

How Does DNA Fit into Your Family Story? Identity. Connection. Answers.

Diahan Southard

Founder and CEO of Your DNA Guide; Author, *Your DNA Guide-the Book*; Creator of *Your DNA Guide-the Academy*

www.yourdnaguide.com



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Identity

Who am I? This universal question brings all kinds of answers and emotions, and yes, more questions. It seems to be part of the fabric of our humanity to wonder at our origins. In recent years, DNA has put itself forward as the ultimate descriptor of who we are. Somehow it has superseded our experience, our memories, our cultures and our connections.

But what gives DNA the right to define us? Should it be given so much power? What role does it really play in shaping who we become? It is the classic nature vs. nurture argument - but perhaps there is a third factor we haven't fully considered: epigenetics. Simply put, epigenetics is how our choices and environment actually affect us on a biological level, which can have serious consequences in everything from our health to our personality.

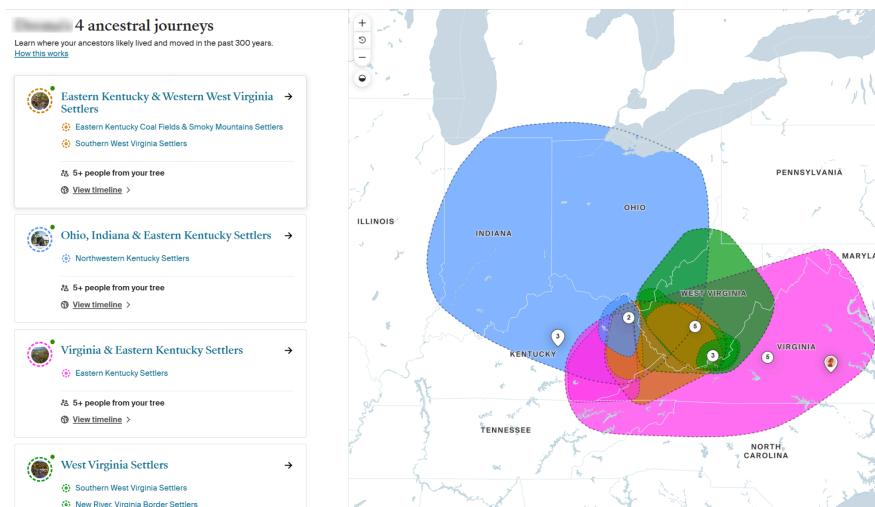
And what if just the act of knowing your family story had the power to override any hard-coded DNA determinism? How would that change your efforts to explore your family story?

Connection

Places

Your ethnicity results at AncestryDNA, MyHeritage DNA and 23andMe include high-level ethnicity estimates and stronger, more specific clues as to the location of your ancestors in the last 200 years. This is a genealogical sweet spot!

These results no longer connect you only to vast swatches of land with generic names like “Northwestern Europe” but also now your DNA can indicate that you have an ancestor who moved to North Dakota from Alsace-Lorraine. Or that you have genetic signatures associated with people who settled West Virginia.



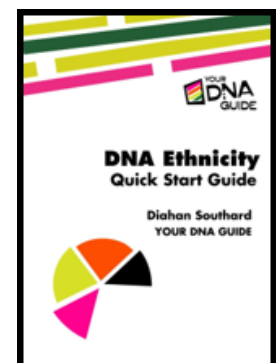
Many are finding that it is one thing to know about your ancestor’s geographic origins on paper, but completely different to recognize that there is biological evidence in yourself of the person or peoples who made that journey as well. That is a visceral connection.

In short, DNA ethnicity results that connect us to a country also connect us to a culture, and ultimately to our people, in a way that nothing else can.

[Learn more about AncestryDNA Ancestral Journeys](#)
[Learn more about MyHeritage Genetic Groups](#)

[Get our free downloadable guide to DNA ethnicity results.](#)

- Test the oldest generation possible, because their genetic “signal” to specific ancestral cultures and places is stronger. [Read this example to better understand why.](#)
- If you don’t have DNA test results for both parents in a family, test as many of



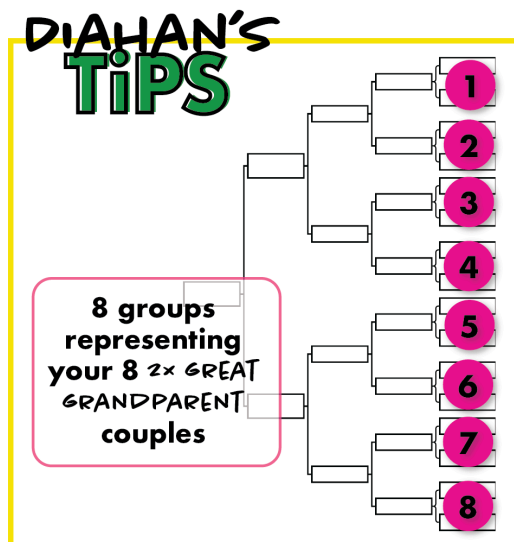
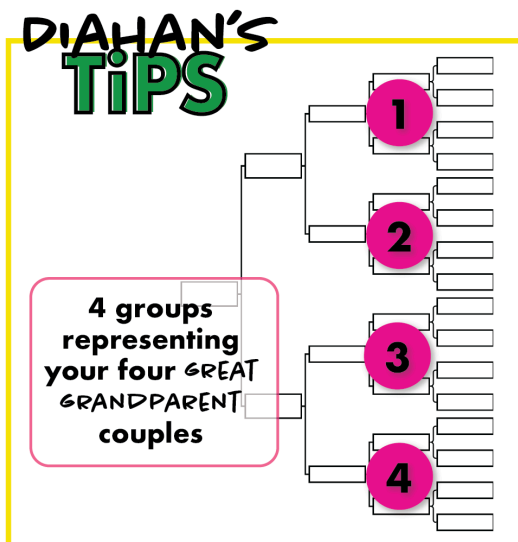
their children as possible. [Read about 3 ways your siblings' DNA tests can help your family history.](#)

At the end of the day, DNA is doing some very powerful things to shape the way we see ourselves and the way we see those around us. [The experience of looking at personal ethnicity results has shown power to help erase bias and introduce a new way of thinking about their global roots to a group of middle schoolers.](#)

People

Your ethnicity estimate is just the beginning of what your DNA can tell you. Along with maps and percentages, you get a list of DNA matches.

Your DNA match list can be sorted into groups of people who share DNA: genetic networks. Think about your two sets of biological grandparents: one from mom and one from dad. So as long as these grandparents aren't related to each other, we could split your match list into TWO genetic networks of people who are related to the families of those two grandparent couples. Likewise, we could divide your match list into FOUR groups, one for each of your four great grandparent couples.



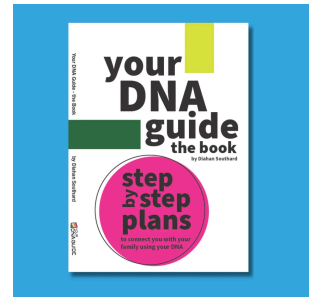
Learning to organize your DNA match list into these genetic networks can help you determine who some of your unknown matches may be. This process can also help you identify matches whose family trees could point you toward any unknown ancestors.

- [Tips for inviting your relatives to take DNA tests](#)
- [Helping your relatives understand and consent to DNA testing](#)
- [Additional DNA testing considerations for members of indigenous communities](#)

Answers

Follow the Plan in [**Your DNA Guide—the Book**](#) to help you **achieve your goals**. (If you're at RootsTech 2025 in person, come by our booth for an exclusive discount on the Book.)

- Identify missing ancestors
- Solve a family mystery
- Discover unknown relatives
- Connect with the places and cultures of your ancestors
- General curiosity



Tools for using DNA match lists to build your family tree in 2025

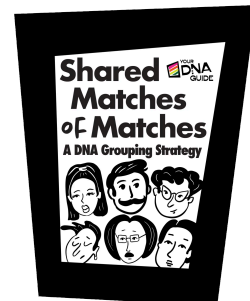
What Are The Odds? (WATO)

This tool, available at Jonny Perl's DNA Painter website, helps you understand the relative probabilities of where you may fit on your matches' family tree, taking into account how much DNA you share with specific matches and how they are related to each other. It's a powerful tool, but it's tricky to learn to use properly. [Learn about our WATO Course](#). (If you're at RootsTech 2025 in person, come by our booth because this course has a special offer!)



Shared Matches of Matches

Tools I collectively described as “shared matches of matches” tools (they have different names at different testing companies) help you understand how much DNA your matches are sharing with *each other*. This provides game-changing insights as you try to understand how you are all related. [Learn more about our Shared Matches of Matches Course](#). (Come by our RootsTech 2025 booth for a special offer.)



What to do with what you learn

- [Here's why you should keep checking your DNA test results periodically](#) DO GENEALOGY! Take what you learn from your DNA back to your family tree
- Consider whether (and how) to connect with newfound relatives
- **What to do if DNA discoveries disrupt your family tree:** [Support resources](#)