

Family Trees

with President Lincoln's Cottage

The tree shown below —an Osage orange—grows on the grounds of the Cottage, the family home where the Lincolns sought sanctuary after tragedy, and where the president thought through big questions facing the nation. Trees like this one are abundant on the Cottage grounds, and it's easy to imagine President Lincoln and his family finding comfort in their shade, climbing their twisted branches, and spending time with loved ones in the shadow of their steady trunks.



Photo by Melanie Choukas-Bradley

Often, trees like this Osage orange are used as symbols of life and family — their roots and branches, fruit and leaves provide a strong visual for talking about our own unique families and our roles within those units. Follow the outline at right to create with your student(s) a family tree that focuses on celebrating the many people, values, and qualities that make up their family.

Procedures:

Optional Opening Discussion: Begin by creating a definition of family collaboratively with your student(s). Do all members of a family have to be related to each other? What makes a group of people a family? What other qualities do families have? Or, you can start from the definition below.

1. Talk with your student(s) about family. A family is a group of people related by blood or promises who are committed to taking care of each other. Give your student(s) a copy of the Osage orange tree illustration and explain that they will be thinking about their own families as they add to the illustration.

2. Complete the tree with student(s).

a. First, student(s) should write the names of their family members — people who are significant to them in a positive way — onto the branches of the tree.

b. Ask: "What values matter to you and to your family?" The roots of a tree nourish and support it just as these values support you and your family. Student(s) add roots to the drawing and write their values on the roots.

c. Ask: "What gifts has your family given to you? How do they support you?" Leaves capture light for trees and feed them. Student(s) should draw leaves onto the branches, adding the ways their family members support them. They can connect specific leaves to specific people (branches) or not, as they desire.

d. Ask: "What legacies do you want to leave in the world? What kind of difference do you want to make?" Trees produce fruit to spread their seeds and continue to grow their family. In real life, this tree grows oranges, but your fruit can be whatever shape you like. Add fruit to the branches of the illustrated tree to represent their ideas for making the world better.

3. Discuss Lincoln's work and the nation as family. Lincoln worked to unite a divided country, calling the United States "one national family." Do you agree that a nation is like a family? Why or why not?

4. All together, complete the larger tree with your student(s), as above. Who are the members of the American family? What values nourish them? How do they support each other? And what legacies do you want to leave in the world as members of the American family?

Materials:

- A copy of the Cottage's Osage orange for each student, plus one for the group (downloadable [here](#))
- Colorful markers, pencils, or pens