**The Family Biographer**

The word History has its roots in the Greek for inquiry, knowledge through investigation, which is perfectly fitting. Historians must collect, search, question, analyze, evaluate, connect and organize various perspectives and evidence to arrive at an understanding of the past. Now, considering the breadth of human experience, the scale and scope of this task can appear daunting (even with limited subject matter, see ‘Canadian History Since World War I’). Thus, to initiate your journey from historical novice to contemporary Thucydides, we’ll begin in a comfortable manageable setting, at home.

Every family is full of history. It is a condition of existence. And, whether you believe it or not, your parents and grandparents lived through important, interesting and colorful historical events. It is your task to learn about the history experienced by one of your elders and to contribute your findings to the record by preserving the research in the written word. As with all assignments in this class there will be a list of outcomes (what you should learn) and a list of instructions (how to approach the tasks).

**The Family Biographer Outcomes:**

1. Knowledge of and appreciation for family and history.
2. Initial experience with the history of the 20th and/or 21st century.
3. Mention of events, trends, or individuals in relation to the subject.
4. Use of primary source information as a means of historical investigation.
5. Translating interview answers into a compelling narrative.
6. Understand multiple perspectives and the importance of historical inquiry.
7. Contextualizing personal experience into a historical timeframe.
8. Demonstration of clear and fluid writing without grammatical or spelling errors.

**The Family Biographer**

The Family Biographer involves conducting an interview, reviewing the answers and forming a short narrative. As with all assignments, follow the specific instructions and look at the rubric to view how marks are derived.

**The Family Biographer Instructions:**

1. Select a family member or members to interview and ask their permission (if there are no family members available choose a family friend or neighbor).
2. Set up a prearranged date and time, and abide by this, but be flexible if they need to change.
3. If possible select a person with more life experience (age usually helps but not always).
4. Create 10 to 20 interview questions (a good interview in this case may deviate from your script and become more of a conversation or discussion – that’s okay). You may need to do some prior research to ask good critical questions.
5. The interview questions should ask the basics (origins, birth, marriage, children, among others) and extend to moments of interest and historical context.
6. Remember to explore how key social, economic, and political events in Canadian/World history have shaped your family history. In order to establish historical perspective you must understand the historical context. **Research, research, research!**
7. Ask follow up questions when the story gets interesting.
8. If your subject was not a participant in major historical events, adjust and look at more local or personal events, ask how the events of the time impacted the subject.
9. Consider cause and consequence when discussing major social, political and economic events and key people in history. How have key events shaped your families story? Remember that historical events can have multiple causes and multiple consequences.
10. Ask comparative questions, for example “how did life for young people, women, men, persons of colour, immigrants etc, during (insert time period) compare to life for Canadians today?” If you are interviewing more than one person use this opportunity to compare multiple perspectives of the same social, political or economic events.
11. Post interview(s) organize and sequence your interview notes then consider the structure of your written work (a narrative seems natural but may not work in the space allotted so maybe an essay works better, or, you just capture a particular time in the life of the subject – be creative here).
12. Plan a beginning, middle and end, so to speak, but this may not exactly work.
13. Begin to compose your biography by starting a few days ahead of time, not the night before.
14. Type please.
15. The final product should be 2 pages, not too much more (seriously – I will stop reading after 2 and ½) and not too much less (1 and ½ is unacceptable).
16. Title the biography, place your name on the first page in the left hand corner and use standard font and spacing. (nothing larger than 12 point font)
17. When complete use spell and grammar check then have a parent or peer edit.
18. Submit punctually.

**The Family Biographer Rubric**

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| Below Level 1  0 – 49% | Level 1  50 – 59% | Level 2  60 – 69% | Level 3  70 – 79% | Level 4  80 – 100% |
| **Communication** | | | | |
| Biography inadequately communicated with many grammatical or spelling errors. | Biography almost adequately communicated with many grammatical or spelling errors. | Biography adequately communicated with some grammatical or spelling errors. | Biography effectively communicated with minimal grammatical or spelling errors. | Biography very effectively communicated without grammatical or spelling errors. |
| 0 1 2 3 4 5 5.5 6 6.5 7 7.5 8 8.5 9 9.5 10 | | | | |

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| Below Level 1  0 – 49% | Level 1  50 – 59% | Level 2  60 – 69% | Level 3  70 – 79% | Level 4  80 – 100% |
| **Application** | | | | |
| There was no research and an absence of historical context. | Research was minimally employed to show some historical context. | Research was employed to somewhat illustrate historical context within a narrative. | Research was well employed to illustrate historical context within a narrative. | Thorough research was adeptly employed to illustrate historical context within a flowing narrative. |
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| Below Level 1  0 – 49% | Level 1  50 – 59% | Level 2  60 – 69% | Level 3  70 – 79% | Level 4  80 – 100% |
| **Knowledge and Understanding** | | | | |
| Almost no understanding of and respect for the subject was evident as specific experiences and events were not recounted. | A partial understanding of and respect for the subject was evident with specific experiences and events barely recounted. | An adequate understanding of and respect for the subject was evident with specific experiences and events recounted. | A good understanding of and respect for the subject was evident with specific experiences and events recounted. | A thorough understanding of and respect for the subject was evident with specific experiences and events vividly recounted. |
| 0 1 2 3 4 5 5.5 6 6.5 7 7.5 8 8.5 9 9.5 10 | | | | |

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| Below Level 1  0 – 49% | Level 1  50 – 59% | Level 2  60 – 69% | Level 3  70 – 79% | Level 4  80 – 100% |
| **Thinking and Inquiry** | | | | |
| Inadequate structure and sequencing resulted in an uninteresting biography. | Almost adequate structure and sequencing resulted in a biography with minimal interesting material. | Adequate structure and sequencing resulted in a biography that had some interesting material. | Sound structure and logical sequencing resulted in a captivating biography. | Thoughtful structure and very logical sequencing resulted in a very captivating biography. |
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