Growing the Family Tree

Grade Level

- 4-8

Timeframe

- 1-2 hours

Materials

Computer with internet access, paper, pencils, various art supplies

Key Words

Genealogy, ancestor, DNA

Activity Summary

This lesson focuses on the quest to identify the recovered remains of two *Monitor* sailors

Learning Objectives

To recognize the importance of understanding a person's ancestry

National Standards:

History K-4: 1A, 4C, 6A, and 8C

History 5-12: 2B

Background Information

In 1862, 16 sailors died when the USS *Monitor* sank. The surviving crew never found their remains. For 140 years, the ship remained undisturbed at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean just south of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. In 2002, NOAA and the U.S. Navy launched an expedition to recover the *Monitor*'s iconic revolving gun turret. As Navy divers began to vacuum sand and sediment from the turret in order to bring it to the surface, skeletal remains of one of those 16 sailors was discovered. Soon after, archaeologists discovered the remains of a second sailor.

Who were these sailors? What were their names? Who were their families? Where were they born? How long had they served on the *Monitor*? All these questions begged for answers. But first, the remains needed to be carefully and reverently removed, and then transferred to the military's Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (currently called Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency— DPAA). In hoping to find answers to these questions and possibly to identify the sailors, the laboratory collected DNA samples and conducted other forensic tests on the remains. For ten years, the remains of these unknown sailors remained at DPPA waiting to find their descendants.

As we approached the 150th anniversary of the loss of the *Monitor* sailors, the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary continued to search for any living relatives. It was and remains the sanctuary's desire to reunite the remains of these two sailors with their families to bring closure.

To begin the process of identification, scientists conducted research to learn more about all 16 sailors that died. They discovered basic information about each man, such as their origin of birth, approximate height and weight, and more, and that information helped to narrow the field of possibilities to aid in identifying the sailors. NOAA hired a genealogist to research possible descendants of all 16 sailors in hopes to discover possible living relatives. DNA submitted by living relatives could help to identify the remains of the two sailors. NOAA continues their efforts and the search is ongoing. However, at this time the remains have not been identified.

Background Information Continued

So what is genealogy? It is defined as the study and tracing of a person's lines of descent. Or more simply, it is the investigation of your family. Do you know who your great, great, great grandmother was? Do you know from what country your ancestors originated? Maybe one of the *Monitor* sailors was your relative. You might be surprised at what you learn if you look at your family tree.

A family tree is a picture record of a person's ancestors. It is called a tree, because the farther you go back into your past, the more branches there are. Most people have trouble going past their grandparents, so you might need some help. Some things you can do to discover your past is to ask your relatives for information or look at old family photo albums, old letters, or even visit the family cemetery. If your family lived in the same place for many generations, look in the library, museum, church, or town hall for your family records.

Today there are many websites that help people trace their family tree. Genealogists, people who are trained and paid to search for clues to your ancestors, can also help.

Activity:

1. Research your family and fill in the family tree as far back as possible.
2. After you complete your family tree, create a family book, putting an entire generation on each page.
3. Include stories and photos about your relatives. Who was the "black sheep" of the family? Was there a romantic love story? Were any of your ancestors famous? Do you look like any of your ancestors?
4. Create a final page in your family book that explains which ancestor you would most like to be like and why.

Discussion:
1. What advances in science and technology today help prevent the military from burying unknown soldiers and sailors?
2. Living relatives could not be identified before December 2012. Therefore, the two sailors were buried on the 151st anniversary of the Battle of Hampton Roads. Do you agree or disagree with that decision and why?
3. The sailors were buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Was this a good choice? Why or why not? Where else might the two sailors been buried? Why?

Extension:
Use the research document to learn more about the 16 sailors that died the night the USS *Monitor* sank.

Top: Officers standing on deck of the *Monitor* in 1862. Courtesy Library of Congress

Bottom: In 2002, the turret was raised and recovered. Courtesy NOAA

Vocabulary

Ancestor – A person who is your relative that lived in the past, especially if they lived before a grandparent

Descendent – A person whose descent can be traced to a particular individual or group

DNA – A nucleic acid that carries the genetic information in the cell and is capable of self-replication and synthesis of RNA

Genealogy – The study or investigation of ancestry and family histories

Generation – All of the offspring that are at the same stage of descent from a common ancestor: Mother and daughters represent two generations.

Resources*

Books

Chorzempa, Rosemary: *My Family Tree Workbook (Dover Children's Activity Books).* Dover Publications, 1982, ISBN-13: 978-0486242293.

Hubbs, Susan H.: *Dig Up Your Roots and Find Your Branches.* Writer's Showcase Press, 2000, ISBN-13: 978-0595131624.

Leavitt, Caroline: *The Kids' Family Tree Book.* Sterling, 2007, ISBN-13: 978-1402747151.

Mason, Jenn: *The Art of the Family Tree: Creative Family History Projects Using Paper Art, Fabric and Collage.* Quarry Books, 2007, ISBN-13: 978-1592533398.

Rose, Christine: *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Genealogy, 2nd Edition.* Alpha, 2006, ISBN-13: 978-1592574308.

* *The inclusion of links in this guide does not imply endorsement or support of any of the linked information, services, products, or providers.*

Web Sites

National Archives Resources for Genealogists
Research tips and hundreds of files waiting to be searched.
https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy

Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPPA) The mission of JPAC is to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all Americans missing as a result of- the nation's past conflicts.
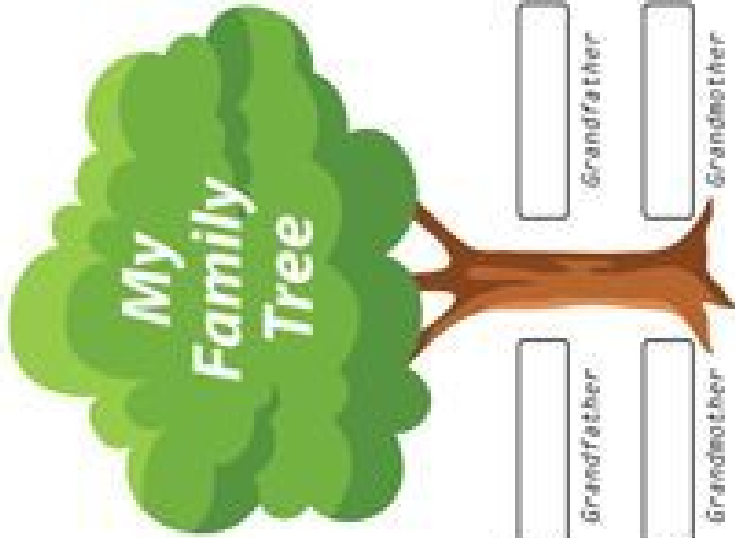https://www.dpaa.mil/

Arlington National Cemetery
Designated in 1864 as a military cemetery, there are more than 300,000 people buried at Arlington Cemetery. Veterans from all the nation's wars are buried there from the American Revolution through the Iraq and Afghanistan (pre-Civil War dead were reinterred after 1900). Over four million people visit the cemetery annually, and the Tomb of the Unknowns is one of the more-visited sites at the cemetery.
https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/

Research Document

From the web site, read background information and download a list of the 16 sailors that died when the USS *Monitor* sank on Dec. 31, 1862.

https://monitor.noaa.gov/150th/education

My Family Tree

Uncle

Aunt

Cousin

Cousin

Cousin

Uncle

Aunt

Cousin

Cousin

Cousin

Uncle

Aunt

Cousin

Cousin

Cousin

Grandfather

Grandmother

Father

Grandfather

Grandmother

Mother

Uncle

Aunt

Cousin

Cousin

Cousin

Uncle

Aunt

Cousin

Cousin

Cousin

Uncle

Aunt

Cousin

Cousin

Cousin