

Margaret Mead



Anthropologist

Margaret Mead is credited with creating the science of anthropology, as she was the first scientist to extensively study the physical, cultural, and social lives of human beings. Her upbringing may have had something to do with her life's interest.

She was born December 16, 1901, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to a university professor and his sociologist wife. Professor Mead's job required extensive relocations, and by junior high school age, Margaret had lived in 60 different houses. She easily adapted to new and strange environments. She enjoyed watching people and wondered what made families so alike and yet so different.

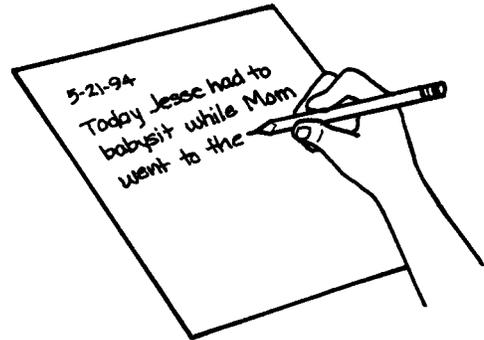
Mead's higher education began at Barnard University where she studied sociology; she graduated in 1923. Two years later, she left for Samoa to study adolescent girls.

Margaret wanted to know if teenage problems were the results of hormonal and physical changes or were due to societal pressures. In her studies she concluded that the Samoan female adolescents experienced an easier transition to adulthood than did their American counterparts. Margaret Mead's first book, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (William Morrow, 1928), was based upon her observations there. Next, she went to New Guinea to live with and study the Manus people. This time, Margaret studied pre-adolescents by having them draw pictures. She hoped the drawings would help her understand how they viewed the world. When Mead studied the Bali children, she developed the techniques of interviewing, observing, note-taking, and photographing that are still used today by anthropologists all over the world.

Suggested Activities

1. **Alike and Different.** With students, construct a Venn diagram to show how they are alike and different from children of another culture. Or, construct a chart comparing likenesses and differences between them and children of another period of history. Discuss some current problems students face: drugs, gangs, violence, AIDS. How are these problems alike or different from students of a different era or culture?
2. **Genealogy.** Assign students the task of finding out about their family heritage as far back as possible. Who is the oldest living member of the family? Who is the youngest? Direct the students to construct a family tree using index cards or self-stick notes. Have them print a different family member's name on each card. Arrange them into a tree pattern on a flat surface (a large sheet of posterboard, for example). Or, reproduce page 66 and have students work with family members to complete the family tree. For help in building a family tree, consult the book, *Do People Grow on Family Trees? Genealogy for Kids and Other Beginners* by Ira Wolfman (Workman, 1991).
3. **Case Study.** When Margaret Mead studied a culture, she used the techniques of note-taking, observing, interviewing, and photographing. Ask students to choose a family member to observe for a one or two week period. Have them prepare a list of questions to ask during an interview. For example, students might ask "What is the best thing about being the oldest child in this family?", "Do you enjoy it or not?", or "What do you dislike most about being the oldest?"

After conducting an interview, observe that person daily. Take notes describing actions made by that family member which have to do with any questions asked during the interview. If possible, take a picture of the interviewee working at a task or doing something related to questions in the interview. Make a construction paper cover for the report. Be sure to include any conclusions you may have been able to draw from your observations.



Extension: Keep records of the amount of time the subject spends on eating, studying, sleeping, and enjoying recreational activities. Make a graph to show how that person spends his or her time.

Teacher References

Emberlin, Diane. *Contributions of Women: Science*. Dillon Press, 1977.

Mead, Margaret. *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth of Western Civilization*. William Morrow, 1928.

_____. *Family*. Macmillan, 1965.

Noble, Iris. *Contemporary Women Scientists of America*. Julian Messner, 1979.

Student Reading

Beller, Susan Provost. *Roots for Kids: A Genealogy Guide for Young People*. Betterway Publications, 1989.

Castiglia, Julie. *Margaret Mead*. Silver Burdett Press, Inc., 1989.

Epstein, Sam and Beryl. *She Never Looked Back*. Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1980.

Saunders, Susan. *Margaret Mead: The World Was Her Family*. Viking Kestrel, 1987.