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## Alternative Strategies for Family History Projects: Rethinking Practice in Light of Indigenous Perspectives

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GENEALOGY AND FAMILY HISTORY projects can be an excellent way to foster students' sense of identity and connectedness to their heritage and relatives.<sup>1</sup> Such activities can help students develop pride and knowledge in their identities and personal histories. They also help students relate to their ancestors by supporting meaningful connections and communication with their living relatives.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, family history projects can invite students to think about the kind of ancestor they want to be for future generations.<sup>3</sup> Because knowledge of family histories is often valued within Indigenous communities, and central to many Indigenous social, cultural, and diplomatic traditions, such projects have the potential to be a meaningful form of culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogical practice.<sup>4</sup>

Within many Indigenous communities, children develop their sense of self through connections to people and place. Fostering students' ability to "recount their own genealogy and family history," for example, is a cultural standard in Alaska for "Culturally-knowledgeable students [who] are well grounded in the cultural

heritage and traditions of their community.”<sup>5</sup> In Hawai‘i, a ho‘olauna (self-introduction) and mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogy) are important ways to foster culturally based Indigenous literacy.<sup>6</sup> As J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (Kanaka Maoli) notes:

Hawaiian kinship and genealogical modes of identification allow for political empowerment in the service of [Hawaiian] nation building because they are inclusive. The genealogical approach is...embedded in indigenous epistemologies whereby peoplehood is rooted in the land....[serving to] connect people to each other and to the land.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, in Aotearoa (New Zealand), genealogies that attend to people and place are an important way of locating oneself. As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou) writes:

For Maori there are several ways of identifying one’s indigenous “community”. One commonly used way is to introduce yourself by naming the mountain, the river, the tribal ancestry, the tribe and the family. Through this form of introduction you locate yourself in a set of identities which have been framed geographically, politically and genealogically.<sup>8</sup>

Each of these examples illustrates the value Indigenous communities often place on family history knowledge, highlighting the potential alignment between family history projects and Indigenous values and practices. Importantly, Indigenous models of kinship also forward an expansive concept of families:

For many Indigenous people and communities, families include all of our relations—reflecting multiple generations, extended family, other community members, more-than-humans, and the lands and waters of our homes.<sup>9</sup>

However, current iterations of K-12 classroom family history projects often present a less expansive version of family connection that privileges Eurocentric, nuclear, and heteronormative expectations. By teaching students that there is one “correct” way to do family history, these projects can inadvertently marginalize and exclude students from a variety of backgrounds, including Indigenous students, students whose ancestors were enslaved, adopted students, and refugee students. Ted Kesler notes that “the traditional family tree presents certain assumptions about families. Its rigid hierarchy privileges children who have siblings, biological links to both parents, and unbroken family lineage to grandparents

and great-grandparents.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Linda Laidlaw and Suzanna So-Har Wong argue that “the modern nuclear, or ‘traditional’ biological family, has been the normative standard against which all other family models have been measured, and where, in contrast, alternative family structures may be represented as deficient or illegitimate.”<sup>11</sup> The normative standard, which Elizabeth Heilman refers to as “family hegemony,” reflects a white, middle- to upper-class concept of family.<sup>12</sup> Normative assumptions within family history projects often include the following:

- that all children have lived with their current family from birth;
- that all children live with biological relatives;
- that all children have access to the same information about their early life, and that if there is something they might not know, they can ask a parent who will be able to tell them;
- that all children have access to the same documents (for example, baby pictures, family photographs, birth certificates).<sup>13</sup>

For students whose families fall outside of these normative frameworks, family ancestry projects that are designed to foster familial connections can, instead, be challenging, inviting feelings of frustration, anxiety, or alienation.<sup>14</sup> Students whose ancestors were enslaved, for example, face silences in the archival record that can create insurmountable challenges to tracing family histories within a K-12 classroom context. Similarly, students whose lives involve frequent moves may face difficulties in gathering family photos or documents. Experiencing houselessness, foster care, or violence in their homes or home countries are just some of the realities that teachers may overlook when organizing family history projects. Though intended by teachers to instill a sense of connection to identity and community, these assignments can ironically encode normative assumptions and biases that counter the diverse, lived experiences of students, and make them feel Othered and abnormal.<sup>15</sup> Rather than being projects that enrich and nourish, for some students, project-related difficulties can even be traumatizing.

These issues may be compounded for Indigenous students, whose understanding of family and kinship can run counter to “normative narratives” of family.<sup>16</sup> In an interview for her dissertation research, Leilani Sabzalian asked a Native mother and daughter about

strengths they saw in their identity, family, and community. The daughter responded that the closeness of her family, including the connections she feels to all of her cousins, is a source of strength. An excerpt from the interview illustrates how this sense of closeness she and her mom feel runs counter to normative concepts like “first” or “second” cousin:

**Daughter:** I just feel like I’m really close to all of them. It doesn’t matter, like we don’t call...my mom’s cousin, I won’t be like “oh yeah, that’s my second cousin.” I just call them my cousin, because I don’t feel there has to be a certain number for each cousin.

**Mother:** [*laughter*]...cousin number one, number two...thing one, thing two [*laughter*].

**Daughter:** I just feel that we’re all close enough we can call each other cousin, or uncle. It doesn’t have to be “Oh that’s our second uncle I think.” I know my friends will be like, yeah, that’s my second cousin I think. I’m like, you don’t call them just your cousin? They’re like uh-uh. I’m like, I call everyone my cousin...I feel like everyone is just family.

**Leilani:** Does that do something, calling someone a second cousin?

**Mother:** Ugh...it’s disrespectful.

**Leilani:** How is it disrespectful?

**Daughter:** I feel like it’s just like separating everyone. Like, oh yes, this group, and that group are my cousins...these are closer cousins. That’s just separating everyone...besides like when I call my second cousin my cousin, it doesn’t matter because we are all close, and it just brings us together and it feels like they’re my first cousin, even though they might be something else.

As this brief excerpt illustrates, this daughter and mother are articulating a more expansive concept of kinship and family than what is typically modeled and reinforced through projects based on the nuclear family. This concept permeates Indigenous communities and scholarship. For example, reflecting on her Ojibwe friend’s comment that “she could not say adoption in her own language,” the late Mohawk scholar Patricia Monture-Angus wrote that Indigenous peoples are “very ‘reality’ based. It is not the biological facts of childbirth and parenting that matter so much in defining family. It is the *actual* relationship that is real and recognized.” This relational

reality is evident in how, for Indigenous peoples, “Many times the people we refer to as parents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters have no biological relationships to us at all.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Michi Saagiig Nishinaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes of her understanding of nationhood, “It is our families—not the nuclear family that has been normalized in settler society, but big, beautiful, diverse, extended multiracial families of relatives and friends that care very deeply for each other.”<sup>18</sup> Beyond challenging nuclear family structures, Indigenous philosophies also challenge human-centered notions of families, articulating instead an “ecology of intimacy” that includes “a web of connections to each other, to the plant nations, the animal nations, the rivers and lakes, the cosmos, and our neighboring Indigenous nations.”<sup>19</sup>

Frequently assigned family history projects can privilege white students’ family histories, especially immigration stories from Europe. As a result, such assignments can place pressures on Indigenous students whose connections to kin, country, and culture may have been disrupted as a result of settler colonial policies and practices like assimilation, removal, relocation, termination, or separation through adoption. Indigenous students vary in the connectedness they feel to their cultures and communities, and supporting students who might seek out connections that settler society has intentionally sought to sever requires care and thought on the part of teachers. Moreover, it requires that teachers have knowledge of the colonial contexts that Indigenous students often navigate.

Teachers working with Indigenous students must contend with histories of forced child removal that date back centuries. Federal officials in the United States and Canada have long engaged in a variety of child removal practices to disrupt Native families, including coerced attendance at federal boarding and residential schools, disproportionate removal of Native children into protective services as early as birth, and adopting Native children out of the community to live with non-Native families. In the territories that are currently Canada and the United States, this story begins with the British colonies, as missionaries and colonial officials used schooling to assimilate and “civilize” Indigenous youth. Such efforts became more formalized with time, becoming boarding and day schools run by federal and church officials. While clearly negotiated spaces in which Native youth resisted and operated

for their own survival, these schools were deeply violent, abusive institutions. A similar story expands beyond North America, as Indigenous children in nation-states throughout the world have their own histories of colonial violence through schooling (e.g., the forced schooling of Sámi children in Scandinavia). Understanding the ongoing political, cultural, social, and emotional consequences of assimilationist schooling—which, across nation boundaries, sought to strip Indigenous children of their languages, cultures, and connections to communities—can sensitize teachers to issues Indigenous students may face today.

Aligned with the assimilative aims of boarding schools, placing Native children in white families has been another method of intentionally severing family ties in an effort to assimilate Native children. At Carlisle Indian Industrial School, a federal Indian boarding school that operated from 1879 until 1918, Captain Richard Henry Pratt developed an “outing program” in which the school intentionally placed Native children in white homes to facilitate the “civilizing” and assimilative process.<sup>20</sup> Estelle Reel, who served as Superintendent of Indian Schools from 1898 to 1910, argued, “Association with good white people is the best civilizing agency that can be devised. Through it the Indian youth unconsciously imbibe the traits of character of those with whom they associate, and continue to be more like them the longer they remain in their society.”<sup>21</sup> This assimilative practice continued via federal programs like the Indian Adoption Project that, with the help of the Child Welfare League of America, removed nearly 13,000 Native children from their families and placed them into non-Native homes between 1959 and 1976.<sup>22</sup> Fortunately, Indigenous advocacy led to the creation of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, an act specifically intended to protect Native children and preserve Native familial connections. Nevertheless, the widespread removal of Native children remains an issue today,<sup>23</sup> and those adopted out (and their children) have had to wrestle with, and resist, this imposed legacy of whiteness.

Child removal, too, is a practice of colonialism across the globe (e.g., the “stolen generation” of Aboriginal children in Australia, the “sixties scoop” in Canada, or the widespread state-sanctioned removal of Māori children in Aotearoa). Understanding this historical practice and legacy helps explain why some students and

their families grew up outside of their families and/or homelands, may know little about their cultures, or perhaps feel uncomfortable or resentful at being asked to recount family histories. Transracial and Indigenous adoptees, in particular, navigate multiple layers of belonging. Adopted students face questions about their “real” family.<sup>24</sup> This is compounded for Indigenous adoptees who must *also* navigate discourses of authenticity around questions of who is a “real” Indian.<sup>25</sup> This colonial legacy, illustrated through this brief discussion of boarding schools and adoption, also attests to how precious Indigenous languages, knowledge systems, and family connections are given the contexts of violence in which they have been fought for, sustained, and/or revitalized.

Indigenous analyses offer important considerations for adapting family history projects to better serve Indigenous students; in addition, approaching family history projects in light of Indigenous perspectives benefits Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike. Many of the available family history lessons and unit plans include modifications for students from “non-traditional” or “atypical” families. Such an approach reinforces expectations of white, middle-class, heteronormative family structures that do not reflect the experiences of many students in our classrooms. The suggested learning opportunities in this unit therefore broaden the typical family history classroom activities to improve all students’ abilities to engage with relevant family history research.

What follows is a brief literature review on the value and practice of using family history projects in social studies/history classrooms. Following this review, we offer a more detailed discussion of Indigeneity and the ways in which Indigenous identities are entangled with family history projects. To demonstrate the importance of rethinking family history projects, we offer three vignettes that illustrate how normative discourses and practices can live in tension with students’ lived experiences. This provides useful context for our subsequent outline of a variety of considerations for social studies educators that we assert can challenge and complement the approaches described. In so doing, our hope is to foster spaces and practices that support Indigenous students, as well as challenge normative notions of family that constrict the diverse range of cultural and familial expressions that we know already exist—and should be supported—in our classrooms.



## Literature Review

In an effort to engage students personally and emotionally in the study of history, many social studies teachers since the late 1970s have turned to family oral history projects. A 1979 National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) booklet traces the popularity of these projects to the spread of folklore magazines like *Foxfire* and the premiere of *Roots* on America's television sets.<sup>26</sup> These projects are often lauded for being personalizable and accessible while allowing young students to access local history directly from older family members.<sup>27</sup> Scholarship has suggested the use of such projects as a way for students to develop their sense of self and to learn often untold histories, such as the forced deportation of U.S. citizens of Mexican descent.<sup>28</sup>

Much of the available literature on the use of family history projects in K-12 social studies classes, college history courses, and pre-service teacher preparation consists of suggested lesson plans; however, few of these articles evaluate the efficacy of such projects beyond laudatory comments about helping students make history "come alive" and locate their own family histories within broader historical contexts. Even fewer comment on the need for a diverse approach to these projects that recognizes the many forms and histories of the families within any given classroom. Journals such as *The History Teacher*, *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, and the Organization of American History's *OAH Magazine of History* have been rich sources of these suggested lessons and unit plans.

Many of the existing articles regarding the use of family histories in the classroom have discussed the use of interviews with family members.<sup>29</sup> Such resources span at least back to the 1970s, when NCSS issued its "Oral History in the Classroom."<sup>30</sup> This early how-to guide advocates for K-12 classrooms to create oral history programs as a way to engage students in active learning. It also promotes oral history projects as a way to create resources about local community history.

In addition to oral histories, other scholars have suggested engaging students with archival research;<sup>31</sup> visits to local historic sites such as cemeteries or historical societies;<sup>32</sup> family documents, photographs, and heirlooms;<sup>33</sup> family tree diagrams, also alternatively known as bloodline charts or pedigree charts;<sup>34</sup> family data charts;<sup>35</sup>

family history maps;<sup>36</sup> family connections to particular historical themes or events;<sup>37</sup> and family timelines that align with U.S. history timelines.<sup>38</sup> A large number of these studies suggest using these resources as a way to help students trace their families' immigration stories and research the countries of origin from which their families originate.<sup>39</sup> Such projects center the experiences of students whose family stories fit neatly into the narrative that the United States is a nation of immigrants, and, in the process, enact academic violence against Indigenous students whose connections to Turtle Island or Abya Yala pre-date the United States and whose traditional territories may even include the land upon which the school itself sits.

Some of the available literature suggests reading resources to help students and teachers learn how to conduct family history projects and to offer additional historical, cultural, or literary resources for students to better understand the place from which their family originates. Where these articles mention Native families, the resources they suggest are often white-authored texts that relegate Native people to the historical past and reinforce damaging narratives about Native people. Teaching Tolerance, for example, suggests assigning *Encounter* by Jane Yolen, which features the life of a Taíno boy and the Taíno community's experience with Columbus.<sup>40</sup> Although on the surface, this might appear an appropriate way to connect Native students (in this case, Taíno students) to texts that reflect their heritage and foster connections to their community and culture, it is important to be intentional and mindful of the resources to which we connect students. Yolen is a white author and shared on her blog that she wrote the text because she inaccurately and inappropriately believed that no Taíno people (at least none who were sufficiently Taíno in her eyes) were still alive to tell the story:

This is the story of Columbus' landing in the Americas, as told by a boy of the Taino people who already lived there. The 500th anniversary of Columbus's voyage was coming up, and my Harcourt editor...suggested such a book was needed. I thought a Taino should write it. After doing some early research, I felt the likelihood of any full-blooded Taino people to be still alive was not great and the story needed to be told. So I said I would do it.<sup>41</sup>

Yolen's notion of "full-bloodedness" reinforces colonial understandings of Indigeneity rooted in blood quantum and other discourses of disappearance, elimination, and erasure (which we

discuss in more detail in the next section).<sup>42</sup> Further, critics such as Jean Paine Mendoza argue that Yolen's account, at times, blames Taíno people, framing them as people who "actively surrendered their culture without much compelling cause. They 'lost' their lands, 'gave' their souls, 'took' the foreign speech and 'forgot' their own, 'became' something other than true human beings."<sup>43</sup> Other times, Mendoza argues, colonization is described using passive language: "Islands *were* colonized; religions, languages and lifestyles *were* changed, artifacts...*were* melted and burned. As if there were no agents of destruction. As if those things just kind of—happened."<sup>44</sup>

Family history units often suggest that teachers connect students with supplementary texts about their family backgrounds. For example, in an OAH annotated bibliography of helpful texts for family histories (whose categories include, among others, demography, historical eras, families under slavery, etc.), the only text that relates to Native families is an anthology of "Short stories, novel excerpts, and autobiographical essays [that] examine Native American childhood and adolescence from the nineteenth century to the 1990s."<sup>45</sup> We belabor this point to emphasize that educators should be thoughtful in selecting classroom texts, and to prioritize those authored by Indigenous peoples when possible. There are worlds of excellent contemporary Native-authored resources that teachers could use instead in the classroom. For example, Upper Skagit author Christine Day's middle grade novel *I Can Make This Promise* addresses family history and identity in light of the widespread removal and adoption of Native children. One need only visit Nambé Pueblo scholar Debbie Reese's blog, "American Indians in Children's Literature," for an introduction to the wide availability of such texts.<sup>46</sup>

The majority of the literature discussing the implementation and impact of family history projects operates under dominant discourses around "family"—in particular, the assumptions that students' families and ancestors come from elsewhere, that students live with their biological families, or that students have access to information and belongings from their birth family and/or culture.<sup>47</sup> Laidlaw and Wong argue that "The modern nuclear, or 'traditional' biological family, has been the normative standard against which all other family models have been measured, and where, in contrast, alternative

family structures may be represented as deficient or illegitimate.”<sup>48</sup> For example, in her research on adoptive families, Laidlaw writes:

The dominant discourse around “family”, often evident in social institutions such as schools, goes something like this: Families are biologically related, families include both a male and a female parent, families always have children, families live in one place, families share the same ethnic/cultural/religious background, extended family members live elsewhere, and so on. Given these limitations, the “normal” family would seem to be a category in a less than majority position for many contemporary families. Still, the “Dick and Jane” model pervades popular culture images and often dominates school portrayals of family structures, even though this model is a less than accurate representation of many families.<sup>49</sup>

Some attention in the research has been given to the intersection of family diversity and family history projects or other types of social studies activities that invite personal narratives.<sup>50</sup> This has included a call for more expansive projects that recognize the specific needs of children whose families do not fit the normative model.<sup>51</sup> Most recently, a lesson in *Social Studies and the Young Learner* illustrates how small shifts can foster more inclusive projects. The authors note that teachers “should be aware of their students’ diverse backgrounds such as their families’ native language(s) (e.g., Spanish, English, French) and living situations (e.g., adoption, homelessness) in order to recognize and honor families’ cultural assets.”<sup>52</sup> In light of the wide variety of family structures likely to be present in the classroom, Christine Sleeter also advises teachers to reflect critically on the objectives and format of their assignments, noting that “teachers contemplating activities that involve family structure and family history should be clear in their own mind about the purpose of the activity.”<sup>53</sup>

Although family history projects allow students to develop a more personal connection to history and a deeper contextual understanding of people’s experiences, decisions, and actions, many family history projects remain limited due to their lack of engagement of non-Western epistemologies engaging kinship, family and societal structure, and cataloging of history. Critical family history projects require us to complicate such narratives. Minimal research has addressed students and communities deeply impacted by settler colonialism and their experiences participating in classroom family history projects.

This article provides an intervention to the extant resources and literature by suggesting considerations for assigning family history projects based on the perspective of how Indigenous students often experience such projects. Previous scholarship rarely included Indigenous students in family history projects; those that did suggested ways to modify existing class projects in recognition of the possible needs of some Indigenous children in the classroom,<sup>54</sup> rather than ways to build projects that account for Indigenous perspectives from the beginning. However, designing projects from Indigenous frameworks offers new possibilities for projects that fit within a culturally sustaining approach to teaching with all children. To this end, the present article offers a series of considerations and alternative projects, constituting a significant addition to the extant literature on the use of family histories in K-12 social studies classrooms. Our goal is to support educators in attending to students' varied familial histories, structures, and experiences.

### **Indigenous Belonging, DNA Testing, and Family History Projects**

In this section, we discuss Indigeneity to frame our understanding of family history projects. While this article is not intended to be a comprehensive account of the scholarship on Indigenous identity,<sup>55</sup> it is important that educators recognize the varying ways Indigeneity is (mis)understood, and the colonial contexts in which Indigenous identities are claimed—and denied. This article focuses on the many ways that considering family history projects from Indigenous perspectives can broaden the projects to better suit all students. However, given the ways family history projects often bring up ideas about Indigenous ancestry, we want to provide some context for thinking about how Indigenous identities are often entangled with family history projects. This is particularly important, given public discourse around claims to Indigeneity via inherited stories about Native ancestors (e.g., Elizabeth Warren's claim to Cherokee heritage), the frequency with which students claim Indigenous ancestry, increased engagement with genealogical research via websites like Ancestry.com, and corporate enterprises like 23andMe, which claim they “can reveal genetic evidence of Native American ancestry.”<sup>56</sup>

First and foremost, educators should recognize that Indigenous understandings of identity are rooted in understandings of kinship that foreground relationships and responsibility, as well as the political relationship between Indigenous nations and other governments. These understandings often run counter to dominant discourses that frame Indigeneity in terms of race, blood, or DNA.<sup>57</sup> As David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark assert in their foundational chapter that outlines the distinction between Indigenous peoples and other racial/ethnic minorities, “Indigenous peoples are nations, not minorities.”<sup>58</sup> In the context of the United States, this distinction stems from Indigenous peoples’ identities as original inhabitants of the Americas, the treaty relationship between Indigenous nations and the U.S. government, and the trust doctrine, “the federal government’s legal and moral pledge to respect those reserved Indian rights,” among others.<sup>59</sup> As part of their sovereignty, Indigenous nations have the right to determine who belongs to their nation. By “sovereignty,” we mean Native nations’ inherent right to self-governance and to self-determine the futures of their peoples, lands, and lifeways.

This distinction involves the question of group, rather than individual identity. In this regard, Indigenous identity is less a matter of an individual’s claims to a particular group, but whether that group—a nation, tribe, village, rancheria, or pueblo, for example—claim that individual. And as Indigenous Studies scholars such as Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) note, these understandings of identity and belonging are enmeshed with a sense of kinship that foregrounds relationality, obligation, responsibility, and reciprocity.<sup>60</sup>

Educators engaging family history projects should understand that Indigenous identities persist within colonial contexts that are structured to erase them. As Europeans colonized the Americas, they categorized the many diverse nations of Indigenous peoples into one homogeneous race. As Osage scholar Jean Dennison notes, “fundamental to this idea of race was the concept of blood, which was believed to transmit racial qualities from one generation to the next.”<sup>61</sup> The federal government documented its racialized understandings of Native people with census records in 1880 that surveyed “‘Indians not taxed’ (tribal Indians residing on the reservations),” and continued to do so in the 1930s via agents who

recorded “whether a person was ‘full-blood,’ ‘one-fourth or more Indian blood,’ or ‘one-fourth or less full-blood.’” These agents were “obliged to record the ‘exact degree of blood’ using ‘3/4, 1/2, 1/4 and 1/8 if appropriate.’”<sup>62</sup>

Racialized notions of Indigeneity tracked by blood are a mechanism of what Patrick Wolfe has referred to as the “logic of elimination.”<sup>63</sup> These racialized logics—which are rooted in biological essentialism and use fractions, or blood quantum, to gradually erase Indigenous peoples, thus providing greater settler access to Indigenous lands—are a mechanism of eliminating Indigenous peoples. Speaking in the context of Hawai‘i, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui notes the ways blood-based notions of identity contrast with genealogical conceptions:

Blood quantum is an attempt to size up someone in order to determine if they are “Hawaiian enough,” and it works to deracinate (uproot), whereas genealogical connections are inherently about *rootedness* by putting the recognition of ancestors back in “ancestry”—and, therefore, connecting Hawaiians to the *‘āina* (land).<sup>64</sup>

As these critiques illustrate, even as educators may see blood as harmless, reaching for blood to legitimize ancestry claims can raise at least two key problems: first, it can be a source of discomfort for Native students for whom blood quantum has been a source of disconnection and dispossession; and second, it can be dangerous for Native nations, as such logics can undermine Indigenous efforts to retain their lands and exercise their sovereignty.

The concept of blood is complicated for many Indigenous peoples, as it has become a prominent factor in tribal identity and citizenship.<sup>65</sup> Many Native nations currently define their citizenry via complex blood quantum math, a colonially imposed practice of administrative genocide that tethers Indigeneity to a ratio of Native to non-Native ancestors in hopes that Indigenous people will eventually “breed themselves out,” ending U.S. treaty obligations.<sup>66</sup> In alignment with settler goals for Indigenous disappearance, blood has superimposed European notions of legitimacy and authenticity over Indigenous ideas about kinship, clan, and belonging to a Native nation, which is frequently discussed in terms of citizenship.<sup>67</sup> As some Indigenous scholars have argued, the idea of blood quantum has been central to Indigenous dispossession, and eclipsed the varied ways Indigenous communities enact notions of kinship, belonging, and identity.<sup>68</sup>

Alongside this structural desire to erase Indigenous peoples exist widespread claims to Indigeneity from non-Indigenous peoples. These settler desires to be Indigenous are also rooted in erasure and dispossession, a practice that has been described as “playing Indian” or “going native.”<sup>69</sup> Though these behaviors, at times, describe settler practices of emulating Indianness, they also speak to the consistent claiming of Indigeneity by settlers via distant ancestors; a desire and practice that is so pervasive that the late Standing Rock Sioux scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. referred to them in 1988 as the “Indian-grandmother complex.”<sup>70</sup> Such desires ignore the aforementioned network of relationality, citizenship, responsibility, and reciprocity through which Indigenous identities are often understood by Indigenous peoples. Instead, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang note, they are rooted in desires for innocence, a way to rid individuals of guilt and complicity that accompany recognizing oneself as a settler on stolen Indigenous lands.<sup>71</sup>

As educators work with their students on family history activities, it is important to be aware of the ways such projects intersect with settler desires to claim Indigenous heritage. As Kristina Elizabeth Waller noted in the use of family history projects with pre-service teachers, such projects fueled students’ interest in “confirming long held family beliefs of Native American relatives and encounters their ancestors had with various Native American people and tribes.”<sup>72</sup> Her findings on this widespread interest in finding Native ancestors is worth quoting at length:

As the students investigated their ancestry, of the 17 students who discussed Native Americans in their final papers, more than half were unable to find documentation that proved they had Native Americans among their ancestors. One student said she did find a single Native American relative on each side but could not verify the long-held notions of her parents that both sides had an extensive Native American heritage. Only three students wrote that they were able to document their Native American heritage...

Students spent a great deal of time and effort searching to confirm beliefs of Native American ancestry and were frequently disappointed in the results. The students who could find no documentation simply concluded they were unable to locate the information because of reasons such as, Indian ancestry was hard to trace or at some point their families were embarrassed and hid this information. Two



students indicated they were definitely not giving up the search. However, even with no documentation to prove the connection, none of the other students were willing to stop claiming Indian heritage or abandon the idea of having Native American roots.<sup>73</sup>

Our purpose in highlighting this passage, which reflects enduring and stubborn desires to falsely claim Indigeneity despite evidence and without connections to existing relations, is not to discourage students and individuals with legitimate community connections from reconnecting with familial connections that have been suppressed. Rather, it is to sensitize teachers to how such desires—where unfounded—can reproduce colonial logics and investments and undermine tribal sovereignty.

The public interest in pursuing settler fantasies of having Native relatives is so widespread, it has fueled corporate practices and promises that genetic testing can confirm Native American ancestry (which the public erroneously equates with being Indigenous—i.e., being recognized as Indigenous by an Indigenous nation). However, Indigenous peoples routinely assert that such tests erode their sovereign rights to determine their own citizenry,<sup>74</sup> an assertion that has been prominent in the controversy surrounding Elizabeth Warren's repeated assertions that she is Cherokee. And while individuals eagerly send their saliva to corporations to learn about their long-lost Native ancestors, many Indigenous peoples remain concerned about the use of their genes, reading such corporate practices within a historical legacy of colonial theft and erasure. Not only have Indigenous identities been appropriated, but "*Having your genealogy and identity (cell-lines) stolen, patented, copied*" is one of the twelve ways that Linda Tuhiwai Smith has noted Indigenous people remain vulnerable to imperialist research projects that continue to colonize.<sup>75</sup>

Understanding this historical and contemporary colonial context is important for educators, so they can thoughtfully support students as they research their family histories and differentiate approaches to meet each student where they are. Teachers working on family history projects with Native students can encourage students to learn more about their community or nation and to think about what it means to be in relationship with one's people.<sup>76</sup> However, teachers will likely find that some students who wish to claim a distant Native ancestor are unable to confirm those relationships and may not actually have a connection to a Native nation. In these cases,

teachers may consider offering students gentle guidance toward the complex network of relationality, responsibility, and reciprocity that make up Indigenous kinship. They can share with students that Indigenous identity is about who claims you as part of a Native nation or community.<sup>77</sup> It is important to share with these students that having a family story about an Indigenous ancestor does not automatically make you Indigenous. Where appropriate, they may be able to help students begin to look more critically at the veracity of such family claims.

We are not suggesting that teachers act as the arbiters of Indigeneity, as an authority to confirm or deny a student's claims. This discursive territory is multifaceted, and we have no template for navigating its contours. Instead, we offer the pedagogical space outlined in three concise tweets by Daniel Heath Justice to provide a glimpse of the complex terrain within which we hope teachers will support students:

Kinship is more than heritage or blood/genetic relationship—it's the matrix of relationships, rights, & responsibilities...<sup>78</sup>

Again, it's vitally important to distinguish between those with genuinely ruptured connections and those with fanciful claims based on stereotype and entitlement. And it's important to do this because the former are so easily erased by the latter.<sup>79</sup>

Our disconnected kin deserve to be re-connected, and their struggle is made harder when false claimants dominate the terms of belonging, because you can bet that the latter won't help the former—if anything, they're invested in making genuine reconnection more difficult.<sup>80</sup>

### Small Stories

To set the context for our considerations, we offer “small stories” of our experiences with family history projects to make visible the ways normative assumptions within these projects existed in tension with our own lived experiences as students and teachers. As Laidlaw and Wong articulate, there is “value [in] gathering the ‘small stories’ that families or children viewed as significant” in their schooling experience, a value not often captured in statistics.<sup>81</sup> “Collectively,” they continue, “such stories provide insights into how such families and individuals experience their differences and the ways in which schooling both includes and excludes children.” In the following “small stories” offered here, the first two reflect student experiences,

while the third emphasizes teacher reflections. Our purpose in sharing these small stories is to illustrate the need to rethink such projects, as well as the many considerations involved in such work.

### Difficult Family Conversations: Meredith's Small Story

*At fourteen, I laid on the floor of my room with my poster board, drawing circles and squares and meticulously connecting them with a ruler and marker. Within each circle and square, I carefully penned the name of a relative—a grandmother, auntie, parent, uncle. There was something soothing about mapping my relations, but also something troubling. While my Scottish, English, French, and German ancestors had dates, locations, and full names, there were also gaps in the chart, places where I had to write “unknown.” There were names that, when I searched the online databases available in 2002, came up only as “Female Indian” or, in Canada, as “Amerindienne.” Why, I wondered, were my Anishinaabe relatives considered so insignificant that they were marked only as “Indian” rather than by their names and places and dates, as my European and settler ancestors had been?*

*In class, we researched our names and looked up our family crests. I was proud of my mother's last name—Bruce—because online searches instantly turned up pictures of Scottish tartans and castles. But I didn't know what to do about my father's last name—McCoy—the last name of a white step-grandfather I never knew. Did I want to claim this person and his history as my own? Shouldn't I instead look up Nicholas or Villeneuve or Gariepy, the actual last names of my Métis and Anishinaabe family?*

*Some of my questions would later be answered, but only once I was an adult and could travel to the National Archives in Washington, DC. There was no way for me to access the records for my 8th grade project, because the federal government held them on then-undigitized microfilm.*

*Researching census records brought up troubling questions for me and my family. While the census identified my mother's family members by profession and role in the family, it added a blood fraction for my father's relatives. For the first time, my*

*father and I had to talk about blood quantum, tribal enrollment, and what he called “administrative genocide.” As I presented my Native and European histories side-by-side on my chart, I started to reckon with what it meant to be a descendent of both, what it meant to have one side of my family represent violence to the other.*

*My social studies teacher that year guided me through these assignments with compassion and understanding. Still, I now wonder, why do these projects so often seem to reify Euro-American settler histories? How could a project meant to build a student’s positive self-image cause so much anxiety? And how could such projects be changed to be more attuned to the experiences of Native youth?*

### Whose Family Tree?: Leilani’s Small Story

*I was 11 years old and in the 6th grade, an Alaska Native student in a predominantly white middle school, Alutiiq to be specific, but I didn’t know that at the time. After being in and out of various foster homes, followed by a long legal battle, I was eventually adopted into a white family—a loving home to be clear, but not a home in which we discussed race or Indigeneity.*

*That year, our class participated in a family history project, which included tracing our family history. I remember distinctly the dissonance I felt between the project expectations and my lived experiences. Which family would I choose? Whose lineage would I trace? Though it would have been practically impossible in that pre-Internet world, I longed to trace my biological family’s heritage. And although practical, tracing my adoptive family’s heritage felt disingenuous, fabricated. I remember, too, my awareness of my adoptive parents’ feelings. I worried how they would feel if I chose my biological family. I worried they would feel betrayed and think it was because I didn’t love them. People who aren’t adopted or aren’t in close relationships with people who have been adopted are often unaware that some adoptees feel a deep sense of isolation, even in families marked by love and connection. These feelings are not a betrayal of the family one lives in, but come from a deeper place of longing.*

*The tensions I felt in this project were shaped not only by my experience as an adoptee, but more specifically by my experience as a transracial adoptee. One of the most difficult aspects of being a transracial, Native adoptee was the profound sense of loneliness and alienation I felt growing up as a person of color in predominately white spaces. Throughout my life, I had a loving family and close friends, but underneath these relationships was a current telling me that I didn't quite belong. I felt alone with these feelings, learning only later as an adult that many adoptees, including Native and transracial adoptees, struggle with this dissonance and disconnection.*

*As an educator now, I reflect back on my experience and wonder what might have happened had someone offered me an alternative, or even pointed out that I was not alone; that there were others, communities even, who had similar experiences and feelings. Instead, I felt alone, and rather than express my discomfort about being asked as a person of color to identify with a legacy of whiteness and colonization, I went through the motions and traced my adoptive family's heritage*

*I still feel a bit remorseful about this project. As one of the few opportunities in my formal school curriculum to investigate my heritage, this felt and still feels like a missed opportunity.*

### Who Am I, Really?: Tommy's Small Story

*I am standing at the doorway as my 8<sup>th</sup> graders walk in  
Some ask,*

*“Hey Mr. Ender, what are we doing today?” with smiles  
on their faces*

*Others simply ask*

*with their usual perplexed looks*

*I did not answer*

*They find their seats and talk with one another until I close  
the door*

*I walk to the middle of the U-shaped classroom and*

*I ask “Ok, tell me what's on your mind.”*

*One student immediately says “What is this project you keep  
teasing us about?”*

*Another student says “Is it true that we are not doing test prep?”*

*I respond with the following statement:*

*“You all will learn about your ancestries.”*

*A collection of yays, groans, and ahhs fill the room*

*I introduced the directions to the students; some asked questions while others sat silent*

*I then go into the body of the project*

- 1. You have the option of participating*
- 2. You must be prepared for the unknown*
- 3. You will need to reflect from your experiences*

*A silence fills the room*

*“What happens if we do not have access?” one student asked  
“¿Que pasa si no tenemos acceso a papeles?” another student asked*

*“What about these unknown stories?” a third student asked  
The students and I go back and forth for the rest of the period*

*Fast forward six weeks to a warm, humid day in June*

*Today is presentation day*

*Most of the students studied their ancestral lines*

*While other students studied famous people’s ancestries*

*For a notable few, they chose to not participate*

*They all reflected on this project tho*

*Their reflections revealed more than any database could offer  
“I did not know my great, great grandfather fought in  
World War I for the UK, not the US”*

*“My father’s disappearance was not his fault, as I was  
told to believe”*

*“My grandmother’s life was kept quiet from us.”*

*As the students willingly shared their reflections*

*I looked at the empty spaces around my mother*

*Whenever I asked my mother about her upbringing, she only  
talked about the help she received from the church;*

*Was it painful for her to suppress her Indigeneity?*

*Why did she carry so much anger about disconnecting from  
her people?*

*What did she exactly gain from her losses?*

*Christianity?*

*Literacy?*

*Multi-national citizenships?*

*A comfortable living in the United States?*

Together, these three small stories have set the context for why expanding classroom understandings of kinship is so important. With this in mind, the next section offers a set of classroom activities that broaden pedagogical approaches to family history projects.

### **Expanding Classroom Understandings of Kinship**

As we engage students in the study of their own histories, we have an opportunity to pivot toward broader understandings of belonging and identity. Instead of a narrow focus on patrilineal descent, we can encourage students to think broadly in terms of kinship. This raises opportunities to examine how we define belonging to one another, what makes a family, and how families influence our individual identities. The following section assesses a set of commonly assigned projects in school family history units and offers alternatives that work not only for Indigenous students, but for all students whose families operate outside of the nuclear, middle-class, cishetero family norm. These considerations include encouraging educators to move beyond bloodline charts, rethink the creation of family crests, critically evaluate the role of migration stories, and reconsider the necessity of family document archives.

#### *Moving Beyond Bloodline Charts*

Many family history projects ask students to lay out their heritage along bloodline charts, activities that are often the foundation for research platforms like Ancestry.com or Geni.com. Students are encouraged to identify their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and beyond, operating in a strict two-parent system of blood descent. These projects take a very narrow view of kinship and reinforce a linear view of time that do not always match Indigenous epistemologies. In addition, they are based on a concept of blood relatedness as the defining feature of family identity. As discussed

earlier, colonial notions of blood do not consistently align with Indigenous ideas about belonging.

For Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike, bloodline charts can be a source of shame when families do not fit into narrow social norms. Many students live with extended family, including cousins, grandparents, and aunts, and may find it strange that the only relatives of these who “count” for their assignment are the center column of generations of parents. For students whose parents, for a variety of possible reasons, are not present in their lives, emphasizing lineal descent can dredge up anxiety and anger rather than pride in having such an extensive support network of family. Recent research in social work has shown that many grandparents take pride in their ability to parent their grandchildren and—for Native families—their role in stopping legacies of forced child removal for boarding schools and foster care.<sup>82</sup> Bloodline charts don’t allow for these kinds of family groupings, nor do they make space for other ways of understanding kinship, such as by clan.

It is important to provide students an opportunity to think expansively about how families develop and define themselves.<sup>83</sup> As an alternative to bloodline assignments, teachers could instead ask students to create an image that reflects the important people in their lives. Leaving the assignment inclusive of any people, blood-related or otherwise, who might be involved in a student’s life in a familial capacity allows students to think of kinship broadly. As suggested by Nancye E. McCrary, students can “create a web of all the people in their lives they consider family.”<sup>84</sup> There are myriad options for visualizing family belonging once we move beyond the linear, parent-centric, generational tree, even without abandoning the “tree” metaphor that resonates with many teachers and students for its related ideas of rootedness and connection. Students could create a tree of people who love or care for them, sketch an orchard of connected family trees, or draw a history tree in such a way that includes both birth and adoptive relatives.<sup>85</sup> Students could also create a wheel of family relations or build genograms that address a wide variety of structures and relationships.<sup>86</sup>

For Indigenous students, including Indigenous adoptees, assignments might also include researching their tribal affiliation or Indigenous nation(s), conducting a community history of their urban Indian community, creating a tree or wheel of relations that



features members of the local Native community, interviewing related or unrelated elders in the community,<sup>87</sup> researching the history of a Native leader from their community, researching their family or nation's heritage language(s) and identifying resources to start learning those languages, and/or researching historical events that have impacted their family history (boarding schools, relocation, allotment, etc.).

### *Family Crests, Class, and Identity*

Within family history projects, teachers frequently ask students to develop a “family crest” or to research what their family crest is based on their surname. This element of the family history project is undergirded by ideas about how families represent that they belong to one another, a universal question that should remain present in family history projects. And yet, family crest activities are deeply rooted in ideas of class and wealth. Growing in popularity in the United States during the Gilded Age, family crests (even those invented in the United States rather than having an origin in Europe) signaled status for the American bourgeoisie, despite a general American distaste for European aristocracy. Indeed, the expansion of family crests, which had in Europe been restricted to specific aristocratic male family lines, to a broad settler market in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries “epitomizes the uneasy relationship between refinement and republicanism, and their eventual reconciliation in consumer culture.”<sup>88</sup> The expansion of these crests was rooted in white desires for a white American racial origin story, one played out through “Anglo-Saxonism and biological metaphor.”<sup>89</sup>

Today, K-12 classroom applications of family crests often bring up ideas about the European Middle Ages, knights, and nobility. Teachers who have researched family crests may be eager to have students create their own.<sup>90</sup> And while such assignments may be intended as a fun way to help students distill what is most essential about their family identity, they ask students to identify with and reify classist models of prestige and status.

Whereas family crests reinforce ideas of noble houses originating in Europe, Indigenous families are far more likely to identify as belonging to one another on the basis of ties to homelands or, in some

communities, clan systems. Given the history of family crests in the United States and their implications for class, teachers might consider shifting to a project that asks not “How can you imagine your family represented with the trappings of nobility?” but rather “How does your family tell other people about its shared history?” At their core, this is what family crest projects are about: how families represent themselves to others. Opening the project beyond the physical crest design makes it more accessible—and more egalitarian.

*“Creation Stories” versus “Colonization Stories”*

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have written that “Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how we/they came to be in a particular place—indeed how we/they came to *be a place*.”<sup>91</sup> For many Indigenous peoples around the world, the land, waters, and non-humans that live in them are relatives. Indigenous people engaged in Indigenous land stewardship practices care for such relatives with responsibility and reverence, recognizing the role of humans in maintaining ecological balance.<sup>92</sup>

Though many Indigenous peoples have origin stories that link their family histories to specific lands and waters, social studies classrooms often ask students to identify immigration narratives that center how settler students’ families arrived in the United States. Such framings reinforce ideas of land as property (how students’ families came to own or rent a particular plot of land), imply that there are no people who are Indigenous to the place where they currently live, and emphasize that relationships to land involve transience (moving over the land rather than being rooted in it). And though some migration story lesson plans have modifications that allow Indigenous students to identify their connections to place,<sup>93</sup> these lessons still center on migration and may inadvertently result in Indigenous students being singled out as the only students in the class without immigration stories.

As a recent example for how to approach these projects in a way that recognizes the diverse connections of students to land, Ariel Cornett et al. offer a handout on tracing family origins, making a point to state that “Some children’s ancestors or family members came from (or are from) far away, while some were (or are) Indigenous

Peoples.” They also include Indigeneity in the sample sentences for their writing prompt: “Write a sentence (or sentences) to help explain your map. Examples: ‘My grandpa came from Ireland.’ ‘Mom and I are from the Tuscarora Nation of New York.’ ‘I live in in North Dakota and want to visit South Korea.’”<sup>94</sup> This article builds on these shifts, suggesting other ways educators can rethink family history projects in light of Indigenous experiences.

An alternative approach to teaching stories of migration is to begin with the land itself, asking students to think deeply about their connections to place by asking open-ended questions about how students came to relate to the land on which they live.

In an age of approaching climate crisis, it is important for all students to acknowledge humans’ critical responsibilities to steward the land and our non-human relatives, as Indigenous people have done for millennia. Students in the classroom, including some Indigenous students, may be at different stages of awareness of and comfort with relationships to the natural world, and they may initially be hesitant to think about land in the context of kinship and family history. However, teachers can use targeted questioning to help students understand their role “in the web of relationships that inevitably structure the elements (flora and fauna) of place” and “belong within these ecological sets of place-relations.”<sup>95</sup> In this way, students get to see their family histories in both their broader historical context and their ecological context, recognizing the responsibilities and relationships of humans to all of our relatives.

Conversations about land also necessarily turn to conversations about students’ positionality. Discussing family histories in the context of Indigenous territories benefits non-Native students, as grounding them in place can help them understand the sociopolitical ramifications of their families’ histories and provide them with space to consider their positionality as a settler living on Indigenous lands. It is also important to create space for Indigenous students to engage their connection to their traditional homelands and current territories (which are sometimes not the same place due to histories of violent United States expansion and forced Indigenous removal), not as an afterthought to modify an existing assignment, but rather as the central foundation for how the project is designed.

This will require that teachers build their own content knowledge about whose lands they occupy and what their relational obligations

might be to those peoples. It is not necessary that teachers have all the answers before broaching the topic of land with students, but it is important that they make visible their own learning process. Framing questions about connections to place broadly can help make space for both teachers and students to learn about Indigenous homelands, Indigenous diaspora,<sup>96</sup> enslavement and labor exploitation, and settler migration. Some questions teachers could ask include: What is your family's relationship to the land where you currently live? What stories has your family or community shared with you about how you relate to the land where you are now? In what ways have movement (migration, relocation, removal, diaspora) and rootedness (connection to a particular place for many generations) shaped your family's experiences?

### *Alternatives to the Archive*

Items that remind us of our families are often cherished, passed down through generations. Teachers often ask students to bring in family pictures and documents to better visualize the past. And yet, such assignments work best for a specific subset of student whose families have had the opportunity to keep such records. Without intending harm, such projects may unintentionally exclude students who, for a variety of reasons, do not have physical copies of family records. For example, documents about family history for Indigenous students may be locked away in government databases and archives, an experience that is compounded for Indigenous adoptees whose birth family records may be sealed.

While the collecting of family records is often meant as a fun activity, how important is it relative to the experiences of students who may struggle to locate them? Instead of a show-and-tell model, teachers could ask students to think about how their family shares memories with each other and with future generations. Students could compose creative writing or artwork that visualizes this transmission of knowledge. Where desired, students can conduct oral history interviews to supplement their understanding of how family knowledge travels over time. Opening the assignment beyond the archive allows students to answer in whatever way fits their family, whether or not they have access to family records.

## Conclusion

*“...our genealogies can serve as anticolonial tools while also reminding us that the colonial experience, however harrowing, is only a blip on the timeline of the collective experience of our peoples.”<sup>97</sup>*

Family history projects have critical implications for how students understand the history of the United States and their connection to it. While current versions of family history projects may increase white students’ sense of representation by connecting their families to the American originary myths that celebrate colonists, pioneers, westward expansion, and manifest destiny, such projects may put Indigenous students in a position of publicly reckoning with painful histories of racism, attempted genocide, land loss, and cultural and linguistic assaults. Teachers must take care to cultivate a space in which students receive appropriate support to recognize and confront settler colonialism and capitalist white supremacy and to ensure that they do not further harmful narratives for students whose families do not fit the tidy white-centric norm of traditional projects.

Family history projects can be strong tools to engage students in the study of history. They can equip students with the tools to investigate their families more fully, to ask questions and record the information they find, and to develop a keen understanding of where their stories fit into the history of the United States. Engaging students in the study of their own histories also provides opportunity for Indigenous students to highlight the resilience and perseverance of their families.

The suggestions offered in this article broaden family history projects to better work for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike. As teachers prepare to implement these alternative strategies, they can commit to building their content knowledge of Indigenous Studies. They can learn about the ways in which Indigenous students see their identities as both political and racial, and build opportunities into their classrooms for students to learn about Indigenous governance and citizenship. They can learn about Indigenous histories, building their understanding of the historical relocations that may separate some Indigenous students from the lands to which their families are connected, and of the experiences of Indigenous adoptees, both under and outside of Indian Child Welfare Act protections.

Teachers' commitment to Indigenous Studies can translate to more holistic framings of family, community, and belonging for family history projects. They will be better able to support Indigenous students whose family vital records are held by the federal government instead of a local municipal office and to prepare students whose Native nations bridge nation-state borders to conduct international research. They will be able to pre-emptively develop strategies for students whose family trees have missing or unidentified relatives or have interrupted, severed, or unknown connections in their families, and they will be prepared to acknowledge with students that such experiences are common. As teachers (and students) learn to center Indigenous ideas about belonging and kinship, they may also critically evaluate their own perspectives on blood, genetic testing, and DNA services. Lastly, teachers equipped with Indigenous Studies knowledge will be better able to center the resilience and perseverance of students' families, past, present, and future, as they base projects in a strengths-oriented, asset-based approach.

## Notes

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1. Tony Burroughs made a distinction between the terms “genealogy” and “family history”: “Genealogy tells you who your ancestors are, when and where they were born and died, who they married, and who their parents were,” whereas “Family history tells you what the ancestors did between birth and death and, hopefully, why they did it and how they felt.” See Tony Burroughs, *Black Roots: A Beginner’s Guide to Tracing the African American Family Tree* (New York: Fireside Books, 2001), 28. For the purposes of this article, we will use the broader term, “family histories.”

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3. Center for Humans and Nature, “What Kind of Ancestor Do You Want to Be?” Questions for a Resilient Future, 2021, <<https://www.humansandnature.org/what-kind-of-ancestor-do-you-want-to-be>>.

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7. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 10, 41.

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9. Megan Bang, Charlene Montañó Nolan, and Nikki McDaid-Morgan, “Indigenous Family Engagement: Strong Families, Strong Nations,” in *Handbook of Indigenous Education*, ed. Elizabeth Ann McKinley and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019), 790.

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11. Linda Laidlaw and Suzanna So-Har Wong, “The Trouble with ‘Getting Personal’: New Narratives for New Times in Classroom Writing Assignments,” *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* 12, no. 3 (December 2013): 109.

12. Elizabeth Heilman, “Hegemonies and ‘Transgressions’ of Family: Tales of Pride and Prejudice,” in *Other Kinds of Families: Embracing Diversity*

*in Schools*, ed. Tammy Turner-Vorbeck and Monica Miller Marsh (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 7-27.

13. Laidlaw and Wong, "The Trouble with 'Getting Personal,'" 110.

14. Kesler, "Teachers' Texts in Culturally Responsive Teaching"; Linda Laidlaw, "Learning to 'Do Family' Differently: Towards More Complex Notions of Family, Culture, and Schooling," *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 4, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 41-54.

15. Laidlaw and Wong, "The Trouble with 'Getting Personal.'"

16. Laidlaw, "Learning to 'Do Family' Differently."

17. Patricia Monture-Angus, *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations' Independence* (Halifax, Canada: Fernwood Publishing, 1999), 158-159.

18. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 9.

19. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 8.

20. Robert A. Trennert, "From Carlisle to Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of the Indian Outing System, 1878-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 52, no. 3 (August 1983): 267-291.

21. Estelle Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 190.

22. Claire Palmiste, "From the Indian Adoption Project to the Indian Child Welfare Act: The Resistance of Native American Communities," 2011, HAL Université des Antilles, <<https://hal.univ-antilles.fr/hal-01768178>>.

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28. Bennett, "Black Roots"; Valenciana, "Unconstitutional Deportation of Mexican Americans."



29. Aaron, "Using Genealogy to Teach History"; Paul Barrett, "'My Grandfather Slammed the Door in Winston Churchill's Face!': Using Family History to Provoke Rigorous Enquiry," *Teaching History* 145 (December 2011): 14-21; Bennett, "Black Roots"; Davis, "Identifying with Ancestors"; Thomas Dublin, "Drawing on the Personal: 'Roots' Papers in the Teaching of American History," *The Social Studies* 88, no. 2 (March-April 1997): 61-64; Rosalyn LaPier, "American Indian Family History Project," Americans for Indian Opportunity Ambassador Program Project (Chicago, IL: Native American Educational Services College, 1993); Nancy E. McCrary, "Building Community through Shared Aesthetic Experience: A Multimedia Family History Project," *Social Education* 76, no. 2 (March-April 2012): 96-99; Mehaffy, Sitton, and Davis, "Oral History in the Classroom"; Irma M. Olmedo, "Family Oral Histories for Multicultural Curriculum Perspectives," *Urban Education* 32, no. 1 (March 1997): 45-62.

30. Mehaffy, Sitton, and Davis, "Oral History in the Classroom."

31. Aaron, "Using Genealogy to Teach History"; Bennett, "Black Roots"; Learn NC, *Family History in the Classroom: Resources and Reflections on Teaching with Family History* (Chapel Hill, NC: Learn NC, 2014).

32. Aaron, "Using Genealogy to Teach History"; James F. Adomanis, "Using Genealogy and Family History to Teach Immigration History," *OAH Magazine of History* 4, no. 4 (Spring 1990): 52-55.

33. Aaron, "Using Genealogy to Teach History"; Adomanis, "Using Genealogy and Family History to Teach Immigration History"; David H. Culbert, "Undergraduates as Historians: Family History Projects Add Meaning to an Introductory Survey," *The History Teacher* 7, no. 1 (November 1973): 7-17; McCrary, "Building Community through Shared Aesthetic Experience."

34. Aaron, "Using Genealogy to Teach History"; Adomanis, "Using Genealogy and Family History to Teach Immigration History"; Bennett, "Black Roots"; Davis, "Identifying with Ancestors"; LaPier, "American Indian Family History Project."

35. Aaron, "Using Genealogy to Teach History"; Bennett, "Black Roots"; Teaching Tolerance/Learning for Justice, "Understanding My Family's History," Southern Poverty Law Center, <<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/understanding-my-familys-history>>.

36. Adomanis, "Using Genealogy and Family History to Teach Immigration History"; Culbert, "Undergraduates as Historians"; Teaching Tolerance, "Understanding My Family's History."

37. Barrett, "'My Grandfather Slammed the Door in Winston Churchill's Face!'" ; Dublin, "Drawing on the Personal"; McCrary, "Building Community through Shared Aesthetic Experience"; Pederson, "The Four-Generation Project."

38. Aaron, "Using Genealogy to Teach History"; Adomanis, "Using Genealogy and Family History to Teach Immigration History"; Davis, "Identifying with Ancestors"; Learn NC, *Family History in the Classroom*.

39. Aaron, "Using Genealogy to Teach History"; Adomanis, "Using Genealogy and Family History to Teach Immigration History"; Davis, "Identifying with Ancestors"; Teaching Tolerance, "Understanding My Family's History";

Dublin, “Drawing on the Personal”; McCrary, “Building Community through Shared Aesthetic Experience”; Learn NC, *Family History in the Classroom*.

40. Teaching Tolerance, “Understanding My Family’s History.”

41. Jane Yolen, “Encounter” (blog post), 2019, <<https://www.janeyolen.com/encounter/>>.

42. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387-409.

43. Jean Paine Mendoza, “Goodbye Columbus: Take Two,” in *A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children*, ed. Doris Seale and Beverly Slapin (Berkeley, CA: AltaMira Press and Oyate, 2005), 197.

44. Mendoza, “Goodbye Columbus,” 198.

45. Steven Mintz, “Teaching Family History: An Annotated Bibliography,” *OAH Magazine of History* 15, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 13.

46. Debbie Reese’s blog, “American Indians in Children’s Literature,” provides a comprehensive source for identifying accurate and appropriate books: <<https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/>>.

47. Laidlaw, “Learning to ‘Do Family’ Differently”; Adomanis, “Using Genealogy and Family History to Teach Immigration History”; Davis, “Identifying with Ancestors”; Laidlaw and Wong, “The Trouble with ‘Getting Personal.’”

48. Laidlaw and Wong, “The Trouble with ‘Getting Personal,’” 109.

49. Laidlaw, “Learning to ‘Do Family’ Differently,” 43.

50. Laidlaw, “Learning to ‘Do Family’ Differently”; Kesler, “Teachers’ Texts in Culturally Responsive Teaching”; Laidlaw and Wong, “The Trouble with ‘Getting Personal’”; Pederson, “The Four-Generation Project”; Tammy Turner-Vorbeck and Monica Miller Marsh, eds., *Other Kinds of Families: Embracing Diversity in Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008); Lansing Wood and Nancy Sheehan Ng, eds., *Adoption and the Schools: Resources for Parents and Teachers* (Palo Alto, CA: FAIR Families, 2001).

51. Wood and Ng, *Adoption and the Schools*.

52. Ariel Cornett et al., “Culture ‘Calle’: Celebrating Heritage, Diversity, and Dreams in Bilingual Classrooms,” *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 32, no. 1 (September-October 2019): 15.

53. Christine Sleeter, “Adoption in Family History,” (blog post), January 25, 2014, paragraph 10, <<https://www.christinesleeter.org/adoption/>>.

54. Davis, “Identifying with Ancestors.”

55. For a more comprehensive discussion of Indigenous identities, see Garrouette, *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America*; Sandy Grande, Timothy San Pedro, and Sweeney Windchief, “Indigenous Peoples and Identity in the 21st Century: Remembering, Reclaiming, and Regenerating,” in *Multicultural Perspectives on Race, Ethnicity, and Identity*, ed. Elizabeth Pathy Salett and Diane R. Koslow (Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers Press, 2015), 105-122; Bonita Lawrence, “Real” *Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Scott Richard Lyons, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Circe Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation*

of *Oklahoma* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Norbert S. Hill, Jr. and Kathleen Ratteree, eds., *The Great Vanishing Act: Blood Quantum and the Future of Native Nations* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2017).

56. 23andMe, “Can 23andMe Identify Native American Ancestry?,” 2019, <<https://customercare.23andme.com/hc/en-us/articles/202906870-Can-23andMe-identify-Native-American-ancestry>>.

57. Kimberly TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood*.

58. David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*, fourth ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

59. Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*, 56.

60. Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018).

61. Jean Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement: Constituting a Twenty-First-Century Osage Nation* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 53.

62. Kirsty Gover, *Tribal Constitutionalism: States, Tribes, and the Governance of Membership* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82.

63. Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.”

64. Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood*, 41.

65. Importantly, even as blood has been imposed as a metric of authenticity, blood may also have different meanings within some Indigenous contexts. As Kim TallBear writes, “Blood rules can and do have roots in the Euro-American racial thinking of earlier centuries. But ‘blood’ may also retain symbolic meanings rooted in indigenous thought, and blood rules require the counting of one’s tribal relations and ancestors.” See TallBear, *Native American DNA*, 64.

66. Suzan Shown Harjo, “Vampire Policy Is Bleeding Us Dry—Blood Quantums, Be Gone!” in *The Great Vanishing Act: Blood Quantum and the Future of Native Nations*, ed. Norbert S. Hill, Jr. and Kathleen Ratteree (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2017), 78.

67. For more on entanglements of blood and Indigenous identity, see the *All My Relations* podcast episodes, “Can a DNA test made me Native American?” and “Beyond Blood Quantum” from Matika Wilbur (Swinomish and Tulalip) and Adrienne Keene (Cherokee Nation). Adrienne Keene and Matika Wilbur, “Can a DNA Test Make Me Native American?” *All My Relations* (podcast), <<https://www.allmyrelationspodcast.com/post/ep-4-can-a-dna-test-make-me-native-american>>; Adrienne Keene and Matika Wilbur, “Beyond Blood Quantum,” *All My Relations* (podcast), <<https://www.allmyrelationspodcast.com/post/ep-10-beyond-blood-quantum>>. See also Norbert S. Hill, Jr. and Kathleen Ratteree, eds., *The Great Vanishing Act: Blood Quantum and the Future of Native Nations* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2017).

68. Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood*.

69. Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Rayna Green, "The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe," *Folklore* 99, no. 1 (1988): 30-55; Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).
70. Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, reprint ed. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 3.
71. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40.
72. Kristina Elizabeth Waller, "An Examination of Preservice Teachers' Understanding of Diversity and Cultural Awareness after Participating in a Family Heritage Experience" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2016), 44.
73. Waller, "An Examination of Preservice Teachers' Understanding," 44-45.
74. TallBear, *Native American DNA*.
75. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 103 (emphasis in original).
76. Some students may legitimately have Native relatives, but not be enrolled as citizens in their nations. Students may not be enrolled in their nation for a variety of reasons and yet maintain ongoing relationships with their Native nation and/or family.
77. A note to our Indigenous readers: Even as we affirm that identity is about connection to community, we also recognize that "Identity is more than what community claims you because some of our communities are laterally violent, anti-Black, homophobic, transphobic and so much more." For those relatives impacted by these internalized violences, we see you. See Carrington Christmas (@carrchristmas), Twitter, July 13, 2021, <<https://www.twitter.com/carrchristmas/status/1414959764501639178>>.
78. Daniel Heath Justice (@justicedanielh), Twitter, September 27, 2015, <<https://www.twitter.com/justicedanielh/status/648227739967754240>>.
79. Daniel Heath Justice (@justicedanielh), Twitter, July 8, 2019, <<https://www.twitter.com/justicedanielh/status/1148286938517950465>>.
80. Daniel Heath Justice (@justicedanielh), Twitter, July 8, 2019, <<https://www.twitter.com/justicedanielh/status/1148286939314868224>>.
81. Laidlaw and Wong, "The Trouble with 'Getting Personal,'" 105.
82. Suzanne L. Cross, Angelique G. Day, and Lisa G. Byers, "American Indian Grand Families: A Qualitative Study Conducted with Grandmothers and Grandfathers Who Provide Sole Care for Their Grandchildren," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 25, no. 4 (December 2010): 371-383.
83. For an example of these types of questions, see LaPier, "American Indian Family History Project."
84. McCrary, "Building Community through Shared Aesthetic Experience," 99.
85. See examples at Family Tree Templates, <<https://www.familytreetemplates.net/category/nontraditional>>. Although we appreciate the suggested templates, we suggest that teachers avoid framing families as "traditional" or "non-traditional," as such labels reinforce normative notions of family.

86. Laidlaw, "Learning to 'Do Family' Differently"; Nancy Sheehan Ng, "A Forest of Family Trees," in *Adoption and the Schools: Resources for Parents and Teachers*, ed. Lansing Wood and Nancy Sheehan Ng (Palo Alto, CA: FAIR Families, 2001).

87. Ng, "A Forest of Family Trees."

88. Forrest D. Pass, "Strange Whims of Crest Fiends: Marketing Heraldry in the United States, 1880-1980," *Journal of American Studies* 50, no. 3 (August 2016): 592.

89. Pass, "Strange Whims of Crest Fiends," 597.

90. John W. Healy, "My Family Crest," *Teaching PreK-8* 35, no. 4 (October 2005): 31-32.

91. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 6.

92. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013).

93. Davis, "Identifying with Ancestors."

94. Ariel Cornett et al., "The Family Tree Project," *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 32, no. 1 (September-October 2019): P3.

95. Richard Manning and Neil Harrison, "Narratives of Place and Land: Teaching Indigenous Histories in Australian and New Zealand Teacher Education," *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* 43, no. 9 (September 2018): 70.

96. Indigenous diaspora refers to the experiences of removal, federal relocation, land dispossession, and economic coercion that have forced Indigenous peoples to leave their homelands. This includes the experiences of Indigenous peoples from Central and South America forced to flee violence or economic hardship, often as a result of prior U.S. intervention in their home countries. In conversations with students about who is Indigenous, it is important to remember that the borders between nation-states have been imposed by nation-states and do not necessarily reflect the boundaries of Indigenous territories. In this way, a K'iche' Maya person migrating from Guatemala to the United States is also an Indigenous person experiencing forced relocation. It is also important to remember that identity categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, students may identify as both Black and Indigenous, and teachers should be prepared to support students in researching their complex histories.

97. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 45.