily activities. It usually mentions major appointments and activities without commenting on them. Entries are usually very factual. A diary takes but a few minutes daily to compose.

Letters
Letters are among the historian's most prized resources. Letters are typically personal, candid, and detailed, simply because people write letters when they have something important or personal to communicate.

Longer Written Records

The Journal
The journal is the most valuable personal record you can keep. Even if you do not write a separate personal history, others will be able to write one for you, based on your journal entries.

The personal essay
An essay is a brief piece of writing (100-1000 words or so) that focuses on a single thought or feeling, idea or event. More and more people, awed by the task of producing a lengthy, continuous personal history, are finding the essay the answer to their yearning to produce some record. They nearly always describe the same procedure: “Last Sunday I wrote about how I met my husband. This Sunday I plan to write about my feelings the day President John F. Kennedy was shot. I try to write on a separate single topic about once a week.”

A concise history
A concise summary of the main events in your life, and your thoughts and feelings about those events, might be written in 25-50 pages, if done according to a simple and clear plan. Several organization options would work:
- Chronological
- Topical
- Chronological-topical
- Thematic

A complete history
A complete life story might run from 100 to several hundreds of pages, depending on your seriousness as a writer and your desire to leave a complete record of your life.