

OPERATION GRANNY FILES

The Junior Genealogist Starter Pack

Three ages, three missions, one family story worth passing down.

Field Guide & Quick-Reference

Mission 36: Passing It Down

Clearance Level: Biscuit-Tin Operative

operationgrannyfiles.substack.com

QUICK-GRAB SUMMARY

This pack gives you one age-appropriate genealogy activity for each stage of childhood — ages 6-9, 10-13, and 14-18 — plus a kid-facing interview card and a one-page leader's guide for running any of it as a group. Pick the sheet that matches the kid in front of you, hand them one object or one question, and let them go find something. That's the whole method.

How to Use This Pack

You do not need to run all three activity sheets. You need exactly one — the one that matches the kid you've actually got. Read the age band, pick the matching sheet, and hand it over along with the object, photo, or question it calls for. Ten to thirty minutes, depending on the age. No chart required.

If you're running this for more than one child at once, see the Group Leader's Guide at the end before you start — it will save you from trying to pitch one activity at three different attention spans simultaneously.

The rule that matters more than any instruction on these pages: the kid does the finding. You supply the object, the question, or the door — not the answer.

Activity Sheet — Ages 6 to 9: Photo Detective

Set-up: Find one old family photograph the child hasn't seen before — ideally one with a person in it nobody has named for them yet. Hand them the photo and this sheet. Nothing else required.

Time: Ten to fifteen minutes. Stop while it's still fun — this age band's attention span is short by design, not by failure.

Work through these prompts with the child, out loud, in order:

1. **What do you notice first?** — Clothes, an object they're holding, the room, anything.
2. **Does this person remind you of anyone in our family?** — Look for a nose, a smile, a way of standing.
3. **What do you think this person was doing right before the photo was taken?** — Guessing is allowed and encouraged.
4. **Who could we ask about this photo?** — Name one living relative who might know.
5. **Fill in the blank:** *I think this is _____ because _____.*

Draw it: Leave space below for the child to sketch the object, the photo, or the person's face from memory. The drawing matters more than the accuracy.

GRANNY PRO TIP

Resist correcting a wrong guess right away. Let it stand for a minute before the real answer comes out — being wrong first is part of what makes being right feel earned.

Activity Sheet — Ages 10 to 13: Mini Mystery Case File

Set-up: Pick one ancestor's name — someone the child has heard of but doesn't know much about. Write that name at the top of the sheet before you begin. This is a bounded case, not an open assignment: one ancestor, one question, one sitting.

Time: Twenty to thirty minutes, with an adult narrating alongside.

Case File

Field	What to Fill In
Ancestor's name	Write it here before starting
What we already know	One or two facts a relative has already told you
The question we're chasing	One specific, answerable question — not "everything about them"
Where we looked	Family photo, one relative's memory, one record (census, ship record, newspaper)
What we found	The new fact, in the child's own words
What I want to know next	Leave this open — the next mystery starts here

Suggested bounded questions, if you need one:

- What year did this person arrive, and does a ship's name show up anywhere?
- What job is listed for them on one census record?
- What does one relative remember about them that isn't written down anywhere?

BONUS INSIGHT

A "guided FamilySearch search" simply means you drive and the kid navigates — they tell you what to click and what looks interesting, you handle typing the search terms. It keeps the discovery theirs even when the tool is unfamiliar.

Activity Sheet — Ages 14 to 18: Field Research Assignment

Set-up: Treat this as a real, bounded research task, not a simplified version of the adult work. Choose one ancestor and one record type together, then let the teenager run the search largely on their own.

Time: Thirty to forty-five minutes, or longer if the teen wants to keep going — let them.

Assignment brief:

1. **Ancestor selected:** _____
2. **Record type selected** (choose one): Census · Immigration/Naturalization · Military Service · Vital Record (Birth/Marriage/Death) · Other: _____
3. **Search process** — log what was tried, in order, including dead ends. A search that fails is still a finding.
4. **What was found** — the record itself, or the closest confirmed lead if the record wasn't located.
5. **Reflection:** How does this finding connect to a story you already knew about this person, or about the family? What does it change, confirm, or complicate?

Optional extension: If the teenager has access to a DNA test result, note one ethnicity estimate or match here and discuss whether it lines up with, or complicates, the paper trail above. This is a discussion prompt, not a requirement.

GRANNY PRO TIP

Treat a teenager like a junior colleague, not a student being tested. Give them the scope and the deadline, then step back. The work holds up better when they own the process, not just the answer.

Kid-Facing Interview Question Card

Cut along the line, or hand over as-is. Built for a kid to use with a grandparent or older relative, in person or by phone.

Ask any of these — in any order, and only as many as fit the conversation:

- What's a game you played as a kid that nobody plays anymore?
- Tell me about a time you got in trouble.
- What's something that was expensive when you were young that's cheap now — or the other way around?
- Who was the funniest person in your family growing up?
- What's a smell or a sound that takes you right back to being a kid?
- Did you have a nickname? Where did it come from?
- What's something you were sure was true as a kid that turned out not to be?
- Is there a story your family used to tell that nobody tells anymore?

One coaching note on the back: *Ask, then wait. The best stories come after the silence — don't rush to the next question.*

Group Leader's Guide

For church youth groups, homeschool co-ops, family reunions, or any setting with more than one child at a time.

- **Group size:** Three to four kids per adult. Smaller than that and the adult does too much of the work; larger and quieter kids get lost.
- **One activity per session.** Pick a single age-appropriate sheet from this pack and run it for everyone in that age cluster. Do not attempt to cover all three age bands in one sitting.
- **Framing matters more than content.** Introduce the activity as a hunt, a mystery, or a game — never as an assignment or a lesson. The moment it feels like school, you lose the room.
- **Permission first.** If the activity involves a cemetery visit or recording an interview with a relative outside the immediate household, get clear, comfortable consent from that relative before you begin — and from a parent or guardian for any child who isn't yours.
- **Cemetery etiquette, if that's the activity:** No rubbings on old or fragile stones. Avoid graves less than fifty years old, out of respect for family who may still be grieving. Go in small supervised clusters, and get permission where the cemetery requires it.
- **Logistics is the job.** Once the activity is framed and the permissions are handled, step back. The actual teaching happens inside the activity itself, not through additional instruction from you.

GRANNY SAYS

You're not handing a kid a research project. You're handing them a mystery, and letting them find out they belong to it.

Notes

Use this space for personal notes and discoveries.
