

Ancestor Journeys - - handout
GSSCC Program - - January 3, 2023
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Introduction - - Write a story about an ancestor's journey. The journey can be geographical, psychological, or metaphorical - - optimistic, tragic, practical, religious, interior. An ancestor may have experienced more than one type of journey. The prompts can also be used to write about your own journeys.

Optimistic journeys

Employment

Did your ancestor leave home to seek employment? Higher pay? More opportunity for advancement?

To follow a different and more desirable career?

To go into business with a family member, friend, or in-law?

Did your ancestor join a gold rush? Where? When?

Was your ancestor successful? In what way?

Did your ancestor go to another state in order to attend university?

Was your ancestor drawn to a new location after a military posting there?

Did your ancestor relocate to follow a personal or fanciful dream? Go to Hollywood or New York to pursue an acting career; or Nashville to pursue a music career?

What were the push-pull factors influencing your ancestor's decision to move? Industrial Revolution drew workers to cities; some occupations faded after Industrial Revolution; factories closed; farming became unprofitable; new industries sprouted in different locales; promise of adventure

Marriage

Did your ancestor travel in order to marry?

Did your ancestor find a spouse as a result of an arranged marriage?

Did your ancestor relocate due to marital discord or failure? Did your ancestor flee to escape domestic violence? Did your ancestral couple become estranged? Why?

Was your ancestor a bigamist or a polygamist?
Did your ancestor avoid the formality of marriage altogether?

Tragic journeys

Was your ancestor forced to relocate, as opposed to choosing to relocate?

War

Was your ancestor affected by war or the Holocaust?
Bombing and destruction? E.g., London blitz during World War II
Did your ancestor relocate in order to avoid conscription?
Sometimes, children relocated into safe spaces during war-time

Natural disasters

Did your ancestor relocate as a result of catastrophic natural disasters?
E.g., floods; tornadoes; hurricanes; wildfires; earthquakes
Was your ancestor forced to move due to man-made activities; e.g., dam-
building; highway construction; government exercise of eminent domain?

Consider where your family lived for possible clues to weather/disaster-
related relocation causes

Research county histories - - what was occurring locally that might have
caused outward migration; e.g., radiation leaks; toxic water; houses red-
tagged

Ethnic cleansing

Removal to ghettos and concentration camps
Indigenous Americans - - Trail of Tears; moved onto reservations; lost
homeland and culture; forced into residential schools far from family

Financial catastrophes

The Irish Potato Famine
The European bank crash of the 1890s
The Great Depression
The Dust Bowl

Imprisonment

- Was your ancestor convicted of a crime and sent to prison?
- Was your ancestor exiled to Australia?
- Was your ancestor a prisoner of war or a political prisoner?
- Was your ancestor accused of being a witch?

Slavery and indenture

- Slavery is the epitome of forced relocation and tragic journeys
- Was your ancestor enslaved? Or an enslaver?
- Was your ancestor forcibly removed from homeland, culture, family?
- Did your ancestor work to end slavery?
- Was your ancestor an indentured servant or impressed seaman?

Personal causes

There are as many personal causes for journeys as there are people

- Was your ancestor orphaned?
- Was your ancestor sent west on an orphan train?
 - See “Finding the Holy Grail of the Nolan Family History”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dO5ev9EhoWk>
- Was your ancestor an adoptee?
- Did your ancestor relocate to escape persecution for being gay, mixed race, handicapped?

Some causes of relocation can be relevant to more than one category

Resulting losses

- Loss of life; liberty; health
- Loss of property, real and personal
- Loss of family cohesiveness
- Loss of language and culture

Religious journeys

Religious freedom

- Did your ancestor relocate seeking freedom of religious practice?
- Think of Puritans; Huguenots; Mennonites; others

Interior religious journeys

Did your ancestor convert from one religion or denomination to another?

Did your ancestor find religion, or lose faith altogether?

Describe consequences your ancestor suffered from his/her religious beliefs or practices - - excommunication; shunning; exorcism

Did you ancestor join a religious community? Where? When? Why?

Become a nun, priest, or pastor? Serve as an itinerant preacher?

Practical journeys

Did your ancestor relocate in order to obtain free land? This is perhaps the number one reason for people relocating to North America in the 18th and 19th centuries. Younger sons of European families had no hope of acquiring land back home; this prompted many of them to migrate to America.

Frontier settlements

Did your ancestor arrive in North America during the colonial period? Did your ancestor relocate after arrival? Frontier settlement occurred during the colonial period as well as during the 19th century. Each colony had its own history of settlement

Did your ancestor settle in Canada? Don't neglect Canada! Many U. S. Americans have ancestors who originated in, or spent time living in Canada. Many people have French-Canadian ancestors, but don't realize it. French surnames have been Anglicized, translated, and disappear the minute a French-Canadian woman marries out of the French-Canadian culture. Loyalists were granted land in Canada after the American Revolution, primarily in Ontario and the Maritimes

Homesteading

Did your ancestor migrate to the Midwest and file a homestead? Where did your ancestor locate? What type of dwelling did your ancestor build? What routes did your ancestor take to the homestead location?

Following family or friends

Did your ancestor move to another place in order to follow family or friends to a new location? Such migration has associated effects including marriages and business connections with neighbors. Use the FAN club!

Interior journeys

Personal remake

Did your ancestor reinvent herself in order to overcome a scandalous past?
Did your ancestor have an out-of-wedlock child? Engage in questionable liaisons or unorthodox activities?
Did your ancestor become a recluse?

Name change

Did your ancestor assume an alias? Why an alias?
For practical reasons? To disassociate from shameful family members or infamous strangers? To disguise identity because of criminal activity?
To hide from an abandoned spouse and/or children?

Alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness

Did your ancestor sink into alcoholism, drug abuse, or mental illness?
Did an ancestor suddenly disappear from records

Flights of fancy

Did your ancestor travel on flights of fancy by way of a journal, music, or art?
What does your ancestor's journal reveal?
Did your ancestor create poetry; write novels; make paintings; pen memoirs; journals; letters? What do those works tell you about your ancestor's journey?

Conclusion

The sky's the limit! Choose one of your ancestors who undertook a journey of some kind, and write a brief piece. A single ancestor may have experienced more than one type of journey. Then choose another ancestor and another journey, and write another brief piece. If you have photos of your ancestor, maps, or other graphics illustrating your story, add those. Use these prompts to write about your own journeys.