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Lesson Plan: Family History Detective Agency

Student: Erica

Subject: Genealogy for Beginners

Focus: Understanding the meaning of genealogy through active investigation and personal storytelling, not just memorizing names and dates.

Materials Needed:

- "Family History Detective" Notebook (any simple notebook or journal)
 - Pens or pencils
 - "Top Secret Case File" folder (a simple manila folder)
 - Printed Pedigree Chart (sometimes called a family tree chart, showing direct ancestors)
 - Printed Family Group Sheet (a form for one family unit: parents and children)
 - A list of "Investigative Questions" (see below)
 - Access to a family member for an interview (parent, grandparent, aunt, etc.)
 - Optional: A recording device (like a phone app) for the interview, with permission
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Learning Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, Erica will be able to:

1. Define "genealogy" in her own words by creating a personal metaphor for it (e.g., "Genealogy is like being a detective for your family's story").
 2. Conduct a short, structured oral history interview with a family member to gather information.
 3. Accurately record names, dates, and locations for at least two generations on a pedigree chart.
 4. Explain the difference between a primary source (an interview, a birth certificate) and a secondary source (a story someone heard from someone else).
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Lesson Procedure:

Part 1: The Case Briefing (10 minutes)

Goal: To spark curiosity and introduce the concept of genealogy in an engaging way.

1. **The Hook:** Present Erica with the "Top Secret Case File" folder. Inside, place the blank Pedigree Chart. Say, "Special Agent Erica, your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to solve the 'Case of the Missing Story.' This chart is a map, but it's full of blank spaces. These aren't just names; they are people with stories, adventures, and secrets. We need a detective to uncover them. That detective is you."
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2. **Defining the Mission:** Ask Erica, "What do you think a detective does?" Guide the conversation toward ideas like finding clues, asking questions, and putting pieces together to tell a story. Then, introduce the key term: "This kind of detective work has a special name: **Genealogy**. It's the job of discovering and telling your family's unique story."
3. **Create a Metaphor:** Ask Erica to come up with her own way to describe genealogy in her "Detective Notebook." Is it like building a puzzle? Following a map? Writing a book? This helps her own the concept.

Part 2: Detective Training (15 minutes)

Goal: To equip Erica with the foundational skills and tools for her investigation.

1. **Know Your Tools:** Show Erica the Pedigree Chart and the Family Group Sheet.
 - **Pedigree Chart:** "This is your 'Ancestor Map.' It shows your direct line back in time: you, your parents, your grandparents, and so on. It focuses on the 'who' and 'when'."
 - **Family Group Sheet:** "This is a 'Family Snapshot.' It gives us more detail about one family at a time—like your parents and all their kids (you and your siblings!)."
2. **Start with the Facts:** Fill out the first spots on the Pedigree Chart together. Start with Erica's name, birthdate, and birthplace. Then, do the same for her parents. This provides a confident starting point.
3. **How to Find Clues (Sources):** Discuss where a detective finds clues.
 - **Primary Sources (Eyewitnesses):** "The best clues come directly from the source! Talking to someone who was there—like your mom or grandpa—is a *primary source*. A birth certificate or an old photo is also a primary source."
 - **Secondary Sources (Hearsay):** "Sometimes we get clues from someone who heard a story from someone else. This is a *secondary source*. It's still useful, but we always try to find the primary source to confirm it."

Part 3: The Investigation (20-30 minutes)

Goal: To apply new skills through a hands-on, creative activity.

1. **Choose a Witness:** Erica will now conduct her first "oral history interview." Help her choose a family member who is available and happy to talk (a parent is a great place to start).
2. **Prepare Your Questions:** Give Erica the list of "Investigative Questions." Explain that she doesn't have to ask all of them. She should pick the 3-4 she finds most interesting. Encourage her to add one creative question of her own at the bottom.

Sample Investigative Questions:

- What is your full name? Why were you given that name?
 - Where and when were you born?
 - What is your favorite memory from when you were my age?
 - Tell me a story about your parents (my grandparents).
 - What is a special tradition our family has, and where did it come from?
 - (*Erica's custom question*)
3. **Conduct the Interview:** Remind Erica of her detective manners: be a good listener, take notes in her notebook, and thank her witness for their time. If using a recording device, she should ask permission first. You can be present to help facilitate but let Erica lead the questioning.

Part 4: Filing the Case Report (10 minutes)

Goal: To review findings, organize information, and reflect on the process.

1. **Organize the Clues:** After the interview, sit down with Erica and her notes. Help her pull out the key information (names, dates, places) and add it to her Pedigree Chart and Family Group Sheet.
 2. **The Story is the Treasure:** Ask Erica, "What was the most interesting story or surprising thing you learned?" Emphasize that genealogy isn't just about filling in blanks on a chart; it's about discovering the stories that make us who we are.
 3. **Mission Debrief:** Revisit the learning objectives. Ask Erica: "So, in your own words, what is a genealogist?" and "What was the best 'clue' you found today (your primary source)?" This serves as a fun and informal assessment.
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Differentiation and Extension:

- **For Support:** Provide a pre-filled chart with some information already included, so Erica is only looking for a few specific facts. Conduct the interview together, with you asking some of the questions.
- **For a Challenge (Extension Activity):**
 - **The Artifact Hunt:** Challenge Erica to find one physical object (a primary source) that relates to the story she heard. It could be a photograph, a report card, a piece of jewelry, or a letter. Have her write a short "Artifact Report" explaining what it is and why it's important to the family story.
 - **Mapping the Past:** Have her find the town or city where her interviewee was born on a map. Discuss how it's different from where she lives now.

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