

**Media Contact:**

Claire Vail  
Vice President of Communications  
American Ancestors/New England Historic Genealogical Society  
[claire.vail@nehgs.org](mailto:claire.vail@nehgs.org)  
617.226.1278

**American Ancestors Announces Annual Young Family Historians Essay Contest**

**Now Accepting Essays for 2023 Contest, Cash Prizes for Grades 4–12**

**Accessible, Student-Centered Curriculum Offers K–12 Educators Practical, Classroom-Ready Lessons for Teaching History Through Family Stories and Connections**

January 23, 2023—Boston, Massachusetts—The 2023 American Ancestors Young Family Historians Essay Contest is now open! This national essay contest, sponsored by American Ancestors, a non-profit genealogical organization, is open to any student currently enrolled in grades 4–12. Home-schooled students are also eligible to participate.



The contest asks students across the nation to explore what they've learned about themselves, the community, and the nation by reflecting on a story from their personal family history. Essays must be submitted by April 1, 2023, and six winners will be announced in early June 2023.

Genealogy requires students to engage in historical thinking and it empowers them to create historical narratives for themselves. Students can explore their roots and make real-world, personal connections to history, while developing critical research skills such as chronological thinking, supporting claims with evidence, and identifying lessons from the past.

Cash prizes will be awarded for the best essays. Six essays will be awarded, in three categories (grades 4-6, grades 7-8, and grades 9-12). Winners will receive \$500, and Semifinalists will receive \$250.

American Ancestors, the world's oldest and largest genealogical society, is dedicated to youth education and supporting educators, both in the classroom and at home. Teachers, librarians, and at-home instructors can use lessons and inclusive teaching strategies from our free [Family History Curriculum](#) to help students explore their roots.

### Family History Curriculum



A new, innovative educational curriculum aims to empower students of all backgrounds to discover their personal connection to history. Developed over several years by a team of professional educators and genealogists at American Ancestors—a national center for the study of family history, heritage, and culture—the *American Ancestors Family History Curriculum* leverages genealogical research methods that any student, regardless of ancestral origins and family configuration, can use to learn more about our shared human

experience.

The *American Ancestors Family History Curriculum* offers inclusive teaching strategies and easy-to-use lesson plans for classroom teachers, informal educators, after-school programs, and homeschool educators. The lessons are designed to foster the development of critical thinking and research skills that students can use to make meaningful connections to the past.

The curriculum is available to all educators for free in the form of an online download at

[AmericanAncestors.org/family-history-curriculum](https://AmericanAncestors.org/family-history-curriculum)

“As leading educators in the family history space, we are committed to supporting teachers with the tools to get young people excited about history,” said Dustin Axe, curriculum author and head of youth programming at American Ancestors.

“This curriculum is the first of its kind—a detailed but flexible plan teachers can easily incorporate into their existing approach to classroom instruction. As a licensed social studies teacher who has taught in museum and cultural institutions for almost two decades, I can empathize with teachers who need practical materials that work right away,” added Axe.

Lessons are designed to be accessible to students of all backgrounds, cultures, religions, and family configurations. The curriculum defines genealogy in the broadest possible terms, and encourages students to define family for themselves, fostering an environment in which students feel comfortable exploring their roots. Students can personalize their research based on their unique history and they can research anyone they consider part of their family, including close friends.

According to James Triesler, an award-winning educator from Virginia with more than twenty years of classroom experience, incorporating genealogy into the classroom has a demonstrably positive effect: “Educators are not just teaching history, they're creating historians. This new curriculum encourages students to make connections with the past, strengthen relationships in the present, and leave a record for the future. This will change both the way history is taught and the way that students view history.”

The curriculum contains multiple lesson plans for grades 4 through 6 and teaching strategies that can be used to enhance genealogy lessons for any grade. Teachers can freely download the full curriculum as a PDF or they can download it lesson-by-lesson at [AmericanAncestors.org](http://AmericanAncestors.org). Handouts and activities are provided as editable Google Docs, which can be personalized to the needs of any student. A letter to parents and guardians about the aim and scope of the curriculum is available in English and Spanish.

Teachers interested in learning more can also take advantage of free one-on-one or department-level Teacher Trainings with the Education & Programming staff at American Ancestors, who will help teachers create personalized plans to incorporate content, lessons, and teaching strategies into existing curricula. Training is available to teachers in grades K through 12.

### **Created for Educators, by Educators**

*The American Ancestors Youth Education Program for Family History* was developed by a team of professionals with extensive expertise in genealogy, experience with adult and youth education, and familiarity with schools across the country. The curriculum took nearly three years to complete, with experts providing strategic input and recommendations for the research, development, evaluation, and expansion of all trainings, lessons, and materials.

### **About American Ancestors and New England Historic Genealogical Society**

American Ancestors is a national center for family history, heritage, and culture. It is the global brand of New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS), America's oldest and largest genealogical society (founded in 1845). American Ancestors serves more than 350,000 members and millions of online users engaged in family history nationally and around the world through its website [AmericanAncestors.org](http://AmericanAncestors.org) with more than 1.4 billion names in its databases. Located in Boston's Back Bay, NEHGS is home to a world-class research center and archive, an expert staff, and the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center. It maintains a publishing division which produces original genealogical research, scholarship, and educational materials, including the *Register*, the flagship journal of American genealogy since 1847;

*American Ancestors*, its award- winning magazine; and *Mayflower Descendant*, a quarterly journal of Pilgrim genealogy and history.

##