

Ties



*What makes you who you are?
Study your family's past. You may
find some answers. Be a detective.
Find the clues to your family tree.*

By Patricia McKissack

KEVIN DAVIDSON/SHUTTERSTOCK

Look in the mirror. Do you see your grandma's eyes? Do you see your dad's smile? That's no surprise. We get our looks from our family.

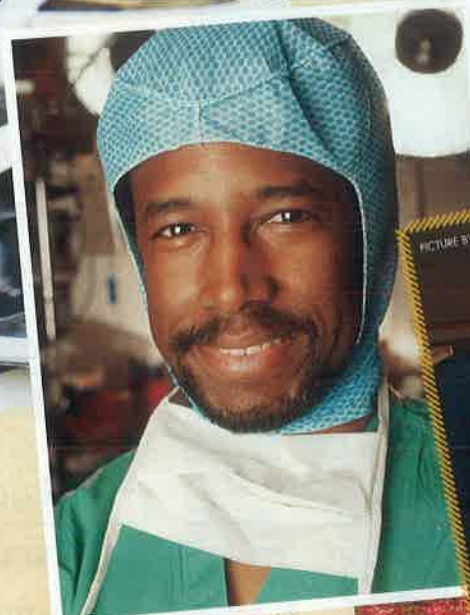
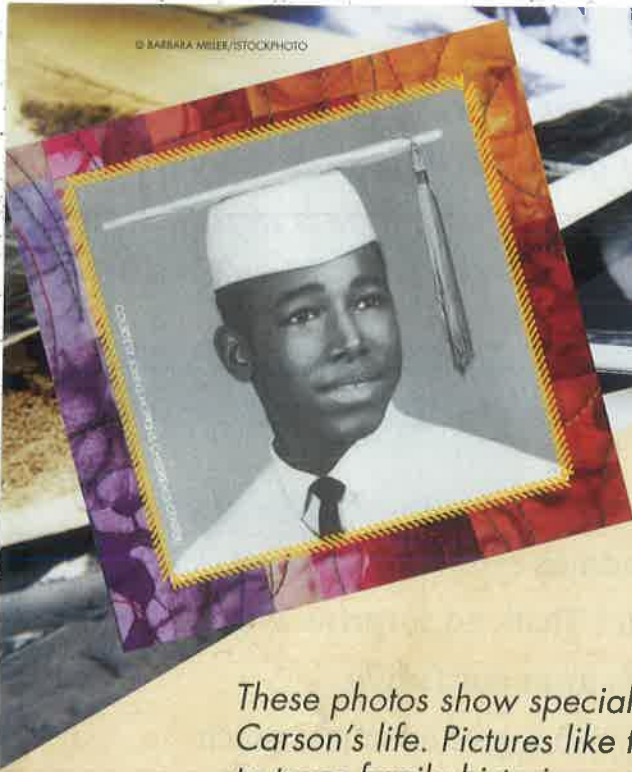
Families give us much, much more. They hand down favorite foods and traditions. They also share stories. Where did your mother's grandmothers live? What were they like? These stories make you and your family special.

History Detective

Do you want to learn about your family? Genealogy can help you. It's the study of people who are related to you. They may be people you know or people who lived long ago.

Genealogists are like detectives. They look for clues in public records. Some records tell when and where people are born. Others tell about marriages and deaths. Some even tell when people first came to the U.S. Newspapers, letters, and those old family stories may hold clues, too.





These photos show special times in Carson's life. Pictures like these help to trace family histories.

Our Ancestors' Names

In the 1800s and 1900s, millions of people came to America. They arrived at Ellis Island in New York. Professor Henry Gates, Jr., visited there. He wanted to learn about his African-American **ancestors**. Yet he didn't find any records at Ellis Island.

You see, the first African Americans did not go to Ellis Island. Most came on slave ships. Then they were sold to slave owners. The owners split families. They gave people new names. Family histories were lost.

Still, Gates found family stories of nine African Americans. One was the story of his friend Ben Carson's family. He is a famous brain doctor.

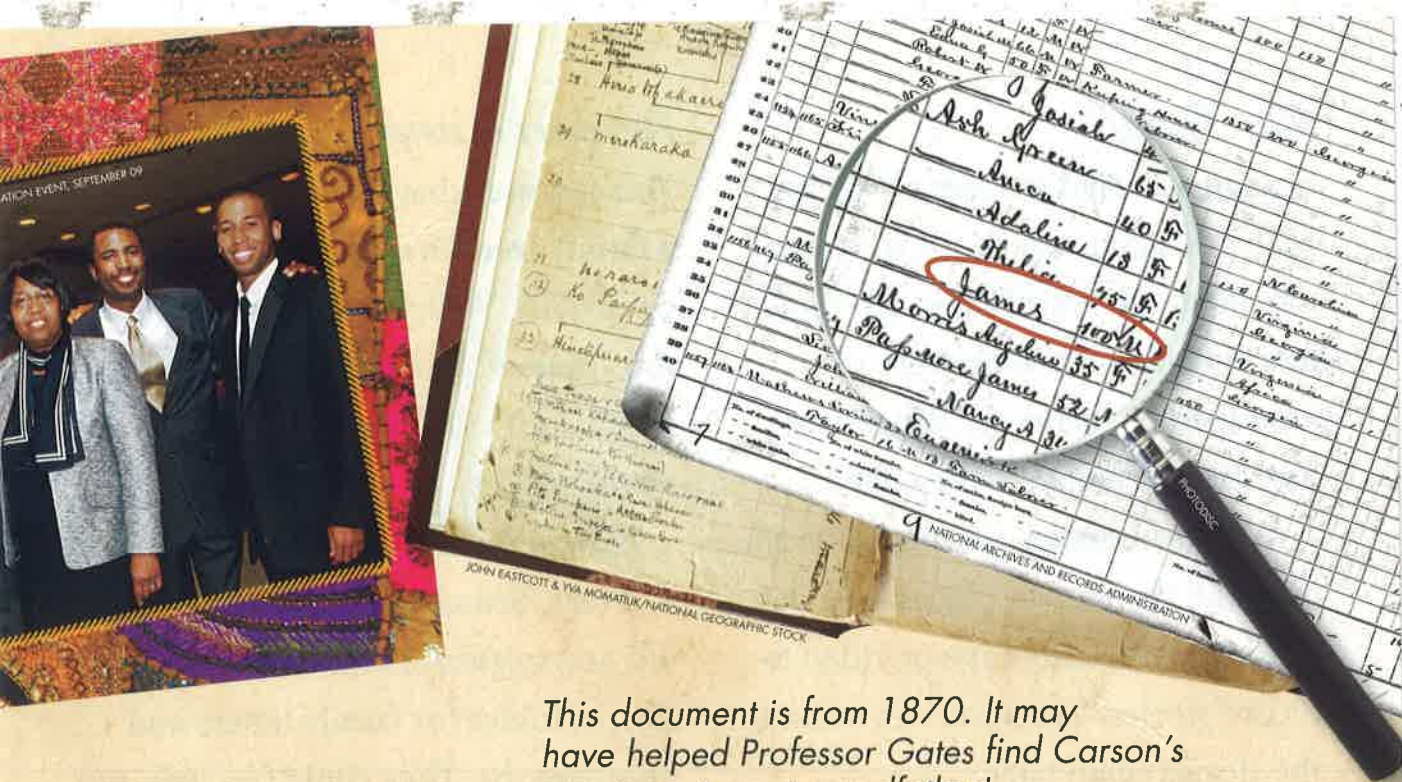
A Doctor's Beginnings

Ben Carson grew up poor. His mother, Sonya Copeland, worked three jobs. Family members took care of Carson while his mom worked.

At first, Carson didn't do well in school. But his mother pushed him to do better. She would not let him fail.

Carson admired his mother's strong will. He wanted to know about her past. Professor Gates helped him.

Gates listened to family stories. He looked through old pictures, records, and slave sales. Gates traced Carson's family to white slave-owners. They lived in Georgia in the 1800s. Their last name was Copeland, just like Carson's mother!



This document is from 1870. It may have helped Professor Gates find Carson's great-great-great grandfather!

Strong Spirit

William Copeland, Sr., was a white slave-owner. When he died in 1859, his family sold his things. Gates found a **document** that showed what happened to a child named John H. Copeland. He was Carson's great-grandfather.

John was sold and sent away from his family. What became of him? Amazingly, Gates found John's name in the 1870 census. That's a count of everyone who lives in the U.S.

John's name was listed on the census with his mother's. Somehow, the child had found his way back to his family! Maybe this is where Carson's determination came from.

Back to Africa

The 1870 census had another big surprise. It listed a 100-year-old man named James Ash. The census said he was born in Africa. Gates figured out that Ash could be Carson's ancestor!

It is rare to find proof that a person sold into slavery came from Africa. This was a great clue Gates found on paper. Next, he turned to science.

Gates knows DNA holds our body's **genes**. They are instructions that control how we look. Genes are passed down in families. So they can tell where our ancestors came from. Gates ran DNA tests. They showed some of Carson's ancestors came from Cameroon, Nigeria, and Kenya.

Your Turn!

Carson was glad to learn about his past. You can learn about your past, too. First, ask your family questions—lots of questions! Who were your grandparents' parents? Where did they live? What were they like?

While you listen, take notes. Write down all the names, places, and dates you hear. Use audiotape or video to record stories. Then you can listen to the stories again later.

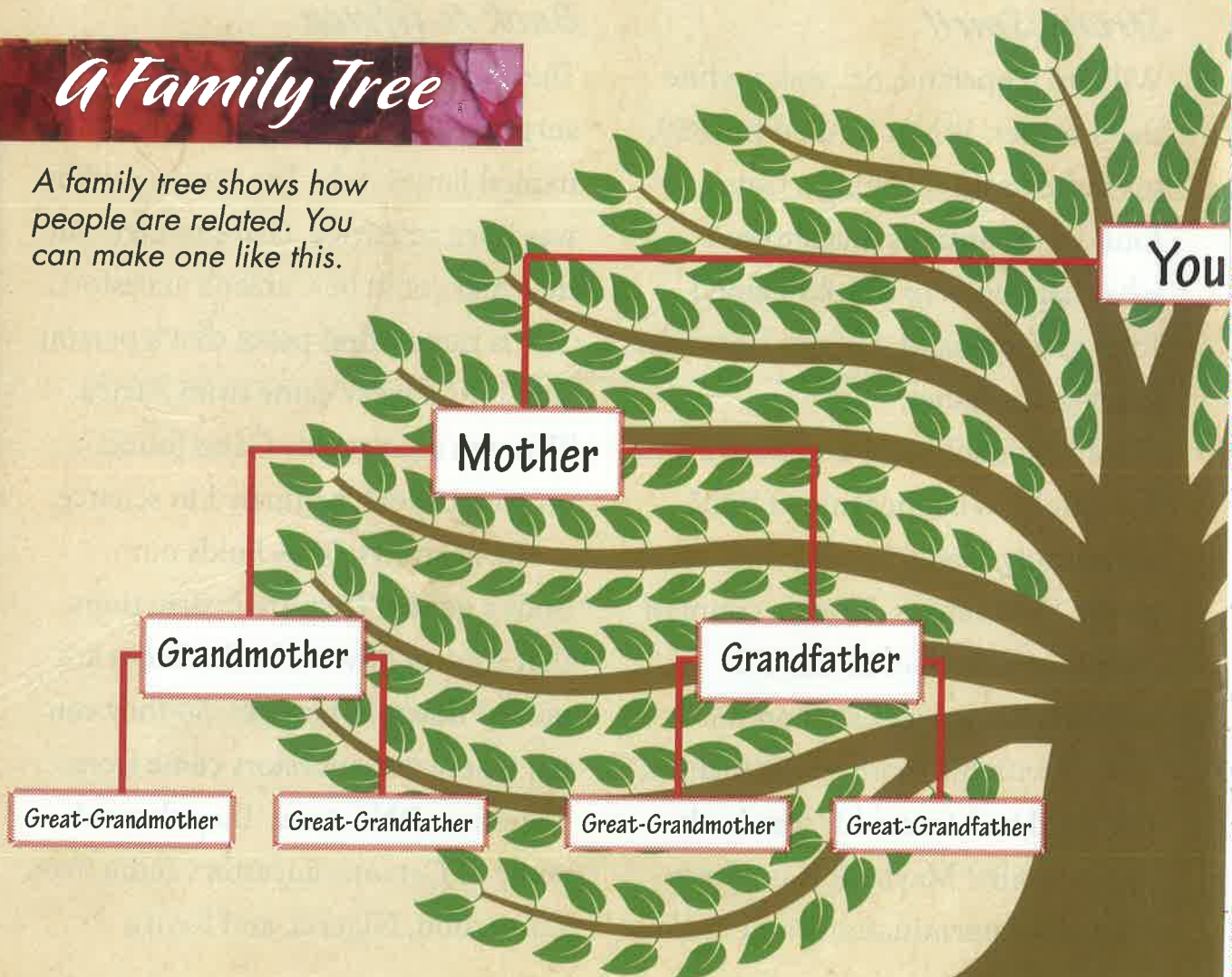
Research and Records

You can use what you learn to make a family tree. Draw a tree like the one below. Write your name at the top. Then write the names of your relatives. It's OK if you don't know all the names.

Now you can be a detective! Go to a library. Search for family names in old newspapers. Look on the Internet. Keep a folder for family letters and photographs. They could be clues, too.

A Family Tree

A family tree shows how people are related. You can make one like this.



© JOHN WOODCOCK/ISTOCKPHOTO

Share Your Story

You also can make a family memory book. Make a page for each person. Then ask each relative to write a personal story. Add family photos, newspaper clippings, and drawings to each page.

At your next family party, pass the memory book around. Ask family members to add more memories. Just think of the new stories you might hear!

Celebrate Your Family

Telling stories keeps your family history alive. Trade tales about your grandpa Max and your great-grandma Sylvia.

Write a family newsletter. You can take turns writing stories. That way everyone gets to help.

You may know you have your grandma's eyes. Maybe you have your dad's smile. Now you know a lot more about your family!

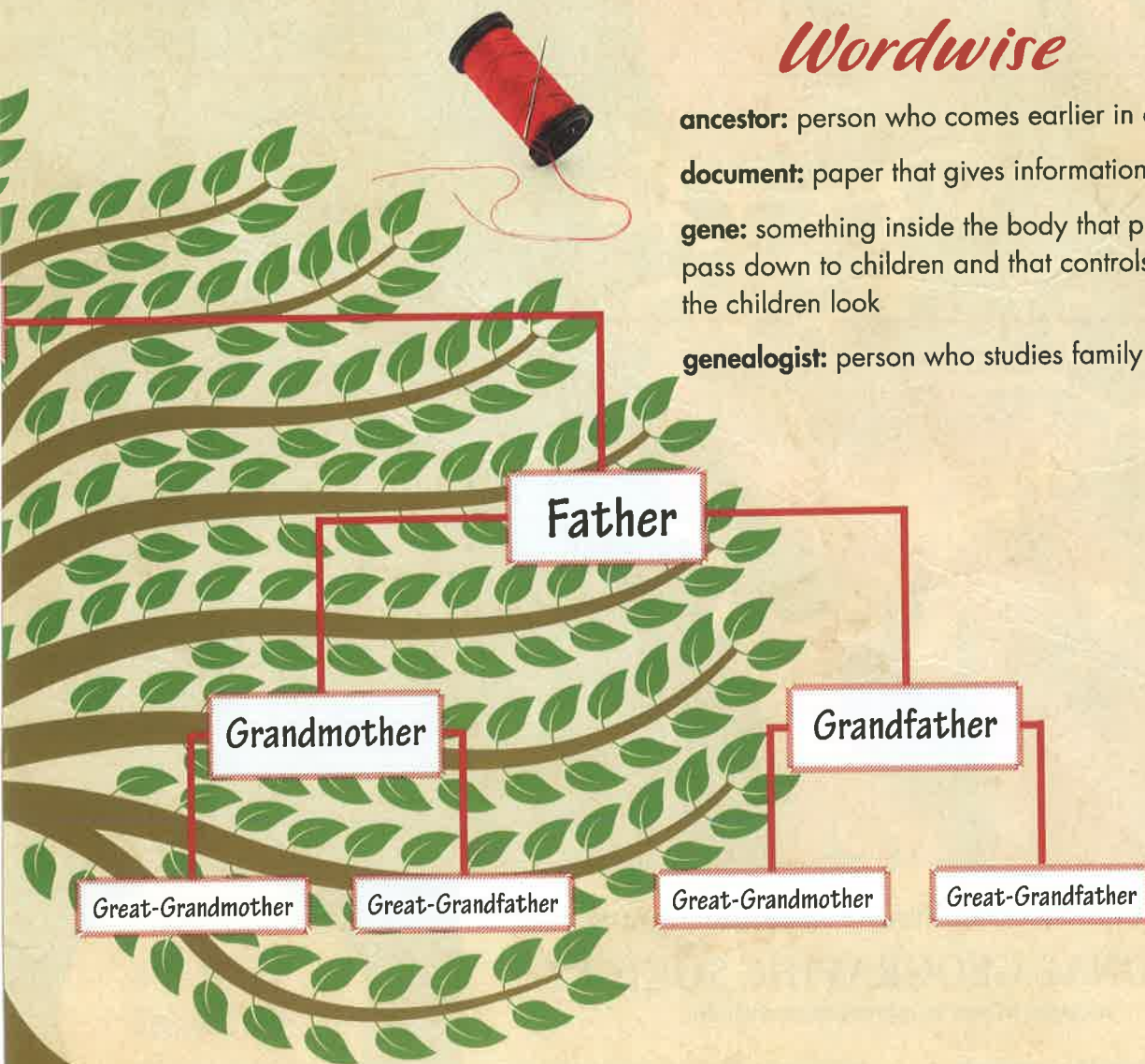
Wordwise

ancestor: person who comes earlier in a family

document: paper that gives information

gene: something inside the body that parents pass down to children and that controls how the children look

genealogist: person who studies family history



Coming in March

Incredible Iceland: Journey to a land of fire and ice to see smoldering volcanoes, steaming geysers, and towering glaciers.

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Cover: A volcanic eruption in Costa Rica spurts lava into the sky.

(PHOTO: FRANK SITEMAN/PHOTOLIBRARY)

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