

# Lesson Plan: Family History Detective Agency — The Evidence Room

## Lesson Overview

**Subject:** Genealogy for Beginners

**Focus:** Building on the previous lesson's interview skills, this lesson introduces the concept of documentary evidence and physical artifacts. Students will learn how to analyze records and objects to verify oral histories and uncover new "clues" about their ancestors' lives.

**Prerequisite:** Completion of "Family History Detective Agency: The Case of the Missing Story" (Introduction to pedigree charts and oral interviews).

## Materials Needed

- "Family History Detective" Notebook (from Lesson 1)
- "Top Secret Case File" folder (from Lesson 1)
- Magnifying glass (real or a paper cutout for "detective" effect)
- "Evidence Analysis" Worksheet (a simple table: What is it? What does it tell us? What is missing?)
- Sample Historical Document (e.g., a 1940/1950 Census page, a birth certificate, or a ship passenger manifest—can be a template or a real family scan)
- A Family Artifact (an old photo, a piece of jewelry, an old tool, or a recipe card)
- Sticky notes ("Evidence Tags")

## Learning Objectives

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

- Distinguish between **Documentary Evidence** (written records) and **Physical Artifacts** (objects).
- Extract at least four specific data points from a historical document (e.g., age, occupation, address, literacy).
- Demonstrate **Cross-Referencing** by comparing an interview answer from Lesson 1 with a written record.
- Explain the importance of "Physical Clues" in telling a story beyond just names and dates.

## Lesson Procedure

### 1. Review & Bridge: The Detective Briefing (10 minutes)

**Review:** Open the "Case File." Ask the student: "Special Agent, in our last mission, we interviewed a witness. What was the most exciting 'primary source' story you heard?" Review the difference between a primary source (eyewitness) and a secondary source (hearsay).

**The Bridge:** "Memories are wonderful, but detectives know that sometimes people forget dates or details. To make our case 'courtroom ready,' we need *Physical Evidence*. Today, we enter the Evidence

Room to look at documents and artifacts."

## 2. Introduction: Types of Clues (15 minutes)

**I Do:** Introduce two new categories of evidence.

- **Documentary Evidence:** Paper trails left behind (birth certificates, census records, old letters).
- **Artifacts:** Objects that belonged to an ancestor.

**Modeling:** Show a sample Census record. Using the magnifying glass, point out that it doesn't just show a name. It shows who the neighbors were, if they owned a radio, and what their job was. Say: "A name tells us who they were; a document tells us how they lived."

## 3. Body: The Evidence Analysis (25 minutes)

**We Do (Guided Practice):** Pick one document (e.g., a Birth Certificate). Together, fill out the "Evidence Analysis" worksheet.

- *Observation:* "I see the father's occupation is 'Blacksmith'."
- *Deduction:* "This means the family might have lived near a shop or a farm."
- *Cross-Reference:* "Does this match what we heard in our interview?"

**You Do (Independent Practice):** Give the student a "Family Artifact" (e.g., an old photo or a kitchen tool).

- The student must "tag" the evidence using a sticky note, labeling what it is.
- In the Detective Notebook, the student writes a "Crime Lab Report": Describe the object's color, weight, smell, and what it suggests about the person who owned it.
- **Challenge:** Find one fact in the document that *wasn't* mentioned in the interview from Lesson 1.

## 4. Conclusion: Closing the File (10 minutes)

**Summary:** Recap how documents and artifacts "prove" the stories we hear in interviews.

**Reflective Discussion:** Ask: "If a fire was coming and you could only save one piece of 'Evidence' from your family history, which would it be and why?"

**Success Criteria Check:** "Agent, can you tell me one thing a Census record tells us that a simple name on a tree doesn't?"

## Assessment

**Formative:** Observation of the student using the magnifying glass to find specific details on the census/document (e.g., "Find the column for 'Occupation'").

**Summative:** The completed "Evidence Analysis" worksheet and the "Artifact Report" in the Detective Notebook, which should correctly identify the source as primary or secondary and list at least three facts found.

## Differentiation & Extensions

- **For Support (Scaffolding):** Use a "Highlighter Investigation." Give the student a document and ask them to highlight every name in yellow and every date in blue to make the data pop out.
- **For Advanced Learners (Extension):** Introduce "Conflicting Evidence." Give them two records with slightly different spellings of a name or different birth years. Ask: "Why might these be different? Which one do you trust more?"
- **Digital Adaptability:** For remote learners, use a digital archive like *FamilySearch* or *National Archives* to view a digitized census record on a screen.

## Next Step in the Sequence

In the next lesson, we will move from "The Evidence Room" to "Mapping the Journey," where we track the locations found on these documents onto a physical map to see how the family moved over time.