Career Family Tree

Most people have a solid understanding of their family tree, but how many of us have ever stopped to consider what career paths our relatives have chosen? Some career callings run strong—for instance, if there is one educator in the family, chances are good that there are many!

This activity is a way for students to explore their past to make connections to their future. Learning about family history, especially as it pertains to careers, can give us new perspectives, help us learn more about choices other relatives have faced, and discover how others have dealt with America's changing work environment.

The example Career Tree provided is the simplest way to demonstrate the purpose of this assignment. Given the diversity and complexity of American families, use your creativity to create structures that work for you and your own students.

Directions

Create a family tree that stretches back at least three generations. For each person, include all the jobs or careers s/he held throught their life. Students will learn a great deal from this activity, including:

- What careers run in the family?
  - Is/was there a family business?
  - Were children 'expected' to follow in their parents' footsteps?
- How many held one stable job throughout their lifetime?
- Did anyone shift careers often? By choice or were they forced to by their circumstances?
- Are there many entrepreneurs in your family? Consider:
  - Side jobs such as selling material from catalogs.
  - Volunteer efforts that pursue a passion like political activism.
- Many generations of women may have stayed at home to take care of the family. Remember, that is a career of its own!
- If you can go back far enough to when women started joining the workforce, did your relatives work for financial security or personal reasons? Were they able to work in positions that interested them or were they pigeonholed into 'women's jobs'?
- What resistance or barriers did your ancestors face and were they able to overcome them?
  - Racism, sexism, ageism, lack of education?
  - If jobs were made obsolete, were they able to get training for new careers?

Career Family Tree

Example

8 Barack
Teacher
Professor
Author

4 Darcy
Lawyer
Non-profit
executive director

9 Michelle
Lawyer
Judge

2 Lance
Teacher
Stay-at-home
Father
Author
Mayor

10 Henry
Computer Programmer
.

5 Elizabeth
Librarian
Media Specialist
IT Consultant

11 Anne
Stay-at-home Mother
Artist
Direct salesperson

1 Arthur
?!?!?!

12 Arthur
Carpenter
*Opened a furniture store
Artisanal woodcrafter

6 George
*Managed family
store
Furniture maker

13 Molly
Nurse
.

Jack
(Step-father)
Teacher

3 Gwen
Chef
*Opened
catering company
w/Martha

14 Franklin
Coal miner
Automotive line worker
Custodian

7 Martha
Chef
*Managed family
restaurant

*Opened catering
company w/Gwen

15 Eleanor
Chef

*Opened a restaurant

StudentCareer INSIGHTS
EXPLORE • EQUIP • ENGAGE