

Family History Presentations

Grade Level: 4th grade

Each child's birthday is celebrated in a special way. The family receives an assignment during the first Parent Evening of the year. The assignment is to research how each family arrived in Michigan. On the child's birthday, the parent and child make a presentation describing how it was that their family came to Michigan.

These presentations range from 15 to 45 minutes and feature pictures of ancestors, relatives and, of course, baby pictures of the 4th grade birthday child. Immigrant stories and cultural customs dominate many of the presentations, including Black cowboys, Polish folk dancing, and what it was like to grow up Jewish in New York.

Many amazing stories are heard about famous distant relatives. One child's family traced their ancestry to Ulysses S. Grant; another family was related to the animal trainer who was in charge of the MGM lion. We heard much about Detroit and Michigan history through several different eras of time, including discrimination and difficulties, as well as successes and triumphs.

The birthday presentations last throughout the year and children with summer birthdays are scheduled on their "half" birthday. Scrapbook pages are distributed to the families, which are filled out with pictures and descriptions of their family's journey to Michigan.

This project gives each child a personal look at his or her own family's journey, at a time when developmentally the child is inwardly beginning to ask questions about his or her place in the world. Hearing each story also gives the class a strong feeling of wholeness in a very apparent diversity. Through many different paths, we all arrived in this one place to be together!

**Linda Williams – Odyssey 2003 Award Winner
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