

# Chapter **3**

## **What Makes a Family? See, Think, Wonder**

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Figure 1. *Home of Mrs. Ella Watson*



**Note** Parks, G. (1942). *Washington, D.C. Dinner time at the home of Mrs. Ella Watson, a government charwoman.* [Photograph]. Library of Congress. [www.loc.gov/item/2017765103/](http://www.loc.gov/item/2017765103/)

What Makes a Family?		
<b>C3 Disciplinary Focus</b> History	<b>C3 Inquiry Focus</b> Gathering information from sources, using evidence, and taking informed action	<b>Content Topic</b> What it means to belong to a family; Compare and contrast family traditions and customs
<b>C3 Focus Indicators</b>  <b>D1.1.K-2:</b> Explain why the compelling question is important to the student. <b>D1.2.K-2:</b> Identify disciplinary ideas associated with a compelling question. <b>D2.His.2.K-2:</b> Compare life in the past to life today. <b>D2.His.4.K-2:</b> Compare perspectives of people in the past to those of people in the present. <b>D2.His.12.K-2:</b> Generate questions about a particular historical source as it relates to a particular historical event or development. <b>D3.4.3-5:</b> Use evidence to develop claims in response to compelling questions. <b>D4.3.K-2:</b> Present a summary of an argument using print, oral, and digital technologies. <b>D4.6.K-2:</b> Identify and explain a range of local, regional, and global problems, and some ways in which people are trying to address these problems.		
<b>Grade Level</b> K-2	<b>Resources</b> Resources cited in this chapter; Library of Congress website; Family and community resources	<b>Time Required</b> Variable

The theme of families is a common topic to help build classroom community and foster children’s awareness of how diverse families enrich our world (Learning for Justice, n.d.). The study of families builds bridges between children’s home experiences and school and provides a topic of inquiry that is relevant and meaningful for children’s learning (Souto-Manning, 2013). Moreover, when children use the tools and processes for doing history and for thinking historically to explore how families have both remained the same and changed over time, young learners develop an awareness of efforts to create a more just and inclusive society.

The American family today has become increasingly diverse (Pew Research Center, 2015), and there is no typical family structure. According to the United States Census, from 1950–2020, the proportion of children under the age of 18 living with two parents has dropped from 93% to 70%, and over half of all public-school students are from a minoritized racial/ethnic group (de Brey et al., 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Family types include nuclear, single-parent, cross-generational, adoptive/foster, never-married partners, blended, multiracial, and same-sex parents (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2020). Family composition, household size, and living arrangements have changed over time, but Census

data (2020) indicate that most children live in a nuclear family, which is comprised of two parents. The number of single parent families has increased; however, millions of children live with one or both parents in their grandparents' home, creating a cross-generational family. The variety of family structures means that children come from distinct home contexts and have unique experiences. Teachers need to know how to create a curriculum that is responsive to children whose demographics often are different from their own by embracing and honoring all families (Kondor et al., 2019; Naidoo, 2017).

In this chapter, we explore how to use primary sources to support inquiry into family diversity and promote the historical thinking of young learners. Authentic inquiry connects to children's curiosity about the world around them. Although inquiry builds upon children's wonderings, teacher intentionality and scaffolding support inquiry-based pedagogy (Berson & Berson, 2014). Teachers may engage children in a participatory process of historical interpretation and also create classroom experiences that facilitate critical pedagogical practice. When preschool and primary grade teachers provide young learners with experiences working with primary sources, students in the early years may begin to participate in an active, constructive process of making meaning of authentic historical resources, using evidence to substantiate their ideas and concept development. Young children are already familiar with gaining meaning about the real world through pictures, and historical images provide a conduit for young children to use their real world experiences and prior knowledge to make inferences about time and place (Berson & Berson, 2014; Levstik & Barton, 2015). Through primary source inquiries, elementary students may begin their social studies exploration by making connections between their own lives and the lives of others in both the past and the present.

The National Council for the Social Studies College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework (NCSS, 2013) emphasizes the need for disciplinary literacy skills. Analyzing diverse sources, asking questions about the evidence, weighing the credibility of information, and using evidence-based interpretation to support a claim are practices embedded in the disciplinary literacy approaches of social scientists (Monte-Sano et al., 2014).

The intentional focus on primary source analysis necessitates careful planning to develop children's skills in identifying and interpreting this multimodal information. Instruction is designed to build conceptual development while also modeling the tools and skills that real historians and social scientists use to explore significant questions in their disciplines. Children gather knowledge by observing visual cues, reflecting on their findings, imagining possibilities, asking questions, and formulating answers (Berson & Berson, 2014; Levstik & Barton, 2015). As a result of these processes, students begin co-constructing knowledge with their teacher and peers.

## **See, Think, and Wonder**

Many of the processes effective in comprehending written text also facilitate meaning-making with images. Teacher modeling is an especially important step in young children's

discovery of information in primary sources (Fuhler et al., 2006). Making meaning from primary sources is a challenging task for young learners (Berson et al., 2017), and they may need help focusing on key details with a structured process of careful observation and inferring (Berson & Berson, 2014; Levstik & Barton, 2015). The “See, Think, Wonder” thinking routine is a Visible Thinking instructional approach (Project Zero, 2016) that promotes inquiry by leading children through the steps of critical thinking. This primary source analysis strategy is ideal for elementary age students to scaffold their development as self-directed learners and can be embedded into whole group or small group instruction. The “See, Think, Wonder” method encourages students to make careful observations and thoughtful interpretations by answering three simple questions: 1) What do I see? 2) What do I think about that? 3) What does that make me wonder? Although we present “See, Think, Wonder” as a sequence, authentic inquiry rarely occurs in a linear process (Berson & Berson, 2014; Berson et al., 2017). Children may start at any stage in a learning experience and may revisit stages as new questions arise or reveal a need to return to careful looking to seek out more information. When students are challenged to examine a primary source using the “See, Think, Wonder” method, the activity prompts students to elicit what they already know, stimulates their curiosity, and sets the stage for inquiry.

In the observation stage of the “See, Think, Wonder” method, children draw from their funds of knowledge to make connections to the primary source or infer new insights based on their close observation of the details. Teachers may use close-looking strategies, such as cropping an image and zooming in to carefully explore details, to slow down the observation process and direct children’s attention to the unfolding details of a primary source. Several resources provide guidance on strategies to differentiate and scaffold primary source analysis for learners across the early childhood and elementary grades. For example, Anne Savage adapted the Library of Congress Teacher’s Guide for Analyzing Primary Sources for use with students in K–2 (see [Figure 2](#)), which provides thoughtful questions to spark young children’s curiosity and encourages them to stretch their thinking as they engage in whole group or small group conversations facilitated by the teacher. This guide forms a cornerstone for instructional practices in the primary grades and offers a variety of questions to support children’s learning and promote deeper understanding.

Typically, the process starts by introducing a frame for the primary source inquiry that activates children’s prior knowledge and clarifies the objective of the learning experience. As we guide students through the “See, Think, Wonder” process, the first prompt, i.e., “What do you see?” or “What do you notice first?,” encourages children to look closely at the primary source with intentionality. Most young students rely on literal descriptions through observation, explicitly describing the image depicted (Berson & Berson, 2014; Levstik & Barton, 2015). Labeling the items in an image without further elaboration is the most basic strategy, but students may need direction to focus on the people, observing their clothing and expressions, and then describing objects such as buildings, equipment, and animals. Children should be reminded to share their observations using the response prompt, “I see...”


to emphasize the focus on observation. There is a wealth of possible responses, and teachers should use anecdotal notes to document all of the children’s comments so that students may use these observations to help support the inferences they make as they further analyze and make meaning of the observed information.

Basic observations are often accompanied by inferential descriptions that draw upon prior knowledge or other information sources. Students may begin to speculate about the lifestyles of the people depicted or make assumptions about why certain objects were included in the photo. The process of reflecting on the observed evidence often raises questions or wonderings that can promote further inquiry and also provides insight into the connections that each child is making with the source (Berson & Berson, 2014).

To further assist with scaffolding the “See, Think, Wonder” process, a teacher may rely on the Crop It strategy, using this [paper cropping tool](#) (Bondie, 2018). Crop It provides a learning experience that guides young learners in developing their visual literacy. After posing a question, the teacher invites children to closely look at the photographic evidence and “zoom in” on key elements in the historical image (i.e., “crop” to an answer). Crop It also has [facilitating questions](#) that assist students in identifying, encoding, and summarizing important information during the thinking stage of the primary source inquiry (Bondie, 2018). In combination with the Library of Congress [teacher’s guides](#), teachers may structure different types of questions appropriate for each child in the class. This process expands children’s competencies for historical inquiry and extends their thinking about connections between the past and present. This is important to scaffold students’ development of formative historical thinking skills. By analyzing resources of past events, children not only develop historical knowledge but also begin to relate distant historical events to their immediate experiences in the present and guide their perspectives and decision-making in the future (Skjæveland, 2017).

Figure 2. Adaptation of Library of Congress Teacher’s Guide: Analyzing Photographs and Prints

**TEACHER’S GUIDE**  
**ANALYZING VISUAL IMAGES**  
**in the Primary Grades**



Guide students with the sample questions as they respond to the primary source. Students may go back and forth between the columns; there is no correct order.

**I SEE ...**

**I THINK ...**

**I WONDER ...**

**Ask students to identify and note details.**  
Sample Questions:  
What do you see?  
What else do you notice?  
Find something small and interesting.  
Do you see any words?  
What do you see that you've never seen before?  
don't understand?

*Clarifying prompts:*  
Please point to that.  
Describe that.

**Encourage students to generate and test hypotheses about the source.**  
What do you think is happening in this picture?  
What do you think the people are doing?  
When do you think this picture was made?  
What place do you think this picture shows?  
How do you think that person feels?  
What is missing from this picture?

*Clarifying prompts:*  
What makes you say that?  
What makes you think that?  
Point to what you see that makes you think that.

**Invite students to ask questions that lead to more observation and speculation.**  
What do you wonder about?  
What questions do you have?

*Sentence starters:*  
I wonder who...? ...what...? ...when...? ...where...?  
...why...? ...how...?

*Clarifying prompts:*  
What makes you wonder about that?

**FURTHER INVESTIGATION**

Help students begin to make connections between the primary source and what they are studying.  
Sample Questions: What is important about this picture? What does it have to do with what we are reading/studying? What do you still wonder about?

<p>A few follow-up activity ideas:</p> <p><i>Beginning</i> Ask students to circle details they think are important on a printed or digitized copy of the primary source.</p> <p><i>Intermediate</i> Ask students to imagine they are "in" the picture. What do they hear? ...smell? ...taste?</p>	<p><i>Advanced</i> Ask students to compare and contrast this primary source with something similar in their lives today.</p>	<p><i>For more tips on using primary sources, go to</i> <a href="http://www.loc.gov/teachers">http://www.loc.gov/teachers</a></p>
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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS | LOC.gov/teachers

**Note.** This guide for students in K–2 is an adaptation developed by Anne Savage from the [Library of Congress Teacher’s Guide for Analyzing Primary Sources](#).

It is important to note that very young children typically assess primary sources as credible representations of information or events (Dutt-Doner et al., 2007), so it is critical to instruct primary grade students to question, evaluate, and challenge information sources. This examination approach to primary source inquiry actively engages young students in the work of historians (Ensminger & Fry, 2012). Rather than focusing on learning strategies that emphasize the management and recall of historical data, students employ the tools of historians and explore this archival evidence, using other sources to collaborate, enrich and extend their thinking about events and people (Nokes, 2012). It is important to get students to share and document their thinking during each stage of the routine. This allows the students to build on each other’s ideas and deepen understanding, and it will lead to richer discussions.

As children get practice responding to many different types of questions, they develop familiarity with the inquiry routine and can become increasingly self-directed with the process. Teachers also may support students’ critical thinking by introducing multiple sources of information to accompany the primary source. By exploring diverse perspectives and learning to synthesize information, students may develop their inquiry skills. Additionally, as children develop their reading and writing skills, they may use other analysis tools in small


49

What Makes a Family? See, Think, Wonder

groups or independently to record their ideas, such as the resources in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. *Teacher’s Guide: Analyzing Photographs & Prints*

## TEACHER'S GUIDE ANALYZING PHOTOGRAPHS & PRINTS



Guide students with the sample questions as they respond to the primary source. Encourage them to go back and forth between the columns; there is no correct order.

**OBSERVE**

**Have students identify and note details.**

Sample Questions:  
Describe what you see. · What do you notice first?  
· What people and objects are shown? · How are they arranged? · What is the physical setting?  
· What, if any, words do you see? · What other details can you see?

**REFLECT**

**Encourage students to generate and test hypotheses about the image.**

Why do you think this image was made? · What's happening in the image? · When do you think it was made? · Who do you think was the audience for this image? · What tools were used to create this? · What can you learn from examining this image? · What's missing from this image? · If someone made this today, what would be different? · What would be the same?

**QUESTION**

**Have students ask questions to lead to more observations and reflections.**

What do you wonder about...  
who? · what? · when? · where? · why? · how?

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**FURTHER INVESTIGATION**

**Help students to identify questions appropriate for further investigation, and to develop a research strategy for finding answers.**

Sample Question: What more do you want to know, and how can you find out?

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**A few follow-up activity ideas:**

*Beginning*  
Write a caption for the image.

*Intermediate*  
Select an image. Predict what will happen one minute after the scene shown in the image. One hour after? Explain the reasoning behind your predictions.


*Advanced*  
Have students expand or alter textbook or other printed explanations of history based on images they study.

*For more tips on using primary sources, go to*  
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers>

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS | [loc.gov/teachers](http://loc.gov/teachers)


**Note.** Teacher’s Guide for Analyzing Photographs & Prints from the Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/guides/](http://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/guides/)

Figure 4. *S.T.A.R. Primary Source Analysis Worksheet*



# S.T.A.R.

Primary Source Analysis



S (See) (What I see, What I observe)	T (Think) (I Think ...)	A (Analyze/Infer) (because...)	R (Reflect) (Questions I have, I wonder...)

WRITING FRAME

In this picture, I observed            (observation #1) \_\_\_\_\_

(Transition word), I observed            (observation #2) \_\_\_\_\_

(Transition word), I observed            (observation #3) \_\_\_\_\_

I think that            (thought #1) \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_  
(analysis/inference/evidence)

(Transition word), I think that            (thought #1) \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_  
(analysis/inference/evidence)

(Transition word), I think that            (thought #1) \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_  
(analysis/inference/evidence)

Based on the evidence provided and my inferences, this picture represents            (conclusion) \_\_\_\_\_

(Reflection) \_\_\_\_\_

Developed by Crissy Wheeler, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher, Cabell County Schools, Huntington, WV

**Note.** Crissy Wheeler, 5th Grade Teacher, Cabell County Schools, Huntington, WV, developed this [tool](#) as a formative assessment of students’ understanding of primary sources as evidenced in their written responses to the prompts. It is posted at the Eastern Region resource hub for the Teaching with Library of Congress initiative and was disseminated on the Eastern Region page as part of a project in Cabell County Public Schools in West Virginia (see [www.waynesburg.edu/community/tps-eastern-region/projects-state/west-virginia/](http://www.waynesburg.edu/community/tps-eastern-region/projects-state/west-virginia/)).

50

Teaching with Primary Sources to Prepare Students for College, Career, and Civic Life, Volume 1



Our approach to instruction applies a critical literacy lens that uses primary sources as counter narratives. These approaches overlap with the dimensions of critical literacy identified by Lewison and colleagues (2002). They describe four interrelated dimensions to critical literacy. Lewison et al. suggest that the first dimension of critical literacy involves seeing the “everyday” through “new lenses” and “problematizing common knowledge” (p. 383). Secondly, critical literacy disrupts standardized or scripted approaches and instead pursues diverse ways of practicing reading by interrogating multiple viewpoints. The third dimension of critical literacy requires readers to go beyond the personal to the sociopolitical, and question how language is tied to power relationships in society that privilege some and marginalize others. Ultimately during the fourth dimension, learning translates into actions focused on social justice in which students seek alternative ways to transform existing inequities and oppressive practices. The use of multiple resources in instruction is a common entry to critical literacy, and when teachers are intentional in their selection of materials and the design of the curriculum, instruction may disrupt the dominant discourse and engage young learners in asking complex questions about power and privilege as well as taking action to challenge commonplace examples of inequities (Kuby, 2013; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Vasquez, 2014).

## **Structuring an Inquiry Question Based on Sources**

In the remainder of the chapter, we model the inquiry process to teach about family diversity using primary sources with a kindergarten class. We want to design instruction so that our classrooms become incubators of inquiry where children engage in systematic investigations. In the elementary classroom, one way that we can make learning experiences meaningful for young students is to focus on concepts that have captured children’s attention. These become seeds for generating an inquiry focus and inform how we approach Dimension 1 of the C3 Framework, which focuses on questioning.

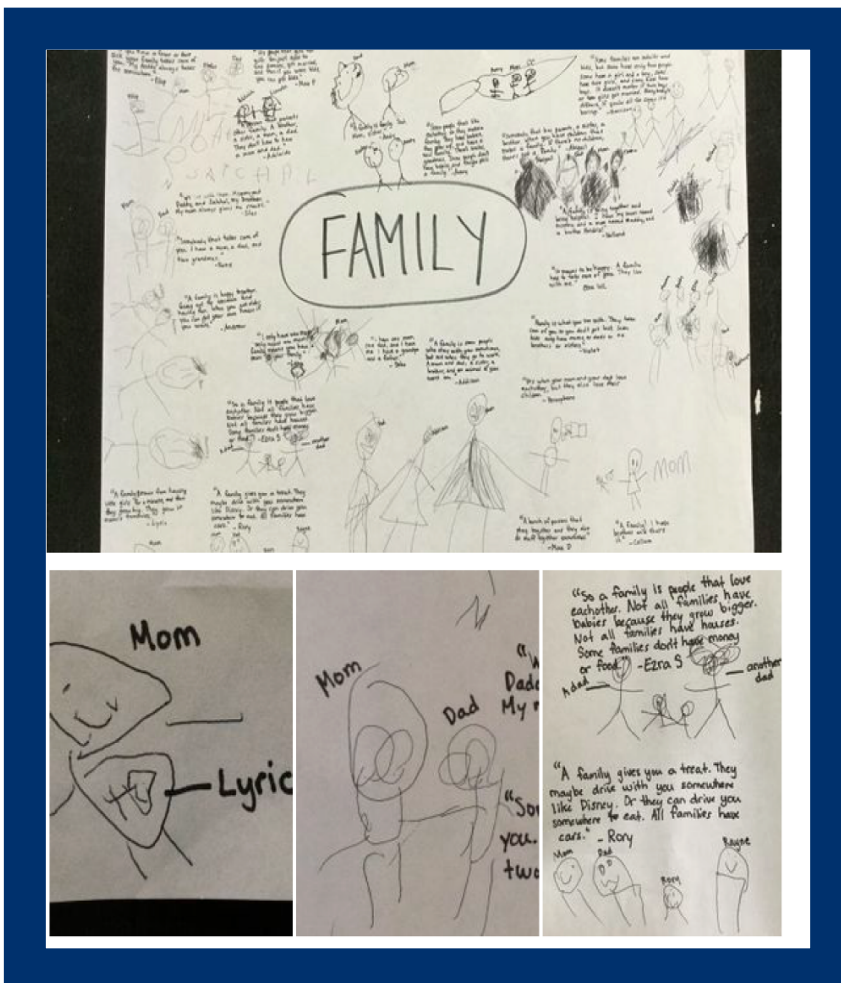
### **Getting Started**

In a kindergarten classroom, we get started on inquiry by first gathering information from the children about what they know and what they want to learn. As we observe children engaged in conversation, we hear discussions take place in classroom centers and on the playground and we listen to children’s questions and comments during story time and morning meeting. In these moments, children often share their observations and questions about race, gender, and family structure differences. These conversations offer valuable opportunities to identify topics that are meaningful for the children.

Given children’s curiosity about differences in their families, we use an anticipatory web

(Helm & Katz, 2016) to gather information on what children already know about families and invite children to share their comments (see Figure 5). During instruction, five-year-old Harrison observes, “Some families are adults and kids, but some have only two people. Some have a girl and a boy, some have two girls, and some have two boys. It doesn’t matter if two boys or two girls get married. Everybody’s different. If you’re all the same, it’s boring.” Harrison’s remark reveals his familiarity with some diverse family structures, and his belief is that these differences make the classroom community a richer place. However, many of the other children in the class have little knowledge of the experiences of different kinds of families. It seems strange to them that other people might not define family the same as they do. The children also have limited information on their own family history and how connections in their family have changed over time.

**Figure 5. Anticipatory Web: What Do We Know About Families**



**Note** This anticipatory web documents kindergarteners’ responses to the prompt: What is a family? Photograph by Ilene Berson

We notice that the children in this classroom have a concept of family based on their own experiences, but we want to add new information and skills to children’s existing knowledge. Based on the Inquiry Arc of the National Council for the Social Studies C3 Framework (2013), we design the instruction around a compelling question that connects to children’s understanding of themselves and society. By drawing on disciplinary skills and concepts, we can guide children toward deeper investigations, and with this instructional goal in mind, we craft a compelling question to design a student-friendly inquiry that is not only provocative and engaging for young learners, but also reflects “an enduring issue, concern, or debate in social studies” (Grant, 2013, p. 325).

## The Compelling Question

The compelling question—*What Makes a Family?*—frames the exploration in this lesson in several ways. Let’s consider why this question is compelling. First, it helps students gain knowledge about what it means to belong to a family. There are multiple perspectives about what it means to be a family, and definitions of family have been guided and informed by social, political, historical, and cultural contexts (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). Children may lack familiarity with the multitude of meanings of family, and this inquiry activity may disrupt stereotypes about who is included within the concept of family. Next, investigating the compelling question develops children’s dispositions and process skills for in-depth exploration of historical resources. Exploring these differences is beneficial for children’s development of their individual identities while also fostering their curiosity, appreciation, and respect for others as they collaboratively construct knowledge with others through dialogue and challenge their own thinking as well as their peers.

While the compelling question provides a frame for the inquiry, we create supporting questions to scaffold the academic content and skills that make up the lesson (Grant et al., 2017). This form of planning represents an inquiry-based approach that is guided by our observations of children in the classroom, intentionally connects to children’s funds of knowledge, and follows their interests. To foster connections to self, students’ prior experiences and learning need to be activated with relevant content that relates to their current lives. The children’s responses to the anticipatory web helped us craft supporting questions that connected to their wonderings, including “How are families the same and different?” and “What does a family do together?”

As we engage in inquiry to answer the supporting questions above, we also scaffold the children in addressing the compelling question, “What makes a family?” Each stage of the inquiry process makes use of authentic resources in the investigation of this meaningful topic.

## Teaching Multiple Disciplines

Dimension 2 of the C3 Framework focuses on identifying the disciplinary specific concepts and tools that will guide the inquiry activity and help children develop deeper understanding. Specific disciplines represent and critique information in unique ways (Berson et al., 2017;

Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Even within the field of social studies, there are differences among the disciplines (e.g., history, civics, economics, and geography), and each discipline has distinct approaches to how information is created, shared, and evaluated (NCSS, 2013). Since we are working with kindergarten students, this lesson example provides an opportunity to build foundational skills in historical inquiry. In our example lesson, we have identified the relevant pathways of Dimension 2 defined by the C3 Framework for our inquiry on families. By the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, students should be able to “compare life in the past to life today” (D2.His.2.K-2); “compare perspectives of people in the past to those of people in the present” (D2.His.4.K-2); and “generate questions about a particular historical source as it relates to a particular historical event or development” (D2.His.12.K-2).

It is important to note that young children in the primary grades do not need in-depth, chronological understanding to engage in historical thinking. Researchers have found that kindergartners can use visual clues in historical images to arrange them in temporal order (Barton & Levstik, 1996). We can teach young children terms such as “long ago,” “recent past,” and “present” to navigate shifts in time without introducing specific numerical dates and time periods. However, this learning experience also may be informative for elementary social studies teachers in other grades as they build and strengthen their own students’ foundational skills in historical thinking. The visual thinking strategies we use with kindergartners are beneficial for accommodating the individualized needs of learners, and the focus on visual resources is helpful for building vocabulary and background content knowledge of English language learners (Tran, 2010). Family membership highlights commonalities and unique identities that have emerged over time as historical contexts have changed. So, in answering the compelling question, we want to facilitate children’s capacity to think like historians (Wineburg, 2001), using the tools, evidence, and strategies that historians rely on to make meaning of the past and inform their understanding of the present.

The learning experience also provides an opportunity to introduce disciplinary specific terms, such as “primary sources,” “history,” and “artifacts,” among others. For most young children, this will be their first introduction to this vocabulary, but through gradual exposure and the use of child-friendly definitions, the children may develop familiarity with these foundational concepts. Pre-teaching the vocabulary before the primary source inquiry is especially important to support students whose home language is not English (Giroir et al., 2015; Salinas et al., 2006; Tran, 2010). We often introduce vocabulary in the form of a graphic organizer with visual illustrations of key terms, and as children explore primary sources, these words are used in the context of the inquiry to promote understanding.

An important step in engaging children in disciplinary inquiry is to make sure that we have selected resources that are accessible to them, and for young learners this means that we need to consider the developmental appropriateness of the primary sources and text-based resources that we use in instruction. Our selection process of finding relevant primary sources builds on children’s curiosity and questions, and we seek out historical images that will engage children in observing more detail, generating vivid descriptions, and using the

evidence to weave together stories about families. Fortunately, digital primary sources are available free of charge online from the [Library of Congress](#) and many local, state, national, and international historical archives, offering economical and plentiful sources for interesting content that can introduce the study of history while simultaneously fostering multiliteracies of young learners. To help facilitate the identification of primary sources that may be used to explore cultural and historical concepts, Library of Congress staff curate the treasure trove of resources into blogs on a variety of topics, and several of these posts provide us with a selection of sources for our inquiry on families, including:

- [Profiling Portraits: Family Groups in Pictures](#)
- [Using Primary Sources to Explore Different Ways Families Come Together](#)
- [Home Sweet Home: Life in Nineteenth-Century Ohio](#)

To help us decide what image to use for the start of the lesson, we look for compelling sources that focus on familiar representational and ideational structures, including events, objects, and participants involved, but we also are intentional about introducing items that include something unfamiliar or surprising to elicit wonder and engage children in the inquiry process. Not all images are well suited for young learners, and earlier research has identified qualities of artifacts that are developmentally appropriate for early childhood and elementary grades (Berson & Berson, 2014). Students must make personal connections to primary documents before they can develop any historical understanding (Morgan & Rasinki, 2012). Moreover, the primary source should entice the interests of young learners with content that is historically accurate. Therefore, we look for an image that features children as the subjects of the primary source. This familiar imagery offers content that is accessible to young users so that they may begin their inquiry by drawing from their existing knowledge, but as the primary source is revealed, students discover ambiguity or puzzling content that activates their curiosity and challenges their thinking. A scaffolded learning experience engages young learners in an inquiry process that builds their conceptual knowledge as well as increasingly complex historical thinking skills.

With compelling primary sources, young children may also observe relationships among people and emotionally connect with individuals depicted in historical images (Berson & Berson, 2014). Comparing their own lives to children long ago, observing changes in their communities, and exploring primary sources that feature familiar objects, images, and sounds (e.g., toys, household items), young learners may begin understanding the representation of distinct time periods and cultural traditions. Through the analysis of primary sources, young children may investigate temporal and historical changes over time (Barton & Levstik, 1996) while confronting misconceptions. In the kindergarten classroom, we want the sources we select to broaden students' understanding of what it means to be a family and engage the children in a lively discussion on the topic. To expand upon children's conceptual background of families and connect to historical inquiry, we have chosen a primary source that will be

used as part of whole class instruction to support students as they collectively analyze the image with the teacher interjecting as needed.

We introduce the primary source to the children. “This picture reminds me of some of your drawings. I have a picture here from a really long, long, long time ago. My picture is from before you were born. It was taken before your parents were even born. It was so long ago that it may even have been taken before your grandparents were born. Let’s see if my picture can help us figure out who these people are.”

We begin by showing the photograph of [Ella Watson with her three grandchildren and her adopted daughter](#) (see [Figure 1](#)) on the large screen and also provide each child a copy of the image along with a magnifying glass to carefully analyze the photo. Students are asked, “What do you see?” Each response is documented on butcher paper, a flip chart, or interactive whiteboard. If a child responds with an interpretation of what they see rather than an observation, we record their response under the think column of [Figure 2](#) and then remind them to tell us what they observe using the phrase, “I see...” For example, if a child makes a statement like, “They look happy,” we respond with a question to elicit a specific observation such as “What do you see that makes you think they look happy?” or model with statements like “I see that they are smiling.”

In the next step, we guide the children to interpret their observations, prompting, “You have looked carefully and made a lot of observations. Who do you think these people are? What do you think their relationship is to one another?” We again encourage the children to use their observations to support their thinking, asking “What do you see to make you think that?” Other questions might include

- “What do you think was happening when the photo was taken?”
- “What do you think happened just before the photo was taken?”
- “What do you think happened just after the photo was taken?”

The children then are encouraged to pursue further inquiry through “I wonder” questions. Broader, open-ended questions encourage the children to seek additional information beyond their interpretations that might not be directly answerable from the image. We ask the children, “What questions do you have about the photograph? What are you wondering?” One child inquired, “I wonder who took the photo.” As a follow up, we query, “How could we try to answer this question? Where could we go to find an answer?” Responses from the children include, “Look it up in a book” and “Search on the computer.”

The children’s suggestions to use additional books and digital tools are both great ideas to engage the students in exploring more resources. When possible, we try to pair a primary source with picture books to support knowledge acquisition and early literacy skill development. For example, we may introduce the children’s book *Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America* (Weatherford & Christoph, 2015). Gordon Parks was a self-taught photographer who documented social injustice and later became the

first Black Hollywood director. He photographed Ella Watson at work, in her home, within the community, and at church. Parks' most famous photograph called *American Gothic* captured Ella Watson at work holding a large mop in one hand and a broom in the other, standing before a huge American flag hanging on the wall.

Using [additional images of government worker Ella Watson and her family](#), we split the class into small groups and give each group one photograph from the series.

- [Washington, D.C. Mrs. Ella Watson, a government charwoman dressing her grandchildren](#)
- [Washington, D.C. Dinner time at the home of Mrs. Ella Watson, a government charwoman](#)
- [Washington, D.C. Mrs. Ella Watson, a government charwoman, reading the Bible to her household](#)
- [Washington, D.C. Grandchildren of Mrs. Ella Watson, a government charwoman](#)

Each group uses the “See, Think, Wonder” process to analyze their photo and discuss what story their particular image tells. When the class comes back together, they share the photographs and their analysis. How does seeing all of the photographs together reinforce or change the story each group developed? We discuss what new stories the children can now tell and what other wonderings they have.

## Instructional Strategies

The Dimension 2 disciplinary skills of engaging in historical thinking and analysis through the See, Think, and Wonder process merge with Dimension 3 as students use their gathered evidence to “develop claims in response to compelling questions” (D3.4.3-5). Although the C3 Framework suggests that developing claims and using evidence should be introduced in grade 3, we assert that primary age children can also develop foundational skills with scaffolding. As the children interpret primary sources, they are encouraged to justify their responses with evidence they have observed.

### ***Supporting Question: How Are Families the Same and Different?***

To help children feel valued in their school context, it is important to plan an inclusive approach that honors differences in family structures (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017; Tschida et al., 2017). Educators' instructional decision-making plays a powerful role in shaping how children view themselves in relation to the messages communicated in the classroom (Berson & Berson, 2019). For the topic of families, an important part of our process of identifying primary resources for engaging elementary students in inquiry-based learning is locating representations of families that showcase diverse families and alternative family structures so that all children find themselves reflected in the curriculum while also having

an opportunity to learn about others through their educational experiences. Displaying photographs of families that celebrate differences helps feature the varied portrayals of what a family looks like and allows children in a classroom who are not part of the dominant narrative to feel recognized (Naidoo, 2017; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017; Van Horn & Hawkman, 2018). Children often observe these differences (Souto-Manning, 2013), which provides valuable opportunities for conversations to support inclusive ideas about gender roles, sociocultural identity, and family structure differences.

We bring into our instruction inclusive text sets to supplement primary sources with a broader range of family experiences that often are marginalized, such as children who have experienced loss or trauma due to incarceration, deportation, divorce, or death (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017; Tschida et al., 2017). We are intentional in our selection of texts that depict counter-narratives to highlight the many distinct ways that families are formed and spark rich discussions about the social and historical forces that have influenced who belongs to or is included in a family. Children’s literature complements the primary sources we select to provide multiple representations of what a family looks like. Together, these instructional materials provide diverse sources for students to evaluate the experiences of people within socio-historical contexts that highlight the complex issues of family membership.

One of the decisions when planning instruction is whether the picture books or primary sources should be introduced first, or perhaps we might opt to sandwich a book between diverse primary sources to provide historical background or content knowledge. Books offer an excellent entry point into an inquiry, and our decision to start with children’s literature was guided by the learning focus on comparing and contrasting family structures. Kindergarteners often need support in noticing subtle differences and developing the verbal skills to articulate similarities and differences (Berson et al., 2017). The texts provide practice comparing and contrasting in an explicit way and visually representing the process with Venn diagrams.

Building on the students’ skills comparing and contrasting resources, we further the primary source inquiry with a gallery walk, which involves the display of images around the room set up as stations where small teams of students collaborate. Each photograph includes a different family from the sources we located earlier in our planning process. Like any classroom activity, we clarify expectations for the children before beginning and model what active engagement looks like and sounds like during a gallery walk. Typically, we pre-organize the children into groups of 3–4 students and establish a specific rotation (i.e., clockwise). One of the most important outcomes is that students are up and out of their chairs actively applying concepts and skills they have been learning to cooperatively engage in the inquiry process. We use different color post-it notes for each team as well as a matching color marker pen. This allows every group to see what contributions have been made. The children work together to apply the concepts and historical inquiry skills that they have been developing in class. During the gallery walk, the teacher moves from group to group, asking probing questions and providing encouragement. Once students have become familiar with gallery



walks, a fun adaptation is the gallery run, a more fast paced version that might be structured with a timed [30-second look](#) at each historic photograph to find a similarity or a difference with a family featured in one of the children’s books about families read in class.

## ***Supporting Question: What Does a Family Do Together?***

Primary sources provide valuable insight into family life and offer clues about day-to-day events that reveal details of family activities, the events families celebrate, and the occasions that are notable for families to document. There are many ways to learn about family histories. One approach includes an examination of artifacts, such as diaries, photo albums, home movies, and greeting cards.

To help students’ concept development, we explain to students what traditions are. Traditions are important in many families and can continue for many generations. For example, our family has many traditions around [Thanksgiving](#). Our extended family of uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents get together the night before to eat pizza, and then we celebrate the birthdays of six family members born in the month of November with a huge chocolate cake on Thanksgiving Day. We have students think of traditions in their own families and share with their peers. If they cannot think of any traditions that their family has, the children may describe a tradition that they would like to have or start in their family.

To introduce children to the exploration of family traditions with primary sources, we use the KidCitizen digital interactive [Rosa Parks: A Proud Daughter](#). Recognizing the potential of digital games to teach children to use primary sources for discovery and problem-solving, the Library of Congress funded the development of apps for a variety of grade levels. [KidCitizen](#) is a digital interactive platform designed for children in grades K–5. The episodes provide authentic, age-appropriate interaction with primary source materials, based on research-informed practices and evidence-based pedagogy, engaging children in exploring civics and government concepts through historical sources, and connecting what they find with their daily lives. Digital games can help facilitate the identification of primary sources that may be used to explore cultural and historical concepts with developmentally appropriate strategies (Berson et al., 2017). The interactive capabilities of digital resources provide unique opportunities to facilitate students’ movement from the arbitrary “seeing” to the deliberate “looking” (Ali-Khan, 2011, p. 315). These observations may lead to questions for further investigation and introduction of strategies to seek answers. The integration of games into the teaching of social studies has optimized the use of multiple sources to promote students’ historical inquiry and problem solving skills (Kim et al., 2009). Game-based learning not only contributes to a learning environment that is interesting and engaging for students but also fosters collaboration among learners while meeting educational goals (Hwang et al., 2015).

In the Rosa Parks KidCitizen episode, children analyze a greeting card to learn about Rosa Parks and her family. The greeting card offers a familiar resource for exploring family traditions. Every greeting card has a purpose and a message that carries information and expresses feelings for a special occasion from one person to another. The [front of the card](#)

has an image and some simple writing. The [inside of the card has a poem](#), and the back of the card features Rosa Parks' [handwritten note](#) to her mother. Children observe the details of the card and analyze clues to figure out what family tradition was being celebrated. Working with an in-game mentor character Ella, children use parts of the card as evidence to support their ideas as they generate hypotheses about the card's recipient, sender, and the feelings the sender wanted to express. Children explore the handwritten note on the card and practice deciphering the message by looking for familiar letters or words.

Family life is often a topic of discussion in journal entries and letters sent to relatives. Using photos, documents, and music from [the Library of Congress classroom materials](#), students can investigate rituals and customs of different families. For example, using resources from the [Rosa Parks' collection](#), children may explore how different types of greeting cards are used to communicate feelings, information, and events. After selecting a variety of greeting cards from the collection, children can group the different types of greeting cards by theme or occasion and explore how writing styles and techniques, such as rhyming or jokes, depend on the type and occasion of the message sent.

Although we have explored applications in the kindergarten classroom, we also could adapt this instruction for the intermediate grades, exposing students to other types of primary sources that offer more complexity or that need additional contextual support. For example, exploring resources on families who have addressed significant life events throughout time (i.e., births, marriage, death, holiday celebrations) showcases how families provide care and support during periods of need as well as in their everyday moments of interaction. Primary sources bring the real world into the classroom, creating relevant and meaningful learning experiences.

Family celebrations and rituals also are captured in the form of songs. Students may listen to lyrics from wedding and funeral music, such as:

- California Gold: Folk Music from the Thirties: [Taksim and Wedding Dance](#)
- Hispano Music & Culture of the Northern Rio Grande: [Los Bienaventurados \(The Fortunate Ones\)](#)
- Southern Mosaic: [Two White Horses Standin' in Line](#)

By examining songs as historical artifacts, children may use the [Analyzing Sound Recordings tool](#) to explore the role of song in family life and further develop their inquiry skills with related activities, such as interviews with older relatives or neighbors to explore the occasions when they sang and the titles or lyrics that they remember from their family experiences.

Oral history interviews provide a rich source of information about family histories. The [American Folklife Center](#) has several collections that document lives and memories of family events. The interviews also add [another type of analysis](#) that involves listening to the voices of people from long ago and can complement other sources by providing unique details on

an event captured in a photograph. Rather than “See, Think, and Wonder,” we can engage in a process of listening, reflecting, and questioning what we hear.

[Voices Remembering Slavery: Freed People Tell Their Stories](#) is a collection of recorded interviews collected between 1932 and 1975 in nine Southern states. In the interview of Bob Ledbetter from Louisiana, he discusses the importance of family ties for those enslaved people fortunate enough to have them. Also, the interview with Harriet Smith includes a discussion of her extended family and how they were separated. Engaging children in thinking about families separated by enslavement (or modern-day immigration policies) opens opportunities for experiences that promote justice-oriented citizenship (Ferrerias-Stone & Demoiny, 2019). Throughout time, families have been displaced and separated, and the challenges facing families in the past and present help children recognize patterns that connect these experiences, including the role of people in power to control families staying together or being torn apart.

Additionally, a study of family could include an inquiry into the landmark Supreme Court decision that overturned laws banning interracial marriage and explore the relevance of the case to our lives today (Van Horn & Hawkman, 2018). On June 12, 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a decision in *Loving v. Virginia* which stated that prohibition of marriage between people of different races was unconstitutional. This ended all race-based legal restrictions on marriage in the United States. The anniversary is remembered every year as [Loving Day](#) (June 12). Children’s books that can introduce historical background on the case. For example, for younger students, *A Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko (2015) tells the story of Mildred Loving and Richard Perry Loving. With scaffolded support, intermediate age students may also appreciate *Loving vs. Virginia: A Documentary Novel of the Landmark Civil Rights Case* (2017) written by Patricia Hruby Powell and illustrated by Shadra Strickland. The docu-novel includes news clippings, maps, and historical photographs. During a [Library of Congress Young Readers Center Event](#), Patricia Hruby Powell and Shadra Strickland discussed their book, and the recording includes a brief video featuring the Lovings talking about the landmark decision that cleared the way for interracial marriage in the United States. There are several additional resources to help plan an inquiry for students about government rules that define who can be considered a family, including the following:

- *Social Education*, the official journal of NCSS, published an article in the May/June 2017 issue on “[The Lessons from Loving v. Virginia still Resonate 50 Years Later](#)” and a 2018 issue of *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, the NCSS journal for elementary educators, includes an article on using trade books to teach elementary students about marriage equality, titled “[First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage \(Equality\)](#).”
- DocsTeach from the National Archives links to the [Supreme Court decision](#), along with some background information. Oyez also includes an [audio of the oral argument on April 10, 1967](#).

- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has a page “[Looking Back at the Landmark Case, \*Loving v. Virginia\*.”](#)”
- The [Bill of Rights Institute](#) has a lesson on *Loving v. Virginia*.
- The National Constitution Center’s lesson “[Supreme Court: Practice with Precedents 2010](#)” familiarizes students with the Supreme Court process for reviewing cases using *Loving v. Virginia*.
- Learning for Justice, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, provides a [teacher’s guide](#) on the Loving story with questions for discussion, vocabulary, and ties to standards.
- *Time Magazine* published an article in 2016 titled “[What You Didn’t Know about \*Loving v. Virginia\*.”](#)”

## Final Assessment: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

A key outcome for social studies education is preparing children to assume active roles as citizens who contribute to civic life (Levinson & Levine, 2013). A lesson is not complete unless participatory experiences are included that provide children with opportunities to use their acquired knowledge and skills to take informed action with application in their own lives. Achieving these outcomes requires the investment of instructional time for implementation of the inquiry, but the benefits are significant. High quality, inquiry-based learning with a focus on engaged action contributes to interdisciplinary academic success across content domains (Knapp & Hopkins, 2018) and helps overcome civic empowerment gaps common among children from lower socio-economic and marginalized communities (Levinson & Levine, 2013). The C3 Framework emphasizes the importance of this goal of nurturing “knowledgeable, thinking, and active citizens,” asserting that “now more than ever, students need the intellectual power to recognize societal problems; ask good questions and develop robust investigations into them; consider possible solutions and consequences; separate evidence-based claims from parochial opinions; and communicate and act upon what they learn” (NCSS, 2013, p. 6). Ensuring that instruction includes this focus reflects our commitment to equity and rigor for all learners.

To ensure that children can practice and demonstrate the disciplinary skill sets they have acquired throughout the lesson, we design a task that connects to authentic real-world contexts. Taking action can focus on a number of spheres of influence, including school, home, and community. Our kindergarten learning experience includes an oral history project to connect to the life histories of the children’s families. We tap into the funds of knowledge of their families to foster home-school connections while providing children with experiences applying their historical thinking skills to connect the past with the present.

The Library of Congress [American Folklife Center](#) (2015) offers guidance for planning an oral history project.

There are many ways to document and preserve families' histories. One approach concentrates on the examination of public records, such as census records, church records, wills, and deeds. Another approach focuses on the examination of various materials that are in the possession of family members, such as diaries, photograph albums, home movies, business records and artifacts. A third approach is concerned with recording oral history interviews with family members about aspects of their lives and memories of other relatives and important events in the family's history.

Interviewing projects allow children to take action by interviewing family members and constructing a story to highlight the uniqueness of their family experience while underscoring the unifying features of love and care. In the kindergarten classroom, this process begins by explaining to students what a family history is. This discussion introduces or reinforces disciplinary specific concepts and clarifies that history includes events that happened long, long ago as well as events that took place last week. Children learn that history is comprised of stories using information from various sources. The stories may include photographs and letters, as well as the details from interviews with people in their family who share their experiences and knowledge. Each child has a family history, and they can turn and share with a peer a story from their recent or [past family history](#).

To help expand upon each child's story of family, the children use the [Library of Congress Intergenerational Interview protocol](#) (see [Figure 6](#)) to investigate their family traditions and gain an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of their own family members. A letter home to families describes the project and provides the form in [Figure 6](#).

**Figure 6.** *Intergenerational Interview Protocol*

1. Name of the person you interviewed:
2. Relationship to you:
3. When and where was the person born?
4. What is the person's birth order in the family? (only, oldest, youngest?)
5. If the person has siblings, how many does he/she have? Gender of siblings?
6. What is the person's culture?
7. How long has the person's family lived in the United States?
8. Name jobs held by family members.
9. Name languages spoken by the person's family.
10. What celebrations did the person participate in as a child?
11. What celebrations does the person participate in as an adult?
12. Do you believe it is important to celebrate rituals? Why or why not?
13. Ask the person to name a news event that is memorable to him or her. Why is it memorable?
14. Ask the person to name an important family member. Why did he or she choose that person?
15. What is the person's definition of a family?

**Note.** The questions are adapted from the UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research. (2021). *Family history sample outline and questions*. [https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/pages/family\\_history](https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/pages/family_history)

Once children have gathered this information, they can organize the historical evidence on significant events, people, and places in their lives that have contributed to their family's identity and share this information with others (Cornett et al., 2019). The interview details may be accompanied by photographs, documents, and artifacts that the children include in a family history box or bag. To represent their family history, children may create one of the following to be shared during a Family Stories Celebration in class:

- Family timeline with 3–4 important events and their significance, using pictures and words
- Family tree

During the Family Stories Celebration, children can go for a gallery walk to see each classmate's family history spotlighted. In doing so, the children have an opportunity to learn from each other and compare their diverse histories as well as discover their commonalities as they refine their own historical inquiry skills.

Through exploration, children can critically reflect on their own family history and construct their family story. By sharing with peers, the children not only think about the richness of differences but also develop a recognition that others have experiences that are distinct from their own. Both the primary source analysis and family history activities bridge complex historical and contemporary events to understand human experiences in the past

and the present and can be used with children to uncover patterns across time with diverse sources of evidence. As children consider historical resources, they also can connect to contemporary events to promote justice-oriented citizenship, contemplating how families have come together and struggled to stay together over time.

## Conclusion

By engaging in primary source analysis, young children may be provided the opportunity to develop important social studies skills and knowledge. Historical photographs are accessible to all learners, and young children can construct meaning by looking at images and talking about them (Berson & Berson, 2014; Levstik & Barton, 2015). They learn to evaluate information, gather evidence, communicate conclusions, and take informed action.

Children thrive when they come to understand there are varying family structures and that the commonality of all families is that they are comprised of people who love and care about each other. However, families throughout time also have faced adversity, and young children are capable of using historical inquiry to explore these conflicts of the past and present to learn how to cope with these challenges. Even if a child's family configuration changes through death, separation, or other life events, they can learn from their family story and use the tools of historical inquiry to seek understanding of these experiences. With knowledge of people's actions and motivations in the past and present, children develop perspective-taking skills that they may employ to foster a more equitable and inclusive society. These skills are the exclusive result of educational experiences and do not emerge spontaneously. Therefore, elementary teachers have an essential role to play in introducing young learners to historical ways of thinking that can inform their values and actions in the present.

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