Family Photo Detectives

Five copies. Twenty minutes. Everyone can pass.

Gather what you already have

Choose five approved paper or digital photo copies. Use these pages and a pen for notes. No special supplies or purchases needed.

5 minutes / Look

Give each image an ID, P01 through P05. Notice clothing, signs, objects and places. A visible clue is not proof of a date or identity.

10 minutes / Wonder

Use page 2 once per photo. Record known details, possibilities, unknowns and the source of each suggestion. Keep different recollections without choosing a winner.

5 minutes / Check

Read notes back. Confirm who may see them. Match every sheet to its copy by ID, then put the working copies and notes together.

Keep it comfortable

Participation is optional. Anyone can notice, write or listen. Skip any photo or question without explanation. No recording, sensitive questions or automatic social sharing.

Protect the originals

Leave originals put away. Keep food and drinks away from photos. Never attach these labels to originals or use pens, glue, sticky notes, tape, clips or rubber bands on them.

PRINT PLAN: Page 1 once • Page 2 five times • Page 3 as needed • Page 4 once

US Letter • Print at 100% / actual size. Page 2 is a reusable worksheet. These are handwriting pages, not fillable PDF forms or archival storage materials.

Handling references: Library of Congress, loc.gov/preservation/care/photo.html; National Archives, archives.gov/preservation/family-archives/handling.html

One photograph, a few clues

Print five copies of this page, one for each photograph.

Photo ID _____ Notes made on _____ Notes by (optional) _____

People and positions in the image • Write unknown or possibly when needed

Approximate date or range • Unknown is fine • What supports this?

General place • Leave out exact private addresses • Known / possibly / unknown

Visible details • What can you actually see?

Source for each identification • Who remembers, caption, sign or other evidence?

Different recollection or uncertainty • Continue on page 3 if needed

Who may see this? _____ Permission confirmed by / date _____

Default: keep private while permission is unresolved. Copy filename or location:

Room for another answer

Keep possibilities separate. Nobody has to settle the question today.

Photo ID _____ Detail being discussed _____

First recollection • Include its source and uncertainty

Another recollection • Include its source and uncertainty

Still unknown • Optional next clue to check, not an assignment

Who may see these notes? _____ Permission confirmed by / date _____

Fictional example only: “Possibly June beside the bicycle. Morgan remembers the bicycle but is unsure of the person.” Another recollection: “Sam thinks it is Lee.” Save both as possibilities, not established facts.

Do not use this example as a real family record. Keep notes only with the contributors' agreement.

Loose photo reference slips

Cut apart if useful. Place beside working copies, never attach to originals.

P01 Copy filename or location: _____

People / place / date: known / possibly / unknown _____

Source: _____ Matching worksheet kept: _____

Who may see: _____ Permission: confirmed / unresolved

P02 Copy filename or location: _____

People / place / date: known / possibly / unknown _____

Source: _____ Matching worksheet kept: _____

Who may see: _____ Permission: confirmed / unresolved

P03 Copy filename or location: _____

People / place / date: known / possibly / unknown _____

Source: _____ Matching worksheet kept: _____

Who may see: _____ Permission: confirmed / unresolved

P04 Copy filename or location: _____

People / place / date: known / possibly / unknown _____

Source: _____ Matching worksheet kept: _____

Who may see: _____ Permission: confirmed / unresolved

P05 Copy filename or location: _____

People / place / date: known / possibly / unknown _____

Source: _____ Matching worksheet kept: _____

Who may see: _____ Permission: confirmed / unresolved

These slips link working copies to notes. They are not photo-safe enclosures. Keep the full worksheet with each copy, and preserve unresolved permissions.