



# GENEALOGY – GOING TO THE SOURCE

**Project Skills:**

- Youth will extract family history information from historic census records.

**Life Skills:**

- Keeping records

**Academic Standards:**

- Social Studies: B.8.1 Interpret the past using a variety of sources, such as biographies, diaries, journals, artifacts, eyewitness accounts and other primary source materials, and evaluate the credibility of sources used.

**Grade Levels:** 5 and above

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Supplies Needed:**

- *Little Town on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder (ISBN # 0064400026)
- *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum (ISBN # 0812523350)
- Computer lab with Internet connection
- Biography sheets – one per youth (see page 3)
- Household Record - one per youth (see page 4)

**Do Ahead:**

- Pre-select passages from the book, *Little Town on the Prairie*.
- Preview web site: [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org).

**BACKGROUND**

Census records contain information about people and their families.

Genealogists use this information to construct family histories, also known as “family trees.” In this lesson, youth get the opportunity to examine primary source records as they trace the family history of some well-known individuals.

Note: As always when teaching children using Internet resources, it is important to establish rules regarding “safe surfing.”



**WHAT TO DO**

**Activity: Introductions**

Have each child introduce him or herself by sharing two things about themselves or the area in which they live that others probably don’t know.

**Activity: Pre-Research**

Read a selection from Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little Town on the Prairie* that discusses the family or the town of DeSmet. Begin a discussion based on the Ingalls family’s many moves. Lead the discussion toward records that could document some of those moves. Possible primary source records would include birth records, death records (the Ingalls lost a son in Iowa), marriage records, diaries and the United States Census.

Explain that the census was taken every 10 years in the United States, beginning with the year 1790. Let the youth know that information recorded varied, but after 1850, every member in the household was recorded, including their name, age, gender and occupation.

With youth at a computer station, demonstrate how to look up Laura Ingalls Wilder’s family record in the 1880 census at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). The instructions are as follows:

1. Connect to the Internet.
2. Type in the web address in the address bar.
3. Click on “Search for Ancestors.”
4. Click on “Census” on the left tool bar.
5. Type in *Laura Ingalls* where you are prompted for first and last name. Ask the group why we didn’t type in Wilder?
6. We have 30 Laura Ingalls! Hit the back button and ask if anyone remembers where Laura Ingalls was born? (Answer: *Wisconsin*.)
7. Enter *United States* in the “Birthplace Country” space. A new database will load and ask you for state. Type in *Wisconsin*.
8. You have Laura Ingalls Wilder, daughter of Charles. Is that right? Look at the rest of the family to make sure – click on the “Household” link on the upper right-hand corner of the screen. Compare her mother’s and sisters’ names with the ones that you heard in the book. Is it probably the right family?

**Sources:**

- Created by Paula Rogers Huff, 4-H Youth Development Agent, UW-Extension, Oconto County

Discuss with the group the categories and the significance of each to genealogy including the age, gender, place of birth and the town in which they were living.

Ask them how else they could have found Laura if her name hadn't been recorded as Laura Ingalls. For whom else in her family could they have searched? (This is an important step because one of the research subjects suggested below cannot be found using his full name.)

**Activity: Research**

1. Draw research subjects' names out of a hat, or assign a name to a pair of youth. See the "Teacher Hint Sheet" on page 5 for clues in locating these individuals: Frank L. Baum, Louisa May Alcott, Rutherford B. Hayes and Frederick Douglass.
2. Have each youth or pair of youth do a "Google" search on the name they are researching. Hint: Put quotation marks around the name to limit the number of returned responses. Encourage the youth or pair of youth to complete the Biography Sheet (see page 3) with the information that they find on their Internet search, including two important things that the person they are researching did in their lifetime.
3. Give each youth or pair of youth a Census Worksheet (see page 4) to complete for the person they are researching. Instruct them to search for the person on [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) using the methods shown before.
4. Group the youth according to the person that they were researching and have them report to other members of the large group.

**Closing Activity (Optional)**

Read a passage from *The Wizard of Oz*.

**TALK IT OVER****Reflect:**

- What sort of information did you find on the family search web site [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)?
- How did you feel knowing that you were getting a peek at someone's family from over 125 years ago?

**Apply:**

- Why might it be important to have the old census records to look at today?

**ENHANCE/SIMPLIFY****Enhance for Older Children:**

- Share the teaching with a computer literate youth. Enlist his or her help in explaining Google searches and assisting others as they navigate the family search web site.
- Enhance this activity by creating a family tree for the Ingalls based on information obtained from the census and other sources.
- Expand this lesson using *Voices from the Past* curriculum from Extension Publications, UW-Extension. Go to <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu>, click on *4-H*, then *Arts & Communications* and scroll down to *Communications*.

**ADDITIONAL WEB LINKS**

- RootsWeb.com is the oldest free genealogy site on the web. The link is <http://www.rootsweb.com>.

***Reviewed by Wisconsin 4-H Afterschool Team: July 2005***

# Biography Sheet

Person being researched:

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Where was he/she born?

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When was he/she born?

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Where was he/she living in 1880?

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What important things did he/she do in his/her life?

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Two interesting facts about his/her life:

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## 1880 Census Worksheet (Household Record)

1. Person researched:

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2. Who was the *head of household* (first name in household)?

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3. What was the full *name* of the person you are researching (as listed on census)?

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4. What was their *relationship* to the head of household?

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5. What was his or her *marital status*?

Married  Single  Widowed  Divorced

6. What *gender* was the person you are researching?  Male  Female

7. What *race*? \_\_\_\_\_ How old (age)? \_\_\_\_\_

Birth year (about): \_\_\_\_\_ Where were they born (*birthplace*)? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What was their *occupation*?

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9. Where was their father born (*father's birthplace*)?

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10. Where was their mother born (*mother's birthplace*)?

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11. What *other* people were living in the household?

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12. Where was the family living in 1880 (*census place*)?

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## Teacher Hint Sheet

**Frank L. Baum**, creator of the *Wizard of Oz* series of children's books, was living in Onondaga County, NY, with his family in 1880. Don't miss his occupation – it says he and his brother raise “fancy poultry.”

**Louisa May Alcott**, author of the *Little Women* and *Little Men* books, was living with her father, A. Bronson Alcott, in Concord, MA, in 1880. From the start, Louisa knew she was going to be an author – and at age 49, she stated to the census taker that she was an authoress.

**Rutherford B. Hayes** has a stylish address in Washington, D.C. Mr. Hayes was the nineteenth president of the United States. He lists it on the census! Look at the number of servants that were living in the White House.

**Frederick Douglass** was born into slavery in 1818. He escaped slavery into the north, changed his name and married. He published his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, in 1845. This led to a brilliant speaking career, a position with President Lincoln, and eventually a job as U.S. Marshall, which he was doing in 1880.

Note: The easiest way to find Mr. Douglass in the census is to search for his wife, Anna Douglass, the name of whom will probably be found by the group during the Google search. Narrow down the search for Mrs. Douglass by searching by name, Anna Douglass, and including her race – “B” for Black. Frederick Douglass is listed on the census as F.W. Douglass.