

Our Human Roots

Objective: Students will learn about their ancestors and their work.

Summary: Students will complete a family tree, including information on the type of work family members did, and note those jobs relating to agriculture.

Time: One week-long homework assignment, culminating with class presentations.

Student Grouping: Individuals/pairs (see preparation)

Materials: Family Tree worksheet, world map

Background Information: Of more than 6.9 million people in the greater Bay Area, only one to two percent work in agriculture. This seems amazing since we know that everyone eats and uses agricultural products every day. These figures include 80 percent of the jobs in agriculture that happen off the farm, such as shipping, processing and selling agricultural products. The percentage of our population involved in agriculture has decreased dramatically over the last 100 years. In 1870, 53 percent of the U.S. population was employed in agriculture; by 1920, that number had dropped to 21 percent. Today only 1.9 percent of the U.S. population works in agriculture. Here in Marin County the 1944 census counted 1,800 ranches, compared to 276 ranches today—a decrease of 84 percent. Nationwide there are 1.9 million farms in America today, down 72% from 6.8 million farms in 1935. There is rarely a family tree that does not illustrate this phenomenon to some degree. In the past, most families were involved in food production of some sort.

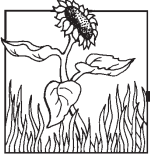
Marin Ag. Facts: In the 1820s most of Marin's ranchers were from Mexico. These ranchers raised longhorn cattle for hides and tallow. The animals grazed wild and were herded by both Mexicans and enslaved Miwok cattlemen.

After the Mission San Rafael Archangel was closed in 1834, the land was divided into ranchos. When the gold rush came, all the longhorns were moved to the gold country to feed hungry miners. During this time the native tule elk disappeared from Marin County due to hunting and loss of habitat. Ranchers began to introduce American stock animals; by the 1850s dairies were established to supply demands from San Francisco. These early dairy ranchers were mostly Swiss, Portuguese and Irish immigrants, joined later by Italians. They produced primarily butter, cheese and hogs.

Just after World War I, Yugoslavians arrived and fished our local waters. Currently there is an influx of men from Jalisco, Mexico, near Guadalajara. These men often come to work on the ranches and save money to send for their families. Today it is harder for anyone to save enough money to buy a ranch. Many local ranches are passed through succeeding generations of family members.

Potatoes were grown from 1850 to 1900 and were a large crop. Unfortunately, the hillsides could not handle the cultivation, and vast quantities of soil were washed into Tomales Bay.

Before World War II, Japanese and Italian farmers grew peas and artichokes at Point Reyes. Today, while beef, sheep and dairy operations predominate, there are still thriving vegetable farms here in the county.



Preparation:

1. Make copies of the Family Tree worksheet for each class member. Review the form and what it requires.
2. Think about your students. If there are family situations that would make this project impossible or painful, maybe students could work in pairs, actually writing out only one family tree, or they could choose to interview a local rancher or farmer, writing up that person's family tree.
3. Decide how you want the lesson to culminate. Each class member can write about their family tree or present what they learned to the class. You can keep a tally of relatives by relation and job type on a piece of butcher paper or the board. Students can hand in the worksheets.

Procedure:

1. Hand out the Family Tree worksheet and review it with your students so they understand how to fill it in. Tell students to talk to their parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and anyone else who might know about their ancestors. Give them a due date. One week is usually long enough. If communication is by letter, more time may be needed.
2. With a world map, have students point out or show with yarn where their ancestors and families lived before they came to Marin County.
3. See preparation (3) for ways to culminate this activity.

Questions for Discussion:

- How many parents, aunts and uncles work in agriculture? Grandparents and great aunts and uncles? Great-grandparents, great-great aunts and uncles?
- How many students plan to work in agriculture?
- In the future, will anyone work in agriculture?
- Does anyone in the class have relatives from the same part of the world as another student's?

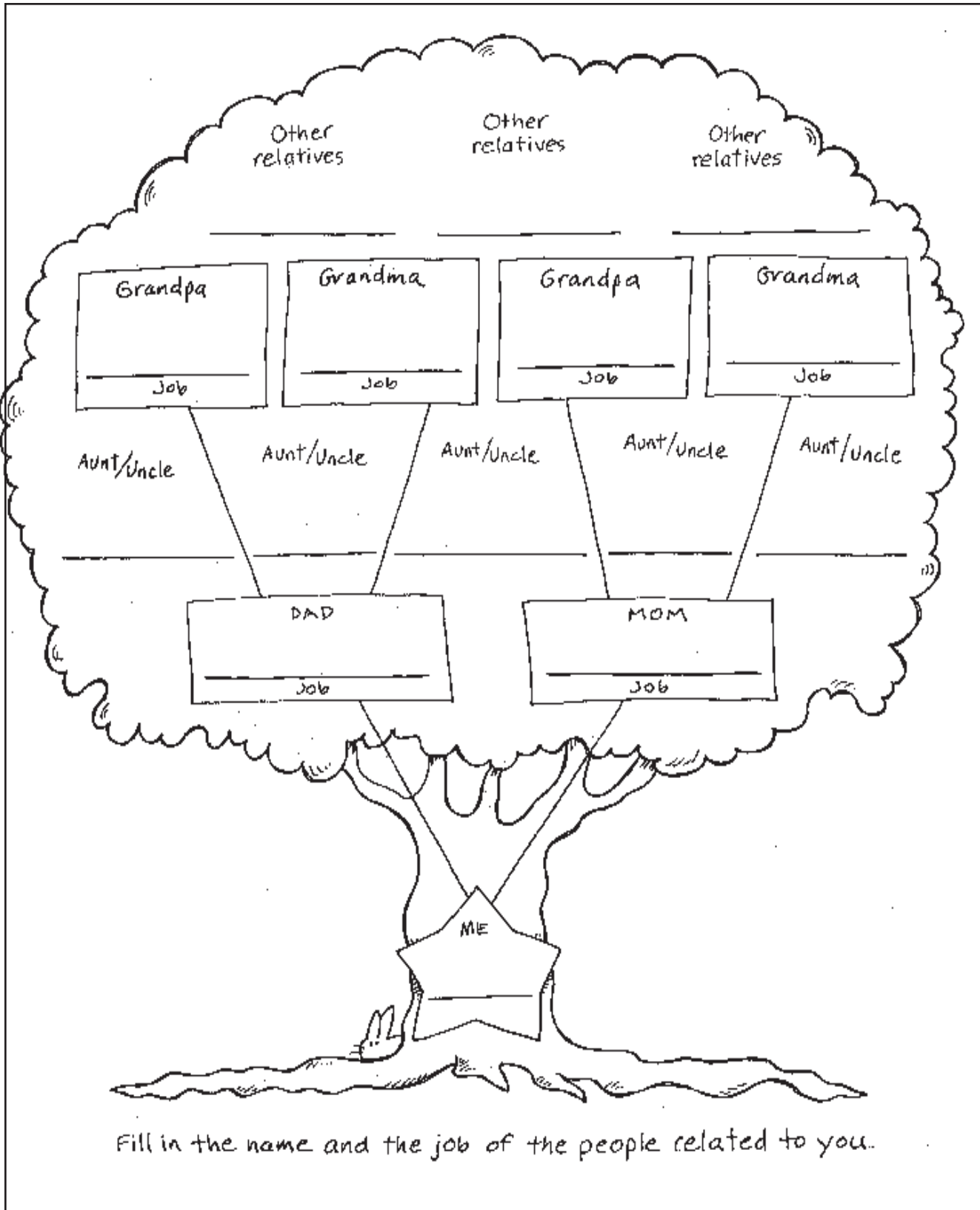
Extensions:

- Take a field trip to the Mission St. Raphael in San Rafael and use books to learn about the agriculture of the mid 1800s.
- Interview grand- and great-grandparents about where their food came from when they were children.
- Students who wrote for information could share their letters.

Idea from Minnesota Ag in the Classroom.



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Nuestras Raíces

