

Land of Diversity

STORIES OF AMERICAN HERITAGE
Contest winning essays, plus tools to tell your family story

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Introduction

DIVERSITY OF LANDSCAPE

Geography played a vital role in the development of both American culture and industry. Its varied landscape offered new settlers the natural resources to begin to shape the regional economies of the United States — from coastlands to mountain ranges, from great lakes to barren deserts. Today, geography and climate continue to affect migration trends.

DIVERSITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Long known as the “Land of Opportunity,” the United States has attracted new residents in search of a better life and individual freedom. The country has abundant natural resources and vibrant cities, helping foster the American spirit of ingenuity and equal opportunity for all. The diversity of the growing immigrant population helped drive successes in U.S. farming, manufacturing, science, and technology, and it also inspired important contributions in literature, music, philosophy, and religion.

DIVERSITY OF PEOPLE

Above all, the diversity of people creates the unique fiber of this country — people from different ethnic backgrounds, different religions, and different countries who bring with them different languages, traditions, values, cuisines, and fashions. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, the nation’s foreign-born population numbers about 34 million people, accounting for about 12 percent of the total U.S. population.

About this Book

The six essays featured in this book are winners of the “Land of Diversity” Essay Contest sponsored by the United States Postal Service® in 2005. Essays were to be written about individuals’ family history in America, and how America, as the land of opportunity and diversity, helped them or their family realize the American dream. The Postal Service™ is proud of its role in portraying the American experience through stamps, and it encourages you to discover your own family heritage.

Use the worksheets to collect information and jot down notes about your family. On the last two pages, you can show and tell your family story. Stamps tell stories too, and stamp collecting is a great way to learn about history, sports, famous people, arts, and much more. You can learn more about stamp collecting — and the stories that stamps help to tell — at www.usps.com/shop, or by calling 800-Stamp-24 (800-782-6724).

A Legacy of Service to Others

Winning Essay

BY JACQUELINE BYRD (18+ AGE GROUP)

*M*y family came over to America by way of slavery from the rich and beautiful continent of Africa. Although our initial entry into America was marked by something negative, because this nation is one of opportunity and many methods to express one's gifts, talents, and desires, our family has achieved many things that were once out of reach. My ancestors, via my grandparents Lannie Bell and John Newell, became land owners during the 1940s. The land was so vast that in comparison to a city street, it would encompass 20 city blocks. My grandfather, John Newell, could only go as far as the first grade and my grandmother only as far as elementary school. They birthed 18 children total. America offered many things to those who were uneducated by way of hard work and showing themselves to be trustworthy. This allowed my grandparents to receive the help they needed by those whom they worked for to own their own farm and land.

My mother, father, and their siblings did not finish high school. My father completed the sixth grade, but had to drop out to work and support his mother and sister. My mother had to drop out in the eighth grade to help out with her siblings. Although my father did not have a complete education, he was allowed to work at a sugar mill, from which he retired after 40 years. My mother eventually went to trade school and obtained her nursing certificate. She has since retired and is a homeowner. My siblings and I each received our high school diplomas. Two of my siblings went into the armed services. My sister and I are college graduates.

Through the opportunities available in the workforce, my grandparents and parents, although uneducated by the educational system, were able to maintain gainful employment that made them homeowners, business owners of a farm, and landowners. My sister and I, because of educational opportunities that are available, were able to obtain our bachelor's degree and master's degree in our respective fields. Because



Jacqueline Byrd

of the need for people to be able to understand their gifts and talents, my small business is able to give back to the community by helping people to realize their talents and gifts and calling in life. This will help them to become productive, help others to realize their dreams, set goals of achievement, and build America up to continue being the great country that she is. Through work opportunities and educational opportunities that were once not available for African Americans, but are plentiful now, my family has realized their dream of achieving our respective goals, express our gifts and talents, and provide hope to others that we have the pleasure of meeting.



My Family Tree Worksheet



Use this sheet to gather data for your family tree. Then fill in the names where indicated by number on the family tree on page 4. Recording each person's place of birth and his or her life dates (dates of birth and death) is useful for further genealogy research and building a more extensive family tree.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. _____
You | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 2. _____
Mother | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 3. _____
Father | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 4. _____
Maternal Grandmother | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 5. _____
Maternal Grandfather | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 6. _____
Paternal Grandmother | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 7. _____
Paternal Grandfather | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 8. _____
Great-grandmother (maternal grandmother's mother) | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 9. _____
Great-grandfather (maternal grandmother's father) | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 10. _____
Great-grandmother (maternal grandfather's mother) | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 11. _____
Great-grandfather (maternal grandfather's father) | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 12. _____
Great-grandmother (paternal grandmother's mother) | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 13. _____
Great-grandfather (paternal grandmother's father) | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 14. _____
Great-grandmother (paternal grandfather's mother) | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |
| 15. _____
Great-grandfather (paternal grandfather's father) | Place of Birth _____
Life Dates _____ |

Leaving the Past Behind

Winning Essay

BY FRANK HICKS, JR. (18+ AGE GROUP)

My grandfather, born under a sovereign ruler, sought freedom in America at the turn of the last century, leaving homeland and family behind. He also left his bride of only a year in a grave on the soil of his birth. The American Dream was so strong he selected a new name, an American name, and settled in Boston, where he felt there was not only diversification in work opportunities, but also culture and religion. He didn't want a sterile environment, even one that complemented his ideas and faith. He worked as a laborer on the docks of Boston until he became a citizen and found a job on the fishing boats. From there he worked 16 hours a day until he got onto tug boats. He spent all his spare time learning every aspect of ships. Eventually his self-education led to his position as chief engineer on cruise ships traveling around the world.

His American Dream was more to him than a high-paying job. He totally adopted this new land. He never spoke his native language again. He met my grandmother, born in England of Irish parents who also came to America seeking the American Dream, in Boston and began his greatest contribution to his new land, his family.

Beginning without money or education, time tested his dream. His family multiplied faster than his paycheck, but he had a strong faith in God and his new country. His family never lacked food, faith, or happiness. And he was always bringing home new friends for dinner, some of whom couldn't even speak the language.

Diversity of this new land also offered problems. His Irish in-laws, now living with him, not only spoke their own form of English, but they developed their own form of loyalty and dreams. His neighbors were a mixture of Irish, Italians, hard-nosed New Englanders, English, French, and an assortment of other nationalities. He struggled at first to understand such a mixture of cultures. Eventually, he made his life all the better by extracting the best aspects from each of these cultures and making them part of his own life. That's what he said made America great.



Frank Hicks, Jr.

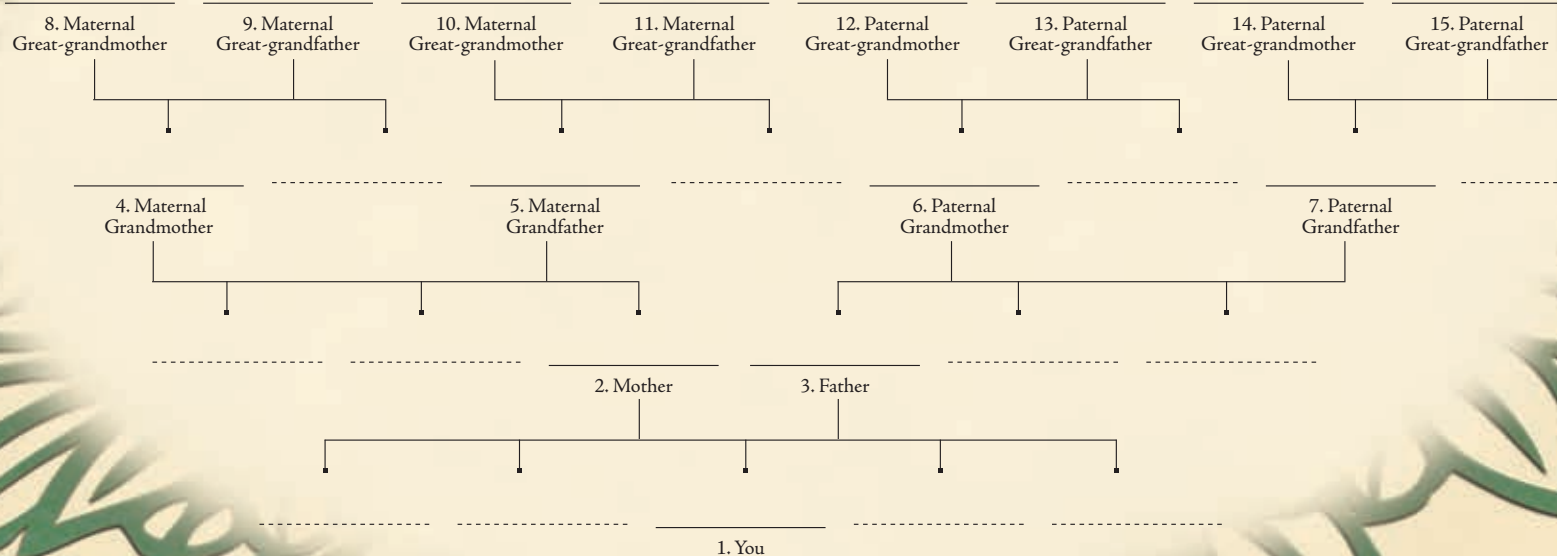
His tolerance grew for all peoples in spite of local cultural bigotry. In the end his family was stronger for this diversity. His instilling of the American diversity into all his children and even his wife, who would have to carry on for him as head of the family when he died early in life, gave a lasting foundation to my grandmother and each member of the large family. She never remarried.

My grandfather's influence reached even to my generation. He became a special influence in my life. I have tried to carry on in his stead and understand the true American Dream as only a foreign-born person seems to understand it — and to embrace all diverse cultures in this land that he loved, cultures that made it special and still do.



My Family Tree

On the numbered solid lines, fill in the names from the worksheet on page 2.
The dotted lines are for siblings — on your line, your brothers and sisters;
on your parents' lines, their brothers and sisters (your aunts and uncles); and on your
grandparents' lines, their brothers and sisters (your great-aunts and great-uncles).



Choose four relatives and send them each a postcard. Ask them to tell you something special about your family, or ask them to share a story or memory about your family's history.

A Family Journeys Together

BY DANIEL WALZER (9-12 AGE GROUP)

Winning Essay

It was 1890 in the Austria-Hungarian Empire. The country was in many wars, and there were many soldiers. My great-grandmother was only 14 years old. She lived with her family in a little house in a small town. The family farmed a small field to get food. They were poor.

Jews were being treated horribly there. They were not allowed to get good jobs or go to school. Great-grandmother had relatives in America. They wrote her and said that America was great. If they left the Austria-Hungarian Empire, they would have lots of opportunities. Her brother and two sisters were discussing whether they should leave that place. Then they made their decision to leave the Austria-Hungarian Empire.

My great-grandmother and her siblings walked all the way from their home to Germany. They got on a boat that took them to America. The voyage took a month, and it was very uncomfortable. They traveled with very few possessions and very little money. Finally, they got to a place called Ellis Island. After they stayed there for a while, they were allowed to go across the river to New York City. Then they walked to the Lower East Side of Manhattan. This was an area where a lot of immigrants came because the apartments were not expensive to rent.

My great-grandmother and her siblings knocked on a door, and their relatives ran out to greet them. They invited them into their home. All the siblings soon got jobs. Their relatives helped them find the jobs. Great-grandmother and her sisters worked in factories sewing clothes. Her brother worked for a furrier.

Eventually, my great-grandmother met a man she liked. She and the man fell in love and got married. My great-grandmother was only 17 years old at that time, but it wasn't unusual then for women to marry at a young age.

Great-grandma and her husband had one boy and three girls. Her oldest daughter was my grandmother, Sylvia. I am proud of my great-



Daniel Walzer

grandmother because it took courage for her to leave her home in Europe to come to a new place that she didn't know. In my opinion, America is the best place in the world to live. My great-grandmother achieved her dream by raising her family in America. She never became well-off, but her children improved their lives. Since Sylvia grew up in this country, she was able to get a good education and became a legal secretary. She married a lawyer, Jack, and raised their own family in comfort.



My Family History Worksheet

Use the questions below as a guide to piece together the story of your family heritage. Jot down all the facts you can gather. What was passed on from past generations? Talking to parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents will help you understand your roots. Then you can share their stories — and your own — with the next generation.



Your full name _____

What was the name of your family's first ancestor to come to the United States? _____

What was his/her reason to come here? _____

What other places did your ancestors come from? _____

What kind of jobs did your ancestors have? _____

What kind of holiday traditions were passed on? _____

How did your grandparents meet each other? _____

Where else in the United States do you have family members? _____

Where else in other countries do you have family members? _____

The Story of a Tailor

BY ADAM BARIN (9-12 AGE GROUP)

In 1913 my great-grandfather left Gostynin, Poland, with one thing in mind — America. My great-grandfather Isidore came to America so he wouldn't be rounded up and put in the czar's army at age twenty-two. This was because he did not support the abuse of the Russian people instead of keeping them safe.

He left on the S.S. Rotterdam with only \$31 and skills as a tailor. His fare was paid by his uncle who was already in America. On June 23, 1913, he set his foot on American soil at Ellis Island. He was inspected for diseases, and none were found.

When he settled down, he became a tailor and saved every cent to bring his five sisters over here. In 1921 he married. And in 1932 he finally became an American citizen. He had two children.

Isidore learned English by doing his daughter's homework. And yet his son became the head of biology at Tufts University and the head of Natural Sciences at the Library of Congress and met the Kennedys and Eleanor Roosevelt. He also wrote a few books.



Adam's great-grandfather Isidore and great-grandmother Anna (front) and great-uncle Jack (back)

Isidore looked for the American Dream here, and he found it. He escaped the czar. And look what happened from being a tailor to his son's becoming the head of Natural Sciences at the Library of Congress, which could only happen in America.

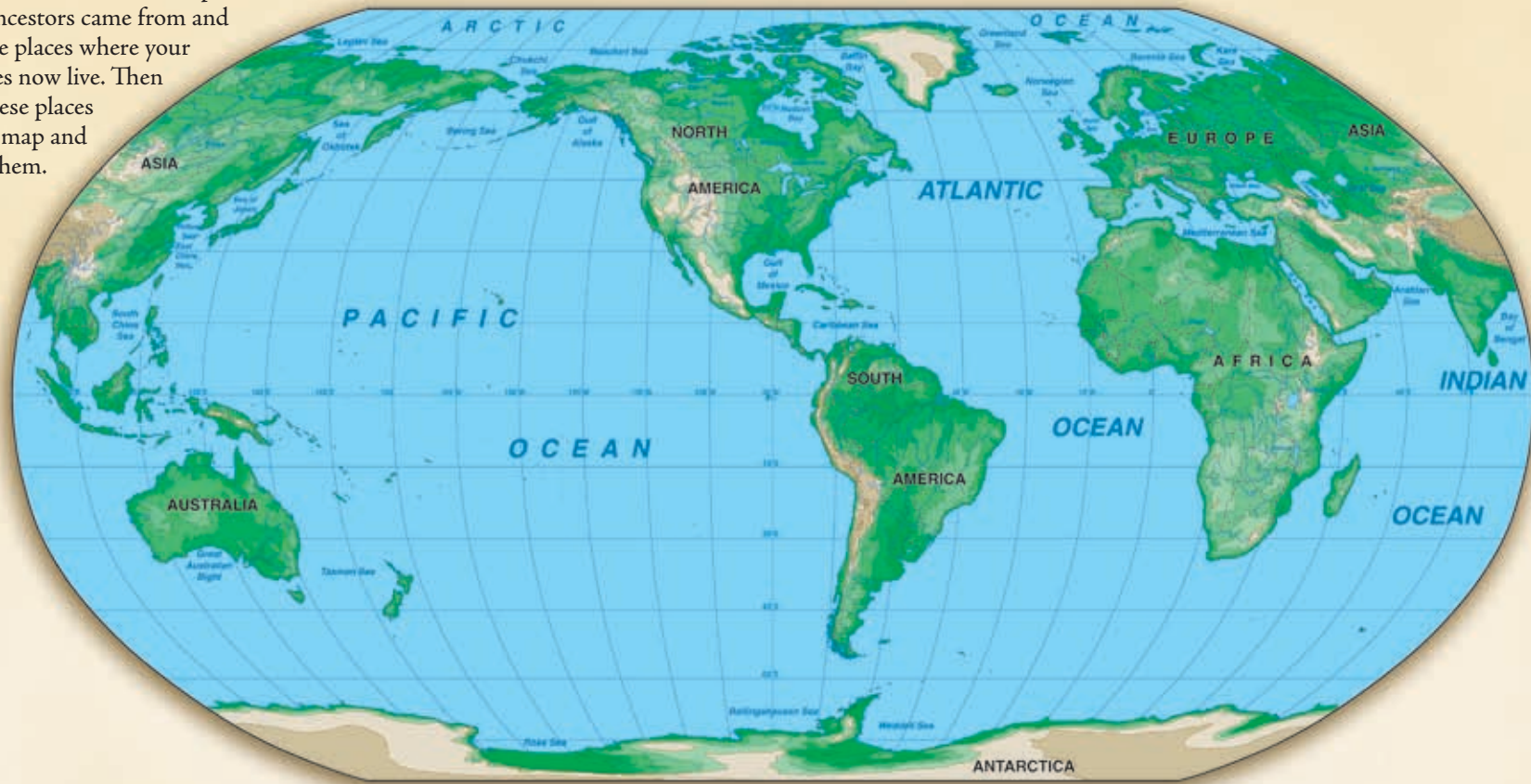


Ellis Island (Photo courtesy of the New York Public Library)



My Family Around the World

On the lines below, list the places your ancestors came from and also the places where your relatives now live. Then find these places on the map and mark them.



Turning Opportunity Into Great Achievements

BY BEN ISRAELI (9-12 AGE GROUP)

My paternal grandparents, my aunt, and my father came to America from Israel. At the time, my father was seven and my aunt was one. They came to America because my grandfather wanted to become an obstetrician in this country and because of the opportunities here. My grandfather decided to be an obstetrician in America instead of Israel because America has better training programs for doctors.

They didn't have much money, so they came to America in an inexpensive way. First, they traveled by boat to Italy. Then, they took a train to an airport. Finally, they took an airplane to America. After a long and tiring trip, my grandparents, my aunt, and my father made it to this country.

My grandfather went to a residency-training program to become an obstetrician. My grandmother worked as a teacher and psychologist. They visited my great-grandparents in Israel many times. They did this every summer until my great-grandparents died.

My paternal grandparents have achieved their goals. My grandfather is now a retired obstetrician. My grandmother is still a teacher and psychologist. Their children also made great achievements. My father is a plastic surgeon, and my aunt is a lawyer.

On the other side of my family, my maternal great-grandfather came to America from Budapest, Hungary. He came with his parents when he was a child. As a Jewish family, they came to America because Jews were being treated poorly in Hungary.

Their trip was also long. They started on a train and then traveled by ship across the Atlantic Ocean. When they arrived in New York City, they took a train to Buffalo, New York. Since his family was not poor, they traveled in comfort. The reason that they chose to go to Buffalo is that my great-great-great-aunt lived there at the time.



Ben Israeli with his parents and siblings: Nancy and Ron (back row), Ella and Ben (middle row), and Alec (front row)

In Buffalo, my great-grandfather owned a dry cleaning company named Pendrick Laundry and Dry Cleaners. He also helped establish his temple and became its president. My great-grandmother founded a Jewish orphanage. Besides these great achievements, they also reached their dreams, because they were no longer discriminated against.





Go on a Family Treasure Hunt

You can tell your family's story not just with words but also with treasured objects — books they owned and read, letters they wrote and saved, and keepsakes like a watch or old photographs.



Heirloom Discoveries

PASS ON THE LEGACY

Ask your parents if you can search the attic, the basement, and the closets to find your family's treasured objects. Then find out the stories behind them and record them for the future. Be sure to protect these keepsakes too — books, letters, and photographs should be stored in acid-free containers and protected from moisture and excessive temperatures. If you think the items could be cleaned up a little, you should first check with your parents or an antiques professional — sometimes, attempts to clean old items like furniture or jewelry can damage the original finish.

List some items that have sentimental or historical value for your family and who owned them.



ITEM

OWNER

The Tapestry

BY JO GIBSON (18+ AGE GROUP)

When John and Sarah Korosy celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on March 27, 1956, in Alliance, Ohio, their daughter Ethel created a tapestry for them, to commemorate the life they had created together. John and Sarah were *székely* people (Hungarians from Transylvania), and in their village it was traditional to place tall, intricately carved wooden gates in front of the houses. So in the center of the burgundy velvet tapestry she made, Ethel stitched a chamois-colored Transylvanian gate, decorated with folk art. To call attention to the music and art that filled the home, Ethel added a violin; for the value placed on morality and godliness, a church with a bell in the steeple. She quilted six green trees around the gate to symbolize the six children. Under the trees she embroidered 13 bejeweled flowers, one for each grandchild.

Behind the representation of this loving family, however, is another story — the story of John and Sarah's beginnings in America. When they disembarked at Ellis Island on June 13, 1906, they were just two of the 1,118 steerage passengers on the Kaiser Wilhelm II, just two of the 12 million other Europeans who came to the United States during the peak immigration years of 1890–1924, from all over eastern and southern Europe. They had left their home in the hidden reaches of the Carpathian Mountains, because the United States was their chance to make a better life. John and Sarah had no money, having come from desperate poverty; they could not speak English; for possessions, they had only two trunks of clothing and household items.

Picture them together, a handsome young man and a blue-eyed young woman, newlyweds, in love, and dreaming dreams, scared but undaunted by what they were about to do. They worked hard, overcoming prejudice and meeting hardships that we find difficult to even imagine today. John was employed in the steel mills in Ohio's Mahoning Valley, and his wife cared for the family, including John's mother and young brother, while running a boarding house and cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry



John Korosy with baby Steve (front row left) and Sarah Korosy (third from left front row) in front of the Boarding House.

for 25 laboring immigrant men. They taught their children to be the best in school, to be competitive, and to take advantage of the opportunities in this, their adopted country.

Today, spread all across the United States are people who come from this family. Good people — teachers, nurses, lawyers, mothers, fathers. Hard-working people — with Sicilian, Indian, African-American, Romanian, Dutch, and Irish marrying into the family. It's true that these fourth- and fifth-generation descendants do not know the stories about the gate, the violin, the church, and the factory and the boardinghouse. They haven't seen the tapestry.

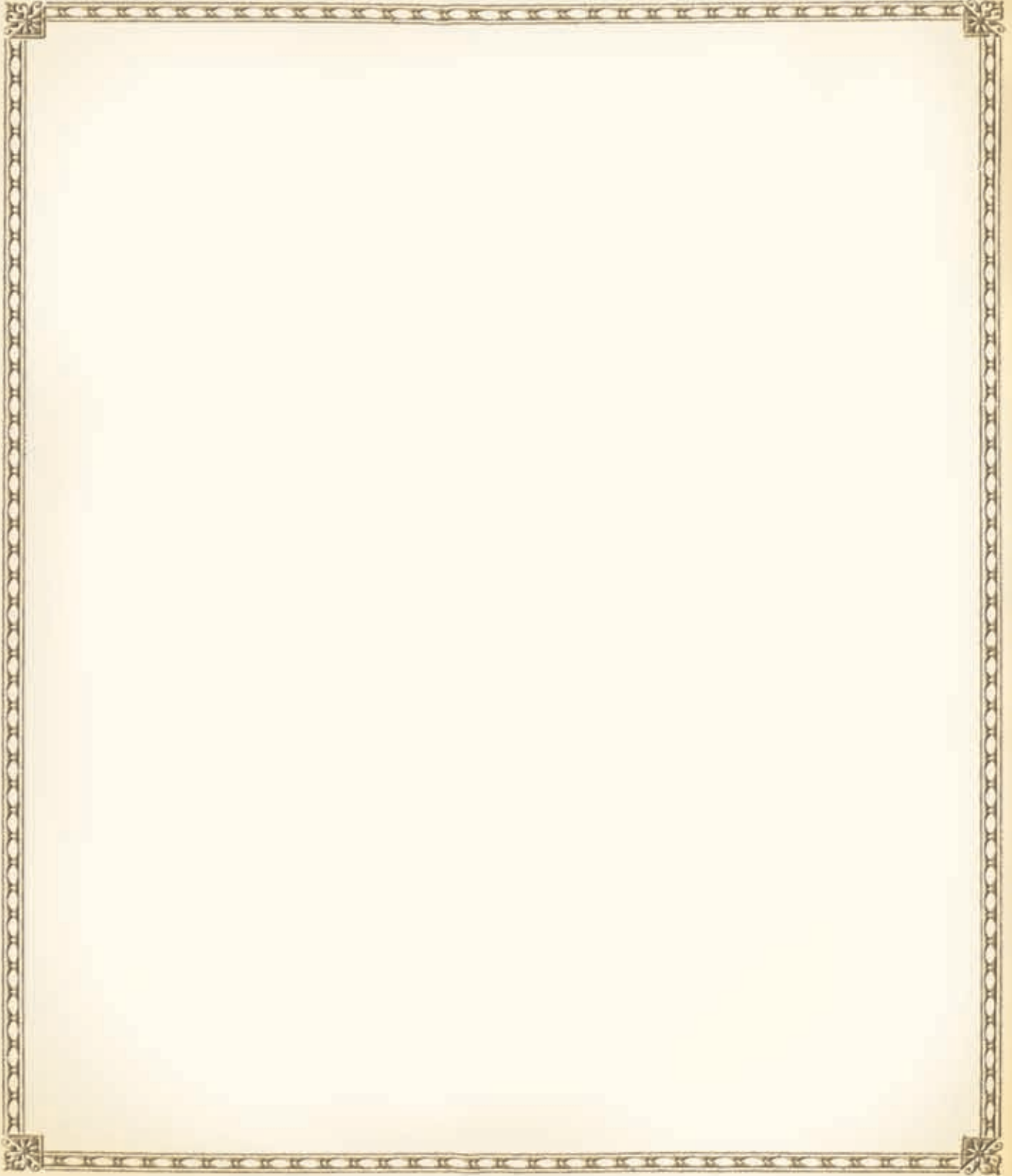
But the beautiful paradox is this: although the tapestry is faded now and not much to look at, the values represented there shine as brightly as ever in John and Sarah's family today.



Putting the Pieces Together

Now it's time to tell your family story! Be inspired — you can fill this page with images, make a collage, paste copies of photos, or draw a picture — it's up to you. Then use what you've learned about

your family to write your own essay on the next page. You can write about the lives and memories from your mother's side of the family, your father's side, or both, and don't forget to include your own family's story!



My Family Story



A large rectangular area with horizontal ruling lines for writing. The border is decorative, featuring a repeating pattern of small circles and floral motifs at the corners.

Name _____ Date _____

