

TEACHING ABOUT FAMILIES



Ideas for Primary School History Teachers

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Acknowledgments

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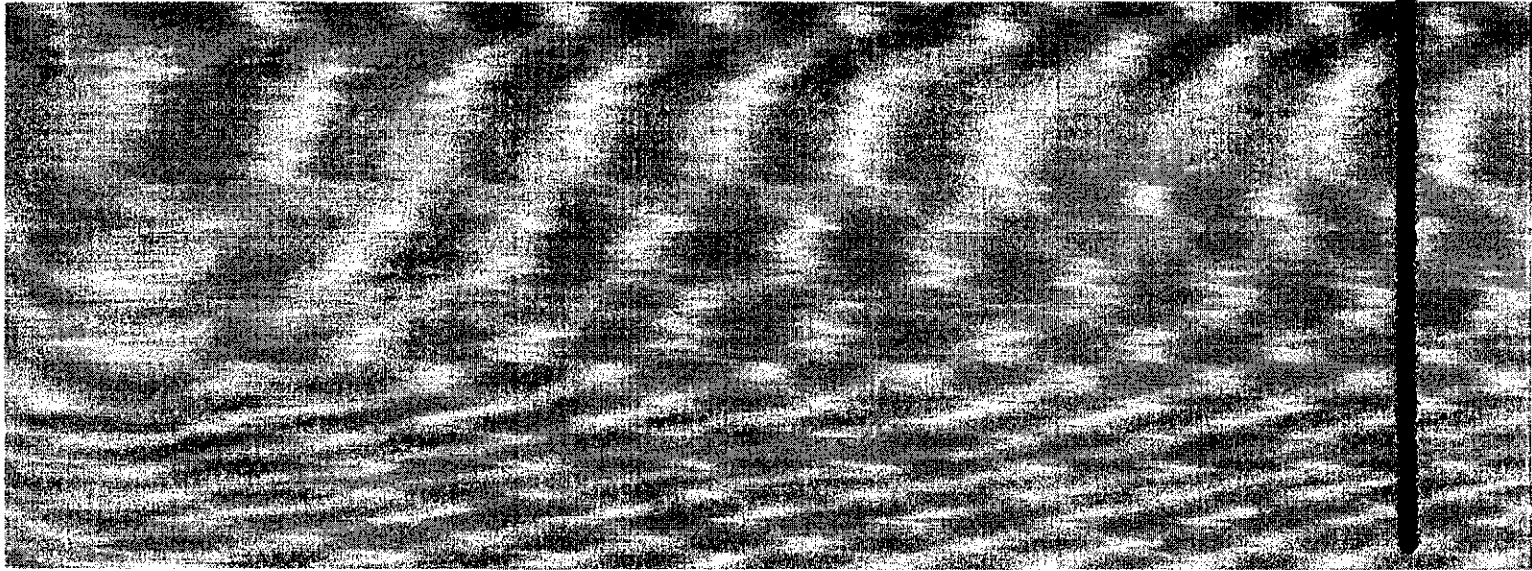
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INTRODUCTION

Questions and answers about family history

Why do family history at school?

Family history gives pupils a chance to learn about the past in a way that is meaningful to them. Most history is about things they know nothing about (especially when they are young). In family history they know something already. Family history is not history that has to be learned, it has to be investigated, and pupils can enjoy finding out about the history of their families and the families of other members of the class.

Family history can help pupils to develop a sense of worth, a sense of identity, a sense that we all "belong", whatever kinds of families we have. It can develop respect for the differences between pupils and an understanding of why those differences exist. For the teacher, it provides an opportunity to get to know pupils and their families better.

What is different about family history?

Unlike other school history, family history has no particular content. The facts and information differ from pupil to pupil, class to class and school to school. The teacher's role is not to tell the pupils the history but to let them find it out themselves and to help them to make a record of it.

What problems are there with family history?

Because family history is about the families of the pupils in the class, it can be a very sensitive subject. School history is usually about people who lived long ago, so one can't hurt their feelings. But family history is different. It is very easy for the feelings of pupils or members of their families to be hurt, either by asking questions that no-one can (or wants to) answer, or by comparing their families unfavourably with other families in the class. Teachers have to be careful to protect the feelings and attitudes of all the pupils in the class. It might even happen that a pupil does not wish to do family history as it is too hurtful or because there are too many problems to be faced.

One of the most difficult aspects of family history is to answer the question "What is a family?", in such a way that no pupil in the class feels left out, or that he or she does not have a 'proper' family. This is why the first thing to do in family history is to help the class find out about different kinds of families, to show that everyone has a family - and that all families are different.

What is the aim of family history?

Family history gives pupils a sense that they are part of history, that they and their families have a place in history. Another important aim is to help pupils to derive a range of skills. These include: increasing their vocabulary, creative expression, investigation, interpretation of different kinds of evidence, the sense of time (and dates), and thinking for themselves.

How can family history be used to promote mutual understanding?

Mutual understanding through history includes:

- ◆ fostering self-respect and respect for others
- ◆ improving relationships between people of differing cultural traditions
- ◆ understanding conflict and knowing how to deal with it
- ◆ developing a knowledge and appreciation of how people, communities and societies are dependent on each other.

Family history can help achieve all of these aspects. It is not culture-bound, as so much other history is. All cultures and traditions can be appreciated and valued equally.

Where did the ideas in this booklet come from?

The Primary History Project team held two workshops with Standard 2 / Grade 4 teachers at the University of Cape Town and the Uluntu Centre, Guguletu (in conjunction with the Primary Science Programme) in 1995. The booklet contains the results of these workshops. As was the case with the workshops, the booklet is divided into three sections: an introduction to family history, ideas for how pupils can find out about family history (do research) and ideas for written exercises and activities (which are the records of what they have done). Examples of work done by pupils were contributed by the teachers in the Primary History Project.

How should the booklet be used?

The emphasis of the booklet is on 'doing' activities, as explained on the following two pages. Skills can only be developed by pupils doing things for themselves. Pupils should be allowed enough opportunity to express their own opinions and to work things out for themselves. Read through the whole booklet first to gain a sense of what will work well in your classroom, and what preparation you will need to do beforehand. It is suggested that the booklet will take about eight weeks to teach thoroughly.

The booklet is NOT, however, intended as a blueprint or recipe for a teaching method. Please adapt the activities and material to suit yourself and experiment with other, perhaps better, ideas. This is very important!

The success of this approach depends on careful preparation: having ready enough of everything you need, preparing your pupils in advance for their next family history lesson, and taking trouble to decorate the classroom with their work when they have completed it.

This booklet contains some new ideas about how to teach history in the primary school. The best way to explain the methods is to put them next to the well-known methods, as in the table on the following page.

OLDER METHODS

1. Teachers do almost all the talking. Pupils are expected to keep quiet most of the time.

2. Pupils work on their own.

3. Pupils learn by repeating and by copying down.

4. Facts are given to pupils to learn.

For example: 'A family consists of a father and mother and their children.'

5. Facts do not change. They are always the same, and the history textbooks always contain correct facts.

NEW METHODS

1. Pupils are encouraged to talk, either to the person next to them or to a small group of pupils. This helps them form their own ideas and gives them an opportunity to find out if they understand things properly.

2. Pupils work together with other pupils.

3. Pupils learn in other ways as well. They learn by talking, by writing their own writing and by doing, such as playing games, acting and making things.

4. Facts are not always given to the pupils. They sometimes have to find them themselves, or decide for themselves what the facts are. Learning is a process of developing personal skills, not just memorisation.

For example: Pupils could decide that a family does not have to have a father and a mother.

5. Some facts do change. New information can change what is written in a textbook. Many of the facts in history depend on the point of view of the person. If the point of view changes, then the fact can also change.

For example: From the point of view of a pupil who has no parents, a family might consist only of sisters and brothers and grandparents.



Time: 1 hour

Preparation: Read through the lesson

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

WEEK ONE

Introducing families

This lesson gets your pupils talking about lots of different families that they know

What you need : blackboard, chalk OR newsprint, crayons

Class organisation : pupils will work with you as a class or you can get them to work in groups

ACTIVITY I

In groups, or as a class, ask your students to think of families under various headings such as:

- ◆ Families on TV
 - ◆ Families in books
 - ◆ Families in the news
 - ◆ Families in fairy stories, tales and legends
 - ◆ Royal families
 - ◆ Cartoon families
 - ◆ Families in songs
- (add any more you can think of)



It doesn't matter if this takes time. Don't be tempted to give the answers. You'll see how pupils gain confidence as they realise that what they say is taken seriously.

ACTIVITY 2

Get the children to give you the names of the families they thought of. Write all the names up on the board.

TV

The Foresters
Hortons
Simpsons (Bart)
Mhlorgo

News

Mandelas
Sexwales
Simpsons (OU)

Books & Legends

Goldilocks
Demarana &
Demezane
Tselane
Unamahamie

Royal Families

Charles & Di
Zwelithini
Dalirayambo

Music

Jacksons
Fassies

Animals

Nija Turtles
Lion King

Cartoons

Tomcats
Denis the Menace
Simpson
Peanuts

In our class someone said
'normal' families - what is a
'normal' family - are any
families the same?

Encourage discussion and
comments about the families
as you write on the board.

ACTIVITY 3

Once you have many names on the board you could ask your class to think about different ways of sorting the families - for example they could group the single-parent families together, or divorced families, or families in conflict.

This is what a group of teachers put together

WEEK TWO

Talking and writing down what a family is

It is easy to give your pupils a definition of a family. However a definition of a family should not leave anyone in the class out - those with single parents, those who live with aunts and uncles, those who are adopted. Working with your class to get a definition includes everybody and values everybody's experiences equally.

What you need : blackboard, chalk, sets of pictures.

These pictures could be:

- ◆ photostats (see next page)
- ◆ pictures cut out of magazines and photocopied
- ◆ pictures from newspapers and magazines you have collected
- ◆ pictures which the pupils have drawn beforehand

Class organisation : pupils will work in groups and then together as a class

ACTIVITY 1

Give each group a set of pictures to look at.

Ask the students to look at the pictures and say if the pictures are of 'families'. They can discuss this in their groups.

Each group must then tell the class what they think a family is.

...in. Children's of pictures.
...and newspapers. Try
...the pictures are not all
...are varied enough
...and debate.

*If groups disagree, encourage them to challenge each other.
Say: Group A, would you agree with that definition? Why do you have something different?*

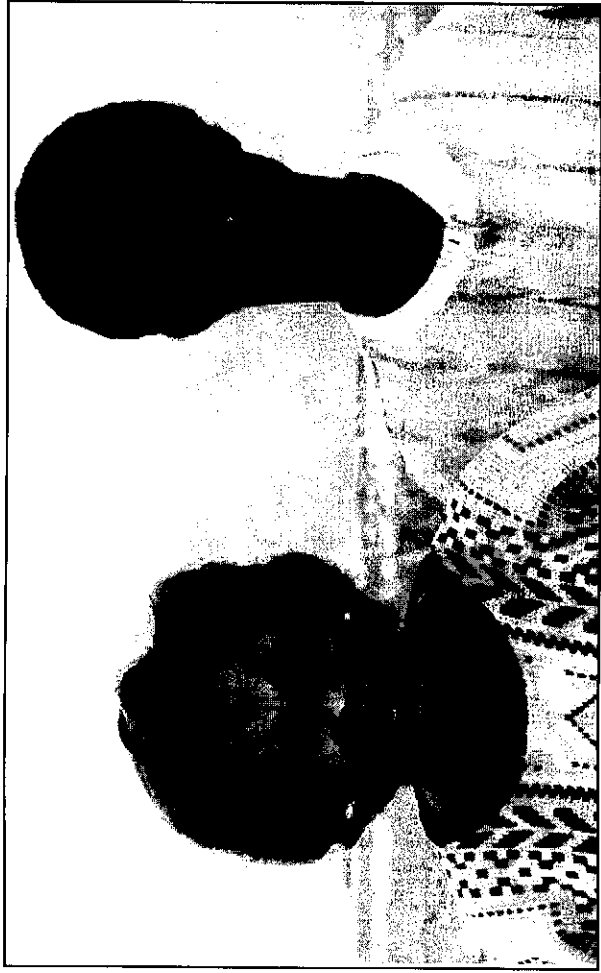


Photo: Jan Bernat



Photo: Jerry Altschuler

ACTIVITY 2

Write on the board: **A family is...** and then write up all the children's answers.

Together as a class choose one definition or work out a definition of a family from the above descriptions. It must be a definition that includes all the descriptions, so no-one is left out. This definition is then stuck up in the classroom for the children to refer to for the lessons that follow.

This is what a group of teachers said **A family is:**

A family is:

People that love and take care of each other

plus: caring, sharing, security for a child

a group of related people who share fruitful communication with each other

a group of people who share strong feelings for each other

a group of all kinds of people with a bond who live together in any form of shelter

a mother and a father

a strong bond and feelings of love and protection between people that stay together or not

There is no right answer, so don't choose the better answers - write them all up. In this way children see that they are taken seriously, and they feel valued.

RESEARCHING THE FAMILY

WEEK THREE

A bag full of information

How do historians find out about people and their families long ago?
What things do they need to tell them how people lived in the past?
They need to look at things those people used in their daily lives. This gives them a clearer picture of what those lives were like.
This lesson gets children to work as historians.

What you need: Put various items that could belong to a family today in a bag or box. For example we put a hat, doll, apron, umbrella, trousers, tie, pair of child's shoes in our bag.

Classroom organisation: Pupils work in groups.

ACTIVITY 1

Tell the class that they are going to work out something about a family. Bring out the objects, from your bag, one by one. Each group discusses the object and writes down who they think it belonged to, and what they used it for.



Time: 1 hour

Preparation: Read through the lesson.
Collect a few items that could belong to a family and put them in a bag or box.



ACTIVITY 2

Ask each group to describe the family. You could use questions like:

How many people in the family?

What do they do?

Are they rich or poor?

ACTIVITY 3

Get each group to read out their answers and discuss what is similar and what is different between their descriptions.

Most of our groups said:

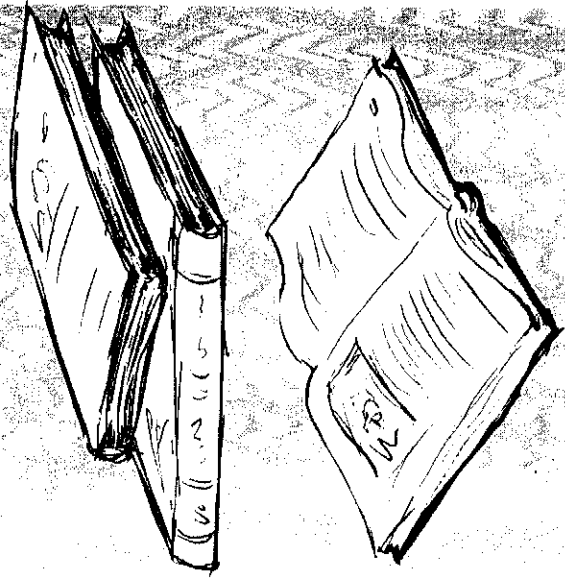
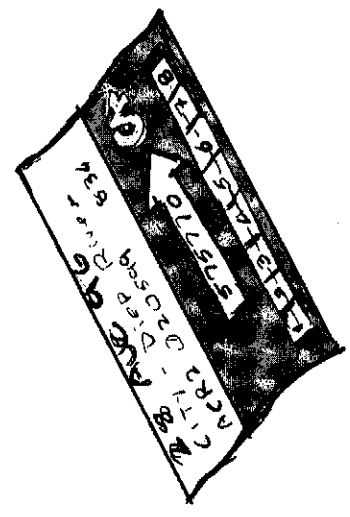
There is a mother, father and a baby girl.

The father works, (tie, hat) the mother stays at home (apron), rich because luxuries like handbag, good quality shoes, they live in a place where it rains (umbrella).

However, other groups had different answers that could not be proved wrong: some groups said the trousers belonged to an older son, others said it was a single parent family, a mother and two children, and the hat and tie belonged to a boyfriend! There is no right answer!

Variations - to replace or supplement the previous lesson

- a) Ask a staff member or two to bring some items from home. Show these to the pupils and ask who they think the items belong to.
- b) This is an activity that might be a bit difficult to manage in a big class.
 - 1. Ask each child to find five items at home that show something about them or their family. The child must put these into a packet and bring the packet to school. (the items can be things like bus tickets or books, or a running shoe or a music tape.) They should not be expensive - everything tells a story.
 - 2. Ask the children to put their packets on the desk.
 - 3. Each child then passes their packet on, about two places away from where they sit. Each child ends up with someone else's packet.
 - 4. Tell them to look at everything in the packet work out what the things tell them about the person. They must then make up a few sentences about the person whose things are in the packet.
 - 5. Get each child to read out their sentences. The class can guess whose packet it was.
 - 6. The owner of the box/packet could respond to his/her history.



WEEK FOUR

Interviews

The family interview is aimed at finding out from an older person how he or she lived many years ago.

It is very tempting to give pupils the questions they must ask the older person. Much of the value of this lesson lies in the discussion that goes with the pupils' own search for the right questions.

You will need: picture of an old person

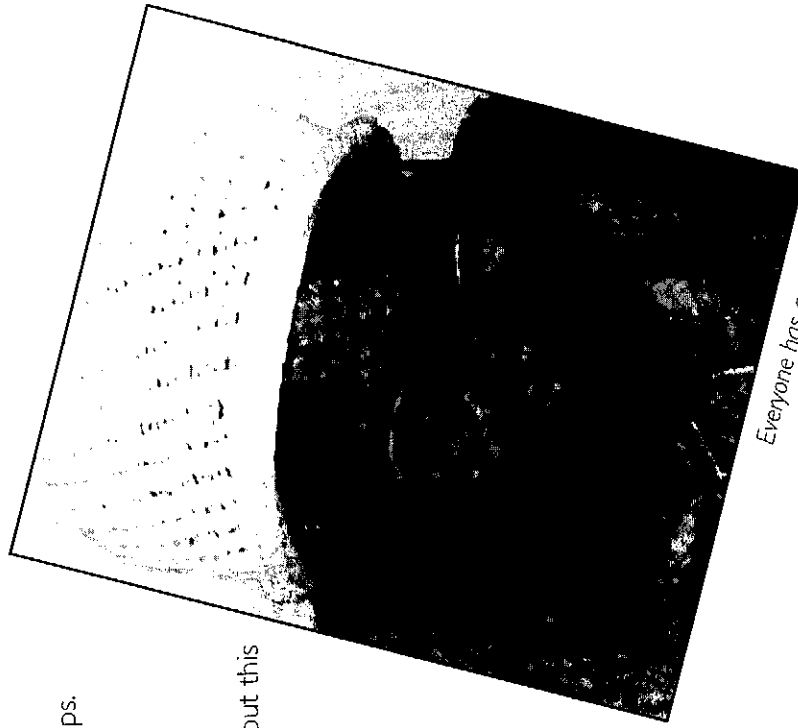
Classroom organisation: pupils work in groups.

ACTIVITY 1

Show the pupils a picture of an older person.

Ask the children: What do we want to know about this person?

Write all the answers on the board.



Everyone has a story to tell!



Time: 1 hour then about 40 mins next day

Preparation: Read through the lesson and find a picture of an older person



It is important that you are sensitive to your pupils and their families as some may wonder about certain questions coming from school.

- ✓ Who is she?
- ✓ Where was she born?
- ✓ Customs and traditions when she was young .
- ✓ Her contribution to the community .
- ✓ What important event in history was happening in history when she was born ?
- ✓ Her contribution to the community - her achievements .
- ✓ Where did she work?
- ✓ Why does she look like she does?
- ✓ What were the worst and best times of her life?
- ✓ Is she rich or poor?
- ✓ Marriage / how many children.
- ✓ How many cows for lobola?
- ✓ Can she work?
- ✓ Does she work away from home?
- ✓ Where did she bank her money?

These were the ones suggested at the workshop

ACTIVITY 2

Then ask the students: What questions must we ask in order to find these things out?

Write down the specific questions on the board.



Children making their own books

- When were you born?
- What does your name mean - why did your parents give you that name?
- What was the important story in your time?
- How did you live in the past compared to today?
- Are the customs the same today as they were when you were young?
- What did you do that was good for your people?
- What was the worst time in your life?
- What was the best time in your life?

ACTIVITY 3

As a whole class, choose about four of the best questions. (or you can ask the pupils to choose about four themselves.)

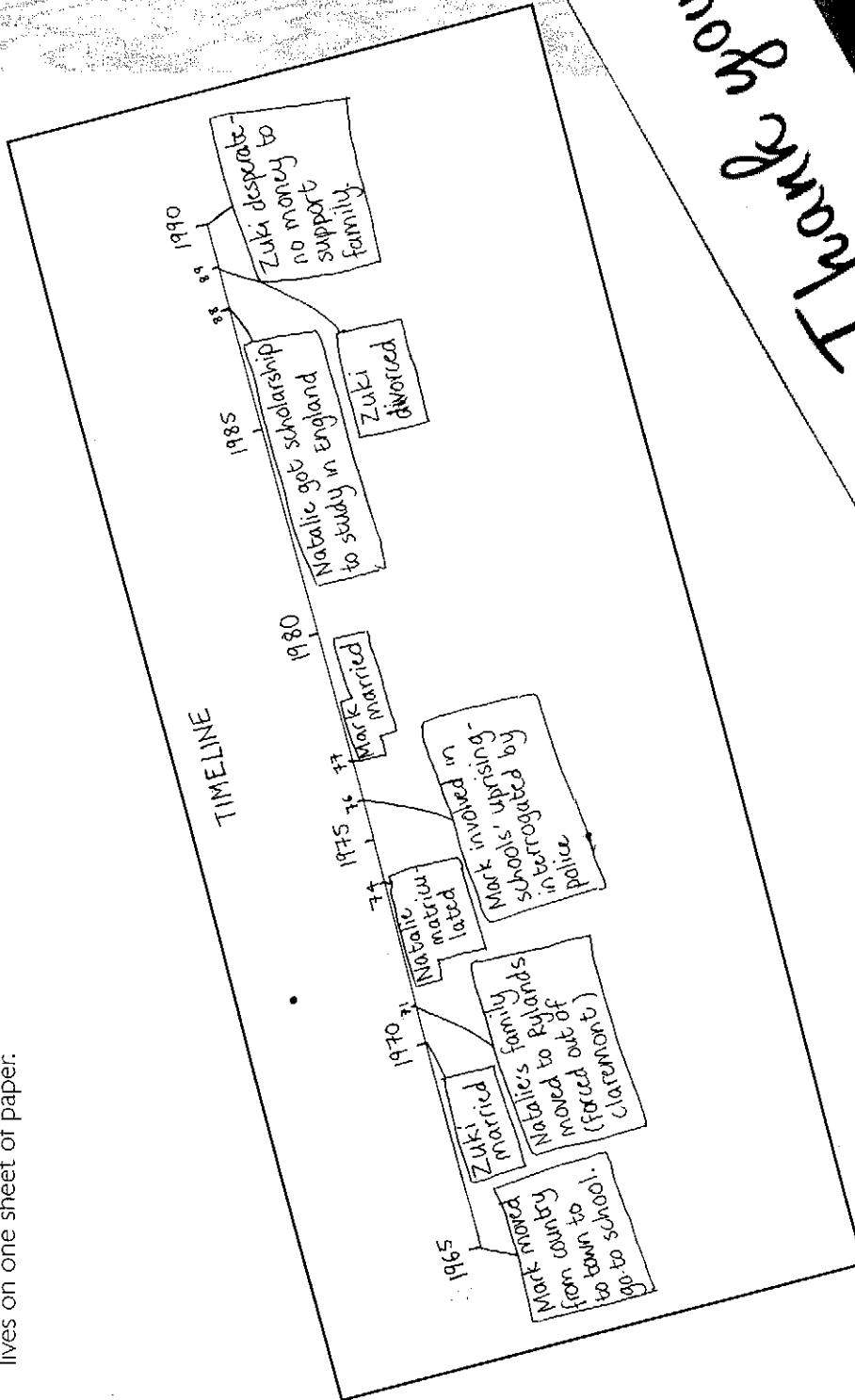
The pupils write down these questions in their notebooks and do the interviews with an adult at home.

ACTIVITY 4

When they bring their answers back there are various ways of recording them. You could choose and adapt one or two of these ideas.

- ◆ Each child could write out their interview neatly on a piece of paper and each group could put their interviews together to form a little book that other groups can read.
- ◆ The individual accounts could be put up in the classroom so everyone could read them.

◆ If appropriate each group could compile a big timeline with important events from all their interviewees lives on one sheet of paper:

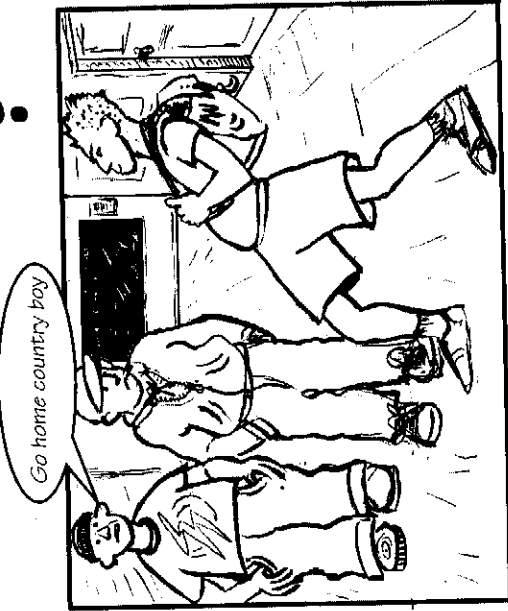


Thank you

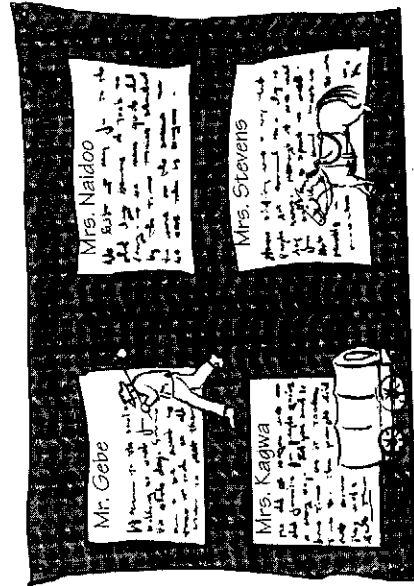
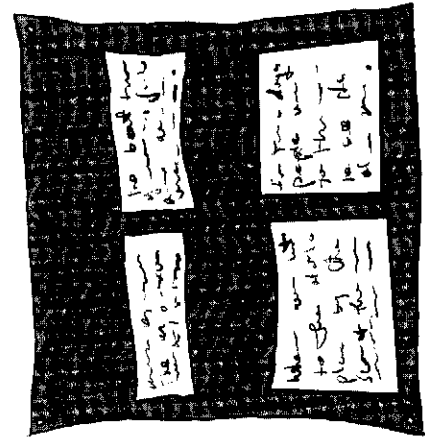
◆ Each child could write a letter thanking the person they interviewed.

?

◆ Each group could choose a story from the interviews to act out

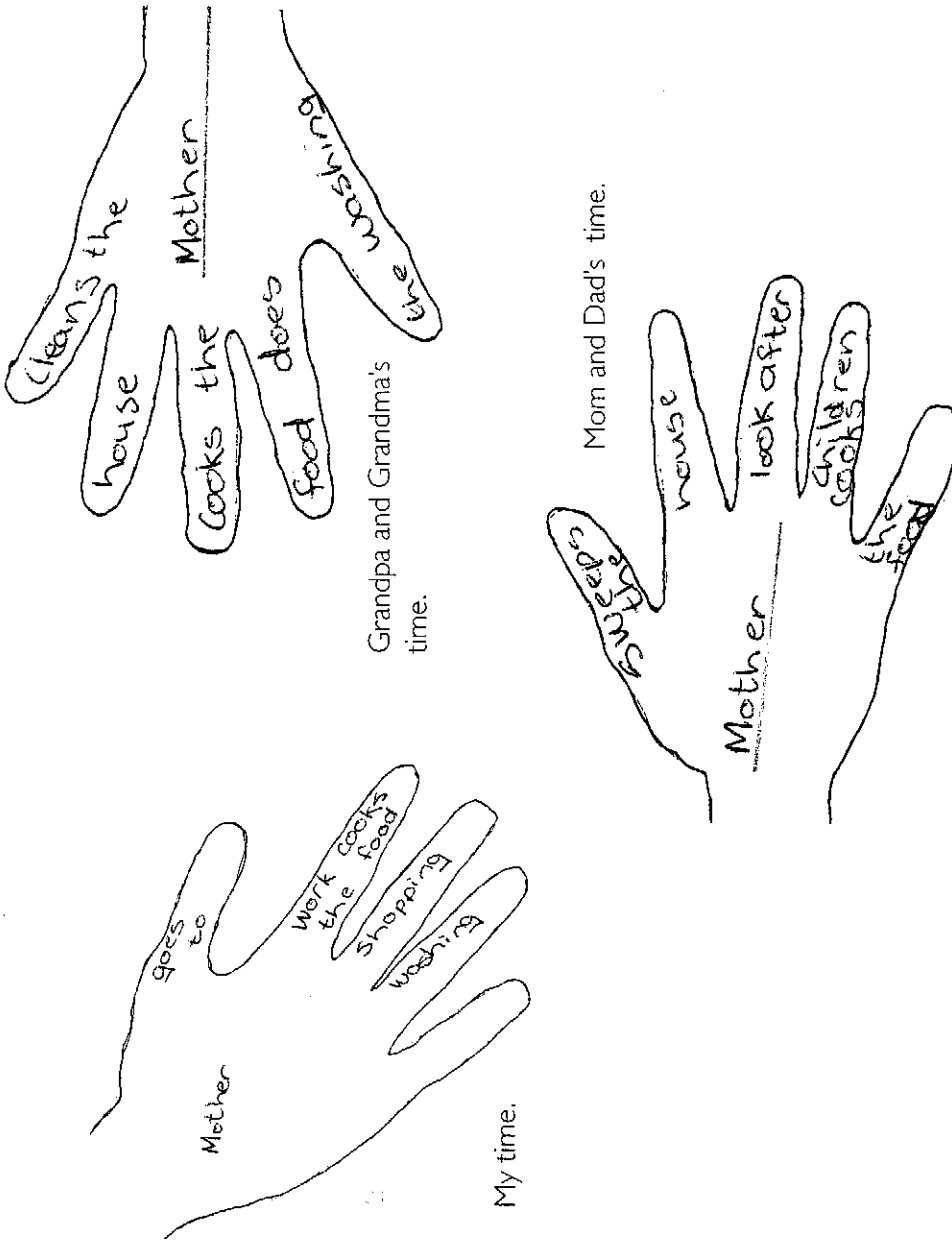


◆ If each child's questions were the same, another idea is to get the children to cut up their interviews and give all the answers to one question to one group, and the answers to another to the next group and so on. The groups then stick all the different answers to the same question together on a big piece of paper, and draw pictures to illustrate the stories.



Additional activity

The pupils go home and ask a parent or a guardian about the work that their family did. They then compare this to the work family members do now. This can be illustrated like this:



This can be done for each family member.



Time: 1 hour

Preparation: Read through the lesson.

RECORDING FAMILIES

WEEK FIVE

A family diagram

Many people use the traditional family tree for a family diagram. However this does not include everybody. In this lesson children work out a diagram that fits themselves.

Classroom organisation: pupils can work in groups or individually.

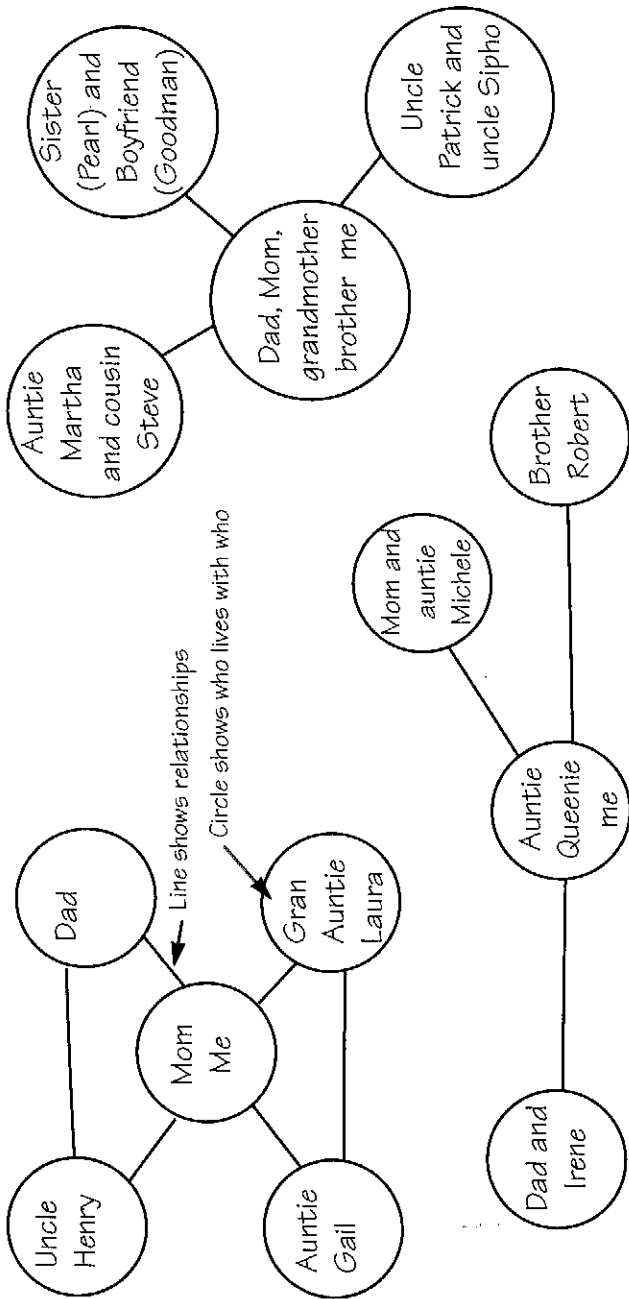
ACTIVITY 1

1. Remind your children of their definition of a family. Put it up where they can see it.
2. Ask the pupils in their groups: now draw a diagram or a sort of a 'map' that shows how all the people in a family can be linked together.

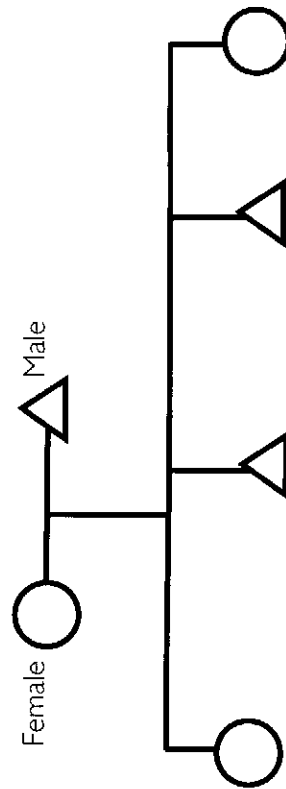
OR

1. Get students to write down who is in their family.
2. Ask them to try to work out a diagram to show how the members of their family are linked to one another.
3. Remind them that their diagram must also fit their definition of a family

If the children struggle to work out a diagram this is one idea that you could give them:



At the end of the lesson show them the traditional diagram of a family tree and explain that you did not use it because it doesn't work for all families.





Time: 1 hour

Preparation: Collect old magazines and newspapers that the children can cut up.

Try to make sure that there is a variety of material, so that the families do not have to be white (White faces dominate much of the media.)

WEEK SIX

Creating family histories

Lots of children have homes which do not fit into a 'traditional' pattern. Instead of making them conscious of their own family's differences from other families, let children invent a family from magazines and newspapers

Classroom organisation: pupils work in pairs or small groups.

What you need: a big piece of paper for each group, copies of old newspapers, scissors and glue

ACTIVITY 1

Give pupils a pile of old newspapers and/or magazines and a big sheet of paper (eg. newsprint).

Ask them to create a family history using material from the newspaper that they cut out and then stick on their newsprint.

A pupil from each group can tell the story of their family to their class.

ACTIVITY 2

Then take one of the family collages, and use it to discuss with your class. You could ask questions like:

- ◆ What would people like this family have done long ago?
- ◆ Would they have driven around in cars?
- ◆ Where would they have gone to school?
- ◆ Would they have lived in the same kind of houses?
- ◆ Would they have played the same sort of game?

After discussion each child could draw a picture illustrating some aspect of life long ago.

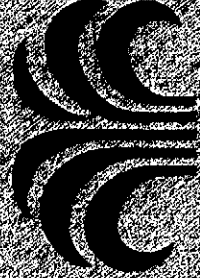
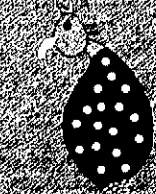
“How can I teach about families in my history class?”

“What content should I cover?”

“What can the children learn by looking at families?”

This book suggests creative and practical lessons on the theme of families. It aims to develop students' historical skills and understandings.

The ideas behind this approach, which emphasises student participation and interaction, are clearly described and can be applied across the curriculum.



The Teaching and Learning
Resources Centre
University of Cape Town

