NOTE: Although this lesson is taught from the New Mexican perspective, students of any state or nation can do this activity. Simply replace ‘New Mexico’ with the name of your state or province.

Introduction
Rio Grande Stories by Carolyn Meyer is an excellent book to use when introducing the rich and varied cultures of New Mexico to middle school students who are new to our state as well as to students who are born natives. Through this project, students will be introduced to the various cultures, traditions, and beliefs of New Mexicans while exploring and recording their own presence and place. These student portfolios can be later unified into a class web site, much like short stories published in the book, Rio Grande Stories.

This year-long portfolio project will be done in conjunction with the novel and is intended to be used as a self-discovery and enrichment program for both middle school Language Arts and New Mexico History. Nearly all students will find a piece of themselves in at least one of the chapters or short stories published about a fictitious middle school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where the characters are exploring who they are and how they are linked to our state. Through this project, students will explore and develop a deeper understanding of how they are a part of our state. This would be an excellent collaborative project for Language Arts and New Mexico History teachers.

Student Outcomes
After completing this project, students will:

- Be able to research, write, and tell short, oral family histories.
- Understand that cultural differences need to be celebrated.
- Be able to identify various groups who explored and settled in New Mexico and how their differences impact our state today.
- Know that they play an important role in keeping the history of New Mexico alive for future generations.
- Have a portfolio of writings, thoughts, and digital photographs to share with classroom guests and parents.
**Content Area and Grade Levels**

This project is designed as an integrative collaboration between Language Arts and New Mexico History at the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade levels. It could easily be adapted for use at any level of middle school and even upper elementary. *Rio Grande Stories* follows the typical timeline of a school year and through literature lends itself to fall harvest projects, traditional Thanksgiving and Christmas projects, Native American pueblo dance projects, and spring rituals using student writing and art. This project allows students to share their own cultural, religious, and traditional beliefs while exploring values and customs of others. It is suggested that with each new part of the project, a parent letter be sent home to outlining the lesson. This will allow parents to share ideas and information with their child as well as allowing them the option for an alternative activity.

**Content Standards and Benchmarks**

**Language Arts: Benchmark: 5-8**

8) Students will appreciate and respect their own language, culture and literature, and will learn about the languages, cultures and literature of others.

**Social Studies: Benchmark: 5-8**

11) People, Cultures, Places and Environments

Students will know and understand the diverse, dynamic, and ever-changing nature of culture.

**Technology Usage**

- Adobe PhotoShop™ or other image processing software
- Internet access
- Diskettes for saving images and text
- Digital Camera
- Word Processing program
- Scanner

**Resources**

**Online**

- American Family Immigration History Center – Ellis Island [http://www.ellisislandrecords.org]
- Encarta online encyclopedia [http://encarta.msn.com/]

**Offline**

- Student World Atlas
- Encyclopedias

**Process**

*Rio Grande Stories* is written in twelve chapters with each chapter followed by a short story written by a fictitious student enrolled in the fictitious Heritage Project at the fictitious Rio Grande Middle School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. After the class reads each chapter and short story, students begin a component of the digital portfolio.
Teacher's Guide

- Allow special education students to make full use of needed modifications.

- Some cultural groups may be hesitant to share family or personal histories. Assign these students an historical figure research or to interview others about.

Materials:
- Photograph of family member
- Digital picture of self
- Two diskettes
- Interview questionnaire
- Poster board
- Markers or colored pencils
- Three-ring binder for paper copy storage

Preparation:
- During Language Arts, teach and discuss what skills are needed to conduct a successful interview. Have students think about the purpose and focus of the interview as well as the audience of the completed interview. Practice open-ended questioning skills and discuss the skills of good listening. Practice writing question and answer formats, as well as the narrative format.
- Prepare parent information and permission letter.
- Check Internet sites.
- Prepare classroom bulletin board for student work.
- Check to see that camera is charged.
- Prepare safe storage for family photographs.

Tasks: (actions)
Collecting the information
1. Distribute, collect, and file signed parent permission slips to continue project.
2. Review interviewing skills.
3. Brainstorm a list of what might make a relative interesting. Ex: Taught in a one-room schoolhouse, worked in Colorado’s coal mines, raised a family of five before there was television…
4. Decide who will be interviewed. Student will have the choice of interviewing a living relative or a family member who can tell about a deceased relative.
5. Research interviewee on Internet genealogy sites.
6. Conduct the interview.
7. Ask permission to include information found on the Internet for report. Report should focus on one major event that made a difference in the interviewee’s life. Ex. Education, work, historical event, marriage. Be specific and detailed.
8. After the interview, write and send a thank you note to interviewee.

Preparing the information
9. Using Word Art, write relative’s name.
10. Write narrative or question-answer interview report using word processing program. Save to disk.
11. Scan interviewee’s photograph onto a disk. Paste image into report.
12. Print the photograph and report.
13. Using the atlas, draw and cut an outline of the state or country where interviewee was born. Mount printed name, area outline, and report on outlined poster board.
14. Using markers and/or colored pencils, surround the printed report with drawings and symbols of objects that represent details from the event share by interviewee.
15. Have a team member take and print a digital picture of the student.

**Presenting the information**
16. Place all paper copies into binder with a title page.
17. Save all digital documents and images on diskette labelled with student’s name.

**Presentation**
Completed posters along with students’ digital photograph will be hung in the classroom. Heritage Night will be hosted at the school. Students will give a short, oral narrative of their interview research to attending family members.

**Credits**
Be sure students include all sources of information, images, and other materials used.

**Assessment**
- An individual grade in Language Arts could be given for the completion of the written interview. Format, detail, grammar, and punctuation will be stressed in the final grade.
- A social studies grade could be recorded for care given to geographical emphasis and time period awareness in the written report.
- A group grade could be given for time on task, cooperative learning, and cultural information sharing.
- Students could be given a grade for giving their oral report on family night. Those students who are unable to attend or are uncomfortable speaking in front of large groups may give their report during the school day to the class or to the teacher.

**Extension**
Students requiring additional enrichment activities may complete one or more of the following:
- Using TimeLiner™, students may make a digital timeline of the interviewee’s life.
- Prepare, cook, and share a recipe that has been handed down from the interviewee.
- Research cost of living at the time of the interviewee’s birth. Make a comparison chart to today’s expenses and wages.
- Research and compare modern conveniences to conveniences at the time of the interviewee’s birth. What has changed? What has stayed the same?
- Bilingual students may write their report in their home language. They are also encouraged to give their oral report in their home language.
RETA Curriculum Guide
Heritage Project: Family History
A Lesson for 6 - 8th Grade Language Arts & New Mexico History
Designed by Merita Wilson

The Mission
When you hear “history,” do you moan? Do you want something interesting to do instead? Try this: In addition to reading about people in a book, go ask one of your family members to tell you a story.
Oral histories are very important. Knowing where you come from and how things have changed helps you to know yourself and where you are going. You aren’t likely to find the story of your great-grandfather’s childhood in a book. So go ask him!!

To create a full story, you will interview and research.

Getting Ready
Start talking with your family about your ties to New Mexico. The key to a successful report is finding a theme about your interview. Some common themes are “succeeding against all odds” and “education pays off.”
Find the most interesting part of your interview and make it the theme of your project. The more original and unique the idea, the better your final project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supplies</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A photograph of the family member you choose to interview.</td>
<td>Please store these with your teacher until needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markers and/or Colored Pencils</td>
<td>Used on your display board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster Board</td>
<td>This board will be used to mount your finished product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>For use at interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your Adventure
1. Decide whom to interview. A living relative would be best, but you may interview a family member of a deceased relative.
2. Interview your chosen family member. Report should focus on one major event that made a difference in the interviewee’s life, such as education or an historical event. Use detail. Pay special attention to time period and geographical area.
3. Decide if you will make a digital or paper oral history report.
4. Using Word Art, write your relative’s name in a creative way. Save to disk.
5. Using Adobe PhotoShop™ or another imaging program, scan a photograph of the person you interviewed onto a disk.
6. Paste interview under scanned photograph.
7. Using the atlas, draw and cut an outline of the state or country where your relative was born. Mount printed name, photograph and report on outlined poster board.
8. Using markers and/or colored pencils, surround the printed report with drawings and symbols of objects that represent details from the event shared by your relative.
9. Create a family tree chart in Inspiration™/Kidspiration™ to show how this person is related to you. Print it out.
10. Have a classmate take and print a digital picture of you. Display with poster.
11. Write and send a thank you note to interviewee.

Dig Deeper!
Using the central theme of your interview, make a list of ideas or beliefs that a social or ethnic group might misunderstand about your relative. What could you or your relative do to help these groups be more opened minded and understanding of your traditions, beliefs and practices?

Make an informative poster that would help others have a better understanding of the overall theme of your report.

Resources
Online
• American Family Immigration History Center – Ellis Island http://www.ellisislandrecords.org

Offline
• Print out the Staying On Track chart to help you complete all parts of the project.
Stay On Track
This chart will help you stay on track while you complete the components of your project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person to Interview:</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
<th>Ideas Developed or Comments/Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview permission given</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Research Completed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WordArt Name Plate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Theme Developed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images Scanned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview &amp; Image combined</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Tree Chart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols and drawings related to interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline or drawing of state of person’s birth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you note to Interviewee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster assembled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital self portrait with completed poster</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital files saved to disk for your portfolio</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>