



Story Summary

Phoebe—half Jamaican, half French-Canadian—hates her school nickname of “French Toast.” So she is mortified when, out on a walk with her Jamaican grandmother, she hears a classmate shout it out at her. To make things worse, Nan-Ma, who is blind, wants an explanation of the name. How can Phoebe describe the

color of her skin to someone who has never seen it? “Like tea, after you’ve added the milk,” she says. And her father? “Like warm banana bread.” And Nan-Ma herself? She is like maple syrup poured over... well... In *French Toast*, Kari-Lynn Winters uses descriptions of favorite foods from both of Phoebe’s cultures to celebrate the varied skin tones of her family. François Thisdale’s imaginative illustrations fill the landscape with whimsy and mouthwatering delight as Phoebe realizes her own resilience and takes ownership of her nickname proudly.

Links:

https://www.my-island-jamaica.com/jamaican_banana_bread_recipe.html

<https://www.littleparachutes.com/category/health/disabilities/>

<https://printableworksheets.in/worksheet/braille>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDstVZwCc_U

<https://www.paralympic.org/>

Pair this book with:

It’s Okay to be Different by Todd Parr

Kari-Lynn Winters is an author, poet, and performer. With over sixteen picture and poetry books published, she has won the British Columbia Book Prize silver medal twice, and been nominated numerous times for the Christie Harris Illustrated Children’s Literature Prize and the Chocolate Lily Awards. *Bad Pirate* won the Rainforest of Reading Award. Kari-Lynn loves being in the classroom and now teaches drama in education at Brock University. She lives in St. Catharines, Ontario.

François Thisdale’s work blends traditional drawing and painting with digital imagery using collage, acrylic, watercolor, and computer manipulation. He is the illustrator of *The Stamp Collector*, which is on the International Board on Books for Young People’s Honor List. He has also won a Notable Books for a Global Society Award, the TD Children’s Book Award, and the Crystal Kite Award. François’ books have been finalists for the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator’s Award, and the Willow Awards. François lives in Montreal, Quebec.

Picture Book Ages 4–7 | ISBN: 978-1-77278-006-2 | Pages: 32

THEMES

Inclusion, Acceptance, Identity, Race, Disabilities

BISAC CODES

JUV039140 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Self-Esteem & Self-Reliance

JUV039250 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Emigration & Immigration

JUV013030 JUVENILE FICTION / Family / Multigenerational

READING LEVEL

Lexile Measure: 630L | Fountas & Pinnell: M

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Read-Aloud; Inclusion: race, disability; Science: the five senses; Health: food groups; Math: measurement; Visual arts: tints and shades

THIS GUIDE CONTAINS:

ACTIVITY	MAIN SUBJECT AREA	SPECIFIC SKILLS AND TOPICS
Read-Aloud	Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activate prior knowledge • infer, predict, make connections
The Same on the Inside	Inclusion—race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoid discrimination (race) • identify body parts
The Taste of Color	Science—the five senses Health—food groups Math—measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sight, taste • prepare and try a variety of foods • measure for the purpose of cooking
Tints and Shades	Inclusion—race Visual Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoid discrimination (race) • mixing paint colors
Family Tree Project	Social Studies —identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research using primary sources • create a family tree
How Can I Help?	Inclusion—disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visual impairment • hearing loss • physical disabilities

THE READ-ALoud

If teachers do not speak any French, they can type the few French words of the text into an online translator to hear how they are pronounced, and practice pronouncing them before reading the book to their students.

Learning expectations:

Students will:

- Employ comprehension strategies, including activating prior knowledge, inferring, predicting, and making connections
- Learn about diverse histories, cultures, and perspectives
- Respect and accept diversity
- Work toward eliminating bias on the basis of race
- See themselves reflected in the curriculum

You Will Need

- *French Toast* by Kari-Lynn Winters

How To:

Before Reading

Show and read the cover. Ask, “What do you see?” Invite students to share experiences related to any of the components on the cover, like eating French toast and/or maple syrup, reading another book by Kari-Lynn Winters, or noticing the woman’s white cane. Invite predictions about the title’s meaning. Read just the first four sentences inside the front flap. This will aid comprehension without giving the story away too much. Allow students to offer answers to the question posed in the fourth sentence, if they wish.

During Reading

First spread: Read the page. “What could that mean?” Do any students notice the same words written in white behind the words printed in black? Note that the book designer has made visible the idea that some people see things that others do not (not everyone will notice the second set of words).

Second spread: Read the first sentence. “What does it mean to guide someone who is blind?” Do students know about white canes used by people who are blind or visually impaired? Read the rest of the page. “What’s going on here?” Invite reaction.

Third spread: Read the first paragraph. Guide students to infer that the basketball players speak English and that Phoebe is bilingual but speaks English with a French accent, based on Nan-ma’s assumption and the use of “French” in the nickname. Read the remainder of the page. Pause to allow Phoebe’s discomfort to sink in.

Fourth spread: Read the pages. “What do you think about strangers at the mall commenting on Phoebe’s appearance and accent?”

Fifth spread: Read the page and help students infer that Ma is Francophone.

Sixth spread: Read the page. “How would you describe Ma’s skin color in the illustration?”

Seventh spread: Read the page.

Eighth spread: Read the page. “What does the author mean by “Nan-ma sees more than most”?” Guide students to realize that Nan-ma is not going to let this conversation go until she has helped Phoebe resolve her feelings about her skin color and her nickname. She is also very interested in hearing skin color described by Phoebe in a way that she can understand.

Ninth spread: Read the page. “Where is Pa from?” Turn back to the previous page. “What does Nan-ma mean by *home*?”

Tenth spread: Read the page, pausing just before the last sentence, to let Phoebe’s wondering sink in.

Eleventh spread: Read the page. Invite response. “Do Phoebe and her grandmother go together well, like French toast and maple syrup?”

Twelfth spread: Read the pages, pausing to let students take in the ideas. “What does it say about Phoebe that she does not know the other girl’s name, but the other girl knows hers?” Discuss how sometimes, especially when we feel insecure, we forget that the people around us are all real people too, with their own stories, emotions, and issues, if we take the time to notice them. “Do you think Phoebe will try to make friends with this girl now?”

Thirteenth spread: Read the pages. Discuss briefly how Phoebe has been a good guide and all the things that made this moment good. Discuss briefly the statement, “When I am with Nan-ma, I like who I am.”

Fourteenth spread: What has changed for Phoebe about her nickname? Show the final illustrations.

After Reading

Discuss ways in which the illustrator has enhanced the story’s message by playing with light and dark in the illustrations. Discuss nicknames. When are they endearing? When are they hurtful? Reread the sentence on the final text page, “When I am with Nan-ma, I like who I am.” Invite students to think of a person who makes them feel that way. What about that person helps them like who they are? What implications does this idea have for how they treat their peers and what makes a good friend? Read *It’s Okay to be Different* by Todd Parr.

ACTIVITY 1: THE SAME ON THE INSIDE

Many teachers will be familiar with an internet meme showing several identical skeletons labeled, in turn, white, black, gay, straight, religious, and atheist, conveying the message that people are all the same on the inside. This activity helps to convey a similar idea in a child-appropriate way.

Learning Expectations

Students will:

- Respect and accept diversity
- Work toward eliminating bias on the basis of race
- See themselves reflected in the curriculum
- Demonstrate knowledge of human anatomy appropriate to their grade. This can include the following: identifying the location and function of major parts of the human body; identifying and describing major physical characteristics of different types of animals, which includes humans; defining a structure as a supporting framework, with a definite size, shape, and purpose, that holds a load, like a skeleton; and identifying major systems in the human body, for example the musculoskeletal system.

You Will Need

- Identical small gifts, one for each student
- A variety of wrapping paper and embellishments
- Pencils, scissors
- Skeleton template (available online) and sufficient copies for each student and teacher
- Small red cut-out hearts for each student and teacher
- Red paper to cover bulletin board
- Card stock, chart paper, markers

How To:

1. Purchase enough identical items to give one to each student. These can be small toys from the dollar store, such as those sold as party favors, or something useful such as a new pencil or eraser, or a small candy, or something related to an upcoming school project, perhaps a packet of seeds. It’s important that they all be exactly the same. Wrap each one differently, using a minimum of tape, so they can be opened easily. A pad of scrapbooking paper will give sufficient variety if you don’t have a collection of remnants. Add ribbons and embellishments to some. Have students sit at their desks or tables and distribute the gifts. Some may comment

on the fact that some gifts look fancier than others. Instruct them all to open their gifts at the same time. Encourage them not to tear the paper, so that it can be reused. Invite comments from students. Guide them to notice that, although the packages all looked different on the outside, they were all the same on the inside. Point out that skin is a bit like wrapping paper—just an outer covering. People look quite different on the outside, but inside, our bones and blood look very much the same.

2. Have students smooth out the wrapping paper and trace their hand and cut it out. If the paper is large enough, have them make two hands each (this will help with the display described below). Have an adult volunteer help with this for very young children. Set these aside.
3. Obtain a skeleton template. Many of these can be found online by searching “skeleton to cut out.” Make enough copies for yourself and the students. Cut one out and assemble it using tape, glue, or brass fasteners. Add a cut-out red heart. Invite students to do the same. The heart represents human emotion. Have students suggest some feelings that all humans feel and make cards bearing these words.
 - Incorporate a study of anatomy as appropriate for your grade. This can include the following: identifying the location and function of major parts of the human body; identifying and describing major physical characteristics of different types of animals, which includes humans; defining a structure as a supporting framework, with a definite size, shape, and purpose, that holds a load, like a skeleton; and identifying major systems in the human body, for example the musculoskeletal system.
4. Create a bulletin board display. Use a red background to illustrate the fact that all people have red blood. Use the wrapping paper hands as a border. Alternately, use hands cut out of different shades of skin-colored paper that accurately reflect the diversity in your class. Display the skeletons on the board within the border, along with a statement created with your students. It could say something like, “On the outside, we look different. On the inside, we all have blood. We all have bones. We all have feelings.”

ACTIVITY 2: THE TASTE OF HOME

You will have a tasting party using the foods from the book. Students will prepare and taste some of the food items mentioned in French Toast and then taste and describe some of their own favorite foods.

Learning Expectations

Students will:

- Prepare and taste a variety of foods
- Identify food groups (optional)
- Measure ingredients

You Will Need

- *French Toast* by Kari-Lynn Winters
- Foods mentioned in the book or their ingredients and utensils. This includes bread, eggs, milk, a griddle, a flipper, tea, a clear carafe, peach yogurt, butter, sugar, bananas, flour, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg, salt, vanilla, raisins, bowls, a mixer, measuring tools, maple syrup, toasted coconut, and cinnamon honey.

How To:

1. Inform administration and parents of your plans and ensure students are not prohibited from eating any of the foods for any reason. Consider using decaffeinated tea. If any students have allergies or are vegan or have other restrictions, offer options. A quick internet search will yield recipes for nearly any dietary restriction.
2. Consider incorporating a curricular focus such as food groups (health) or measurement (mathematics) as you do the baking and tasting.
3. On the day of the tasting party, bring tea, milk, peach yogurt (with fruit on the bottom if possible), maple syrup, and the ingredients for banana bread and for French toast (French bread, milk, eggs).
4. Obtain a recipe for Jamaican banana bread, like this one: https://www.my-island-jamaica.com/jamaican_banana_bread_recipe.html. Bake it with your students.

5. While the banana bread is baking, prepare the French toast. Slice the French bread and set aside. Whisk together 4 eggs with about ½ cup of milk (optional: add vanilla, cinnamon, or a bit of icing sugar as desired). Dip bread slices, one at a time, into this mixture, turning with tongs to coat both sides. When all the mixture has been used, proceed to mix up enough to coat the remaining bread, based on how many slices you were able to coat with the original amount. If you don't end up with a whole slice for each student, that's fine. They only need to have a taste, so just cut the French toast into halves, thirds or quarters as needed. Cook until golden on a non-stick griddle preheated to 375°F, turning once. Bring the warm banana bread from the oven and slice it onto a serving plate.
6. Stir the yogurt while students watch so they can watch the color change. Make tea in a clear carafe and add milk while students watch as well. A small amount of sugar can be stirred in as well. Make sure that it's warm, not hot when you serve it.
7. Set all the food out, buffet-style, and allow students to take a small amount of each food. Pour a small amount of maple syrup onto their French toast for them. Ask them not to taste any until you are ready. Once all students are seated with their food, tell them you would like them to taste the foods from the perspective of someone who is blind, like Phoebe's grandmother. Be prepared for the fact that not all students will like all the flavors. Invite them to take a bite of French toast, then close their eyes and really pay attention to the taste. Remind them that Phoebe's classmates gave her the nickname "French Toast," partly because of the color of her skin, which Phoebe found hurtful. But Phoebe's grandmother is blind and says she has never known the colors of skin. When she asks Phoebe, "What color's yours?" Phoebe eventually answers, "Like tea, after you've added the milk." The grandmother responds, "Warm and good." Is the French toast warm and good? Taste the tea. Is it warm and good? Have students taste the other foods and see if they agree with Nan-ma that the peach yogurt is sweet and good, and

that warm banana bread tastes like home. For Nan-ma, home is Jamaica. When Phoebe says Nan-ma's skin is like maple syrup, Nan-ma breathes in like she has noticed something yummy. Do students agree that maple syrup is yummy? If possible, allow students to taste different grades of maple syrup (available from a maple syrup producer). They range in color from golden to very dark. Which one looks most like Nan-ma in the book? The students on the basketball court had skin like toasted coconut and cinnamon honey. Taste these. How might associating skin colors with things she likes help Phoebe also be more accepting of her peers? Most schools do not allow tree nuts, so students will not be able to taste the chocolate hazelnut spread, but many will have tasted it at home. Invite their comments. Chocolate sundae topping could be tasted as an alternative.

8. Invite students to bring a favorite food from home to share with the class. Have students close their eyes and taste them, then describe each with a short phrase, as Nan-ma did.

ACTIVITY 3: TINTS AND SHADES

Students are often asked to draw self-portraits, but the basic 8-packs of crayons, markers, or colored pencils do not contain appropriate colors for a diversity of skin tones. Teachers might consider adding to their art center packs of coloring utensils specifically designed to represent a variety of skin tones. In this activity, though, students will learn to use paint to mix their own.

Learning Expectations

Students will:

- Respect and accept diversity
- Work toward eliminating bias on the basis of race
- See themselves reflected in the curriculum

You Will Need

- A 2-sided easel with trough for paint jars

- Small plastic containers, like the ones individual portions of yogurt come in
- 10 squeeze bottles such as ones designed for condiments, available at dollar stores
- Tempera paint in white, brown, black, red, yellow, and blue
- Art paper
- A photograph of someone whose skin tone is noticeably different from your own
- Small (1/4") paintbrushes

How To:

1. Ideally, you will use a dedicated painting center with an easel. A dedicated table will also work. One or two students will work at the center at a time. It is possible to do this as a whole-class activity for older students, but you would need to provide each student with all the colors listed above, and a small tray on which to mix them at their desk.
2. Fill two squeeze bottles with brown tempera paint and two with white. Half-fill the remaining squeeze bottles with the other colors.
3. Model the process to the class before opening the paint mixing center to them. Bring one squeeze bottle of each color to the demonstration area.
4. Make a pencil drawing of a person standing. Tell students you are drawing a picture of yourself. Think aloud as you model how to make arms, legs, and neck so that they can be colored in (not a stick figure). Outline hair and clothing on your picture. Write your name on it and remind students to do the same when they make their picture.
5. Show how to mix the paint (practice in advance). For most skin tones, you will begin with either brown or white. It is easier to darken the paint than to lighten it. For a light skin tone, begin by putting about a tablespoon of white paint into a yogurt cup. Squeeze in a bit of brown paint and stir using the paint brush or a spoon. Continue doing this until the paint is dark enough. Adjust the tone of the paint by adding a small amount of yellow or red. If it is already too orange, add a tiny amount of blue. For a dark skin tone, begin with a tablespoon of brown paint. Add

white or black until the required lightness or darkness is achieved, then adjust the tone with red, yellow, or blue.

6. Paint in all the exposed skin in your picture. Leave white spaces where the eyes will go. Set it aside to dry. You will paint the features, hair, and clothing at another time.
7. Make a second drawing to represent a person you have never met, but who is, nonetheless, a fellow citizen of Planet Earth. Using the photograph to guide you, repeat steps 5 and 6.
8. Once all students have made their drawings and painted in the skin areas, replace the paints in the paint center with colors that could be used for features, hair, and clothing and allow students to complete their pictures.
9. Have students cut out their pictures. They will need to rewrite their names on the backs of the cut-outs before handing them in. For younger children, the teacher can do the cutting.
10. Create a bulletin board display around the theme of diversity and acceptance, perhaps like the one below.



ACTIVITY 4: FAMILY TREE PROJECT

Students will research and display their own family tree in a way that also celebrates their family's unique story. If you have students in your class who are adopted, in foster care, or whose parents are unknown for any reason, you will want to be especially sensitive when introducing an activity like this one. Teachers may wish to call the parent or guardian before sending the assignment home to discuss options. Teachers may find the book *Elliot* by Julie Pearson helpful. It describes the story of a foster child who is eventually adopted. Its teaching guide, available at https://pajamapress.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Elliot_ReadingGuide.pdf, includes an activity called "Timeline of My Life," which may be used as an alternative to this activity.

Learning Expectations

Students will:

- Gather and organize information on significant events, people, and/or places in their lives that contribute or have contributed to the development of their roles, relationships, responsibilities, and identity/sense of self (e.g. a birth or death in the family, their first day at school, a friend getting hurt at the park, getting lost in a shopping mall, their family's place of worship), using primary and/or secondary sources that they have located themselves or that have been provided to them
- Communicate the results of their inquiries, using appropriate vocabulary and formats

You Will Need

- *French Toast* by Kari-Lynn Winters
- Family Tree Assignment blackline master, one for each student and two for demonstration
- Diverse skin tone crayons or colored pencils
- Regular crayons or colored pencils
- Copies of a world map, one for each student and two for demonstration

How To:

1. Show students the Family Tree Assignment sheets. Tell them they will research and display their own family's tree and history. Use Phoebe's family history, as described in *French Toast*, as an example.
2. Show the portrait of Phoebe's family at the end of *French Toast*. On one of the information cards from the Family Tree Assignment sheets, draw, or have a student draw and color, a picture of Phoebe. Write her name in the space provided. Cut this out and glue it to the center bottom of a large sheet of paper. You will later add more writing about her.
3. Draw, or have a student draw and color, a picture of each of Phoebe's parents, and glue these above Phoebe's. Write the names Phoebe uses for her parents, Ma and Pa. Ask students to identify the probable birthplaces of each parent (Ma: French Canada, Pa: Jamaica). Where might Phoebe have been born or where might she now live and go to school? It's clear that her classmates are Anglophone, since Nan-ma asks if they call Phoebe French Toast because of her French accent. Perhaps they live in Montreal, Quebec, where there are large populations of both French and English speakers. This could also be Ma's birthplace. Or perhaps they live in a mainly Anglophone community, where Phoebe's French accent would be more noticeable at the mall. Examine the illustrations for clues as well. Encourage students to agree on a hometown for Phoebe. On a map of the world, place stickers on the agreed-upon birthplaces of Phoebe and her parents. Discuss how they might have all come to live in the same place now and show their imagined journeys on the maps using a dotted line and a small icon for the mode of transportation. Returning to the information cards, write the agreed-upon birthplaces below each person represented so far.
4. Draw, or have a student draw and color, a picture of Phoebe's grandmother. Ask students to identify where it belongs (above Pa's picture). Help them use inference to determine that she is from Jamaica ("reminds me of home" precedes the description of a variety of Jamaican foods). Below her picture, write, "Nan-ma, Born in Jamaica." Discuss the

fact that we know nothing of Phoebe’s other grandparents. If she were a real person, how might we fill in those gaps?

5. Show the ready-made similar family tree you have made of your own family. Show the world map that shows any immigration or relocation in your family’s history. Tell students they will get a chance to do the same. They will need to do research (asking family members) and complete the assignment mainly at home. Students may go back more generations if they wish and if they are able to get the necessary information. If a few students fail to complete the assignment at home, teachers might get the information by phoning home, and then support the students as they complete the task in class.
6. Help students locate the places their family members were born and/or lived on a map.
7. Have students present their completed projects to the class.



ACTIVITY 5: HOW CAN I HELP?

Besides addressing varied skin tones and cultures, *French Toast* helps students understand what it might be like for someone who has never seen colors. This activity extends that idea to increasing understanding of a variety of disabilities.

Learning Expectations

Students will:

- Respect and accept diversity
- Work towards eliminating bias on the basis of disability
- See themselves reflected in the curriculum
- Gain understanding of a variety of disabilities and how they might support people who live with those disabilities

You Will Need

- *French Toast* by Kari-Lynn Winters
- A collection of other picture books (both informational and fiction) which show or mention disabilities. (It’s important to also include books in your classroom library that feature characters with disabilities, where the disability is not the focus of the story, so that students who have disabilities can “see themselves” in ordinary stories, and to help other students become more inclusive in their thinking.) This website and others give suggestions: <https://www.littleparachutes.com/category/health/disabilities>.
- Internet access

How To:

1. Re-read the references in *French Toast* to Nan-ma’s disability (e.g. on spreads 1,2,3, 8, 10 and 13). Invite discussion about the statements “Nan-ma sees more than most” and “That’s what guides are for.”
2. Collect other picture books featuring people with disabilities. *Slug Days* and *Penguin Days*, both by Sara Leach, feature a main character with

Autism Spectrum Disorder and are early chapter books suitable for children ages 7–10. Other useful books, including some for younger children, are described on various websites, including this one: <https://www.littleparachutes.com/category/health/disabilities/>.

3. Read some of these books to your class and discuss both the challenges faced by people with disabilities and ways in which their peers can help.
4. Invite one or more people with disabilities to your classroom to speak with your students about the things they would like people to know about their life or their disability.
5. One way to show respect to a person with a disability is not to make assumptions. Have your students role-play situations (use the picture books and/or guest speaker for inspiration) and practice asking, “How can I help?” rather than assuming they know what the person needs.
6. Learn about Braille. An alphabet is available here: <https://printableworksheets.in/worksheet/braille>. Students can practice writing words and messages in Braille. Here’s how to make them tactile: hold the message up to a window so you can see the dots through the paper and make corre-

sponding dots on the back of the paper, then use a push pin to make a hole by poking the pin through the paper from back to front. This way, the raised dot is on the front of the paper in the correct pattern. Have students close their eyes and run their fingers over the dots. Do they think it would be easy to learn to read that way? Where have they seen Braille labels in the community? Also learn about guide dogs and white canes and how these help blind or visually impaired people. Check out websites for pertinent agencies such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) or the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB).

7. Learn about American Sign Language. Many videos are available online. This one features a young girl teaching an alphabet song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDstVZwCcU>. It includes both the letter signs and the signs for 26 objects. The girl uses child-friendly language to explain the logic behind the object signs, which will help students remember them, and she also mentions finger spelling. As an added bonus, the song may help students consolidate their letter sounds!
8. Learn about Paralympic sports at <https://www.paralympic.org/>.

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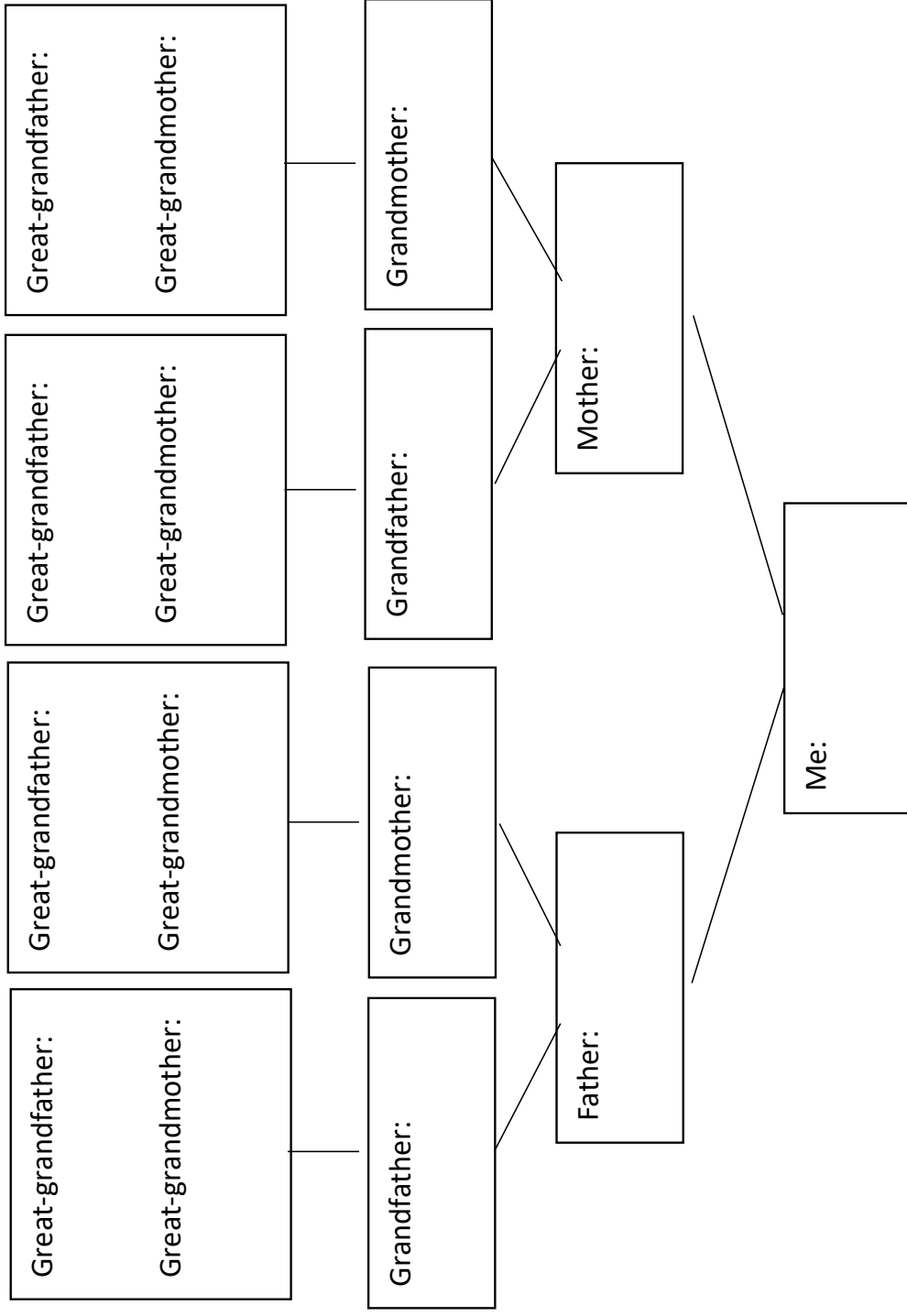
This guide was created with support from Ontario Creates



Name: _____

FAMILY TREE PROJECT

1. Gather the names of your parents and grandparents by asking family members (this is called “using primary sources”). If possible, find out the names of your great-grandparents as well. Write the names on the “tree” below.



2. For each person you have named on your family tree, try to find a photograph of them and learn something about them. Use the information cards on the following pages to record the information. Glue a copy of the photo, or a hand-drawn picture, onto the information cards. If the information cards provided are too small, you may make your own. Cut out the information cards and arrange them onto a large sheet of paper or poster board, the way the names are arranged in the diagram above. Write a title at the top, for example “Phoebe’s Family Tree.”