

Tree of Life Exercise

Tree of Life Guiding Questions

- What is your family's race and/or ethnic background? Is there a trend?
- What was the family structure of each generation (including number of children)? (*example: single head of household - divorce with one kid, heterosexual parents with three kids, widow, unmarried, cohabitation, communal, LGBTQIA parents with two kids*)
- Are you, your parents or grandparents immigrants?
- What kind of work (paid and unpaid) did each adult do? Was it hard work? Was it gratifying work?
- Where did income/money come from? (*example: jobs, underground economy [legal or illegal], transfers such as gifts, charity and government programs, business ownership, stocks and bonds*)
- How were men's and women's work different? (*differences in variety, steadiness, age levels and benefits, upward mobility, status*)
- Were there organizations or programs that your family relied on for help when they couldn't earn enough money to get by?
- How did major economic upheavals such as the Depression, the migration of black people from the South after WWII, or the cutbacks in public benefits during the Reagan years affect your family?
- What was the general level of education for each successive generation? Is there a trend?
- Did each generation own or rent housing? Do you currently or do you expect to own your own home?
- What did the people who raised you teach you about how to get by? How did they help you get started in life? What kind of job and income did you expect when you were growing up?
- Did you or your family face barriers that made things harder? (*racism, sexism, classism, disability/ableism, language, illiteracy*)
- Can you trace your heritage back even further than three generations?

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THE FRUIT: YOURSELF

How did your family's economic situation affect you – your goals, your education, your expectations of work?

What kind of work have you done in your life?

What have you taught others – your children, young friends – that they could expect for their economic futures?

Where have you lived – type of neighborhood, house. Have you owned or rented? Who lived in your neighborhood?

THE TRUNK: YOUR PARENTS

What your mother/female guardian's work paid or unpaid? Did she work outside the home? Was her work considered important?

What kind of unpaid work kept the family going? Did the person who did it have a job?

What did your parents/guardians do for a living?

Were they immigrants? Did they migrate from another region of the country?

Where did your parents/guardians live? What type of neighborhood, house? Did they own or rent? Who lived in the neighborhood?

THE ROOTS: YOUR GRANDPARENTS

What did your grandparents do for a living? Did they do paid work? Who did they work for? Were there other sources of income besides wages?

Where did your grandparents live? What type of neighborhood, house? Did they own or rent? Who lived in the neighborhood?

How was your grandmother's work different from the men in the household? Was her work valued and respected?