

# WHERE HISTORY LIVES



## A Tour *of* the White House Teaching Guide

CREDITS

**Authors:**

Michelle Pearson (grades 4–8) and

Rachel Yarnell Thompson (grades 9–12)

**Editor:**

John P. Riley, White House Historical Association

*President Gerald R. Ford acknowledges the toast of Queen Elizabeth II during a state dinner, 1976, Gerald R. Ford Library*

*President Kennedy's children, Caroline and John Kennedy Jr., picnic on the South Lawn, 1963, John F. Kennedy Library*

*A rare American vase with patriotic symbols, 1830s, White House Collection*



*Mantel Clock with figure of George Washington, c.1806-17, White House Collection*



## TO THE EDUCATOR

This Teaching Guide and the accompanying video *Where History Lives: A Tour of the White House* will help you increase your students' understanding of the many roles of the White House. The activities are targeted to grades 4–8 and 9–12; however, you know the capabilities of your students and will want to select those activities most appropriate for them. Some activities include additional background for you to convey to your students. More activities are included here than you will use to allow you a menu of teaching options more suited to your unique classroom situation.

While the video will provide you a content basis for discussing the White House with your students, other resources will strengthen the discussion, and make it easier for you to develop the activities suggested in this guide.

1. The White House Historical Association's website, [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org) is a rich resource. You will find virtual tours of the White House, photographs of paintings and historic objects, classroom lessons, timelines, and an extensive bibliography of books about the White House and its occupants.
2. Several other books published by or in cooperation with the White House Historical Association will be helpful, especially *The White House: An Historic Guide* and *The White House: An Illustrated History*. You might find these books in your school or local library; if not, they can be ordered at [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org), or by calling 1-800-555-2451, where you can also request a catalog that features additional educational resources. A brief list of Resources is found at the end of this Teaching Guide.
3. All presidential libraries have websites, which can be accessed for information to support these activities. For links, visit [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov) and locate presidential libraries.

## OBJECTIVES

Though many lessons can be drawn from viewing *Where History Lives: A Tour of the White House*, the activities will focus on these objectives:

### The student will:

1. Appreciate the White House as a place where the president of the United States has his office, and conducts the business of government.
2. Understand that the White House provides an important symbolic and ceremonial backdrop for the president's work.
3. Recognize that the White House is a private home for the first family.
4. Realize that even though the White House is a place where the president temporarily lives and works, it is also a museum that must be preserved and protected.
5. Explore how White House furnishings and art reflect evolving ideas in American culture and society.

## BEFORE STUDENTS VIEW

Ask students to write for five minutes, describing anything they know about the White House—for example, who built it, who owns it, the purpose it serves, how is it similar to or different from other houses. After students write, ask several to share their thoughts, and record some of their impressions on the board. Focus on comments about the purpose of the White House. Some students will probably say that it is a home for the president or a place where he works. Some may recall reading about state dinners at the White House or about the president signing an important bill into law there. Perhaps a few students will have toured the White House during a school trip or family vacation. Add to their list if they missed one of the key functions of the White House (see the Objectives). Tell students that the video will acquaint them further with the history and function of this famous house.

Duplicate and distribute copies of the Viewing Guide (please see page 4). The Viewing Guide follows the sequence of the video and keeps students focused on its content. Explain to students that they do not have to get every question correct; if they miss something, you'll help them with it later. Give them a few minutes to look over the Viewing Guide so they can be more efficient listeners.

(Note: If you prefer that students not write during the viewing, you might use the Viewing Guide to frame questions covering information that will be shown in the video. The Viewing Guide can also be used as a vehicle for discussing the content of the video after viewing.)

## VIEWING GUIDE

### Where History Lives: A Tour of the White House

1. At the beginning of the video, First Lady Laura Bush is standing in the White House Library. She mentions that it was President \_\_\_\_\_ who first used this room as a library and that its shelves hold \_\_\_\_\_ books.
2. Though we now refer to this home as the White House, in the early days it was called simply, “The \_\_\_\_\_.”
3. The beautiful colonnades that you now see on both sides of the White House were the idea of President \_\_\_\_\_, who had them built to conceal storage space and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The White House has changed over time to make it more modern. Running water was added in \_\_\_\_\_; gas lighting in \_\_\_\_\_; and a telegraph room in \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Over time the White House needed more than slight modifications. During a reconstruction in 1948, a two-story basement was dug using a \_\_\_\_\_.

6. The president who is featured in a 1952 television special proudly showing off the newly renovated White House is President \_\_\_\_\_ .
7. In 1962, First Lady \_\_\_\_\_ hosted a new television tour of the White House. She wanted the viewing audience to get a sense of the nation's history through the furnishings in the house.
8. The White House first (or state) floor includes some of its most famous rooms, for example \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
9. President Franklin Roosevelt used the \_\_\_\_\_ Room during World War II to track troop and ship movements.
10. President Theodore Roosevelt removed the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ that were on the west side of the house to make room for the addition of the now famous "West Wing."
11. The first president to use the Oval Office of the West Wing was President \_\_\_\_\_ .  
In what year? \_\_\_\_\_ .

12. Presidents can choose the furnishings for the Oval Office. At least 21 presidents have used a desk made from the oak timbers of the British ship *Resolute*. The desk was given first to President Rutherford B. Hayes by Queen \_\_\_\_\_ .
13. The narrator describes a grand piano in the East Room that was especially designed for the White House in 1938. The decorations painted on the piano depict scenes of \_\_\_\_\_ that are unique to America.
14. A famous East Room portrait, saved by Dolley Madison during the War of 1812, shows the likeness of \_\_\_\_\_ by Gilbert Stuart.
15. Of the eight presidents who have died while in office, \_\_\_\_\_ of them have lain in state in the East Room. Name one of those presidents mentioned in the video: \_\_\_\_\_ .
16. The East Room has also been the scene of some happy ceremonies; for example, President Ulysses S. Grant's daughter, \_\_\_\_\_ , was married there, as well as President Lyndon Johnson's daughter, Lynda.

17. Within the White House, there are more than \_\_\_\_\_ works of fine art, many by major American artists.
18. Formal state dinners are held in the State Dining Room.  
Today, as many as \_\_\_\_\_ guests can be seated there.
19. The family living quarters are on the second and third floor of the White House. Outside the Yellow Oval Room on the second floor is the \_\_\_\_\_, a favorite place for families to relax and entertain.
20. Though now called the Lincoln Bedroom, this room was actually used by President Lincoln as an office. He signed the \_\_\_\_\_ in this room.



*The Resolute Desk, used by many presidents in the Oval Office*

## VIEWING GUIDE

### Answers:

1. Franklin Roosevelt; more than 2700 books
2. "The President's House"
3. Thomas Jefferson; stables
4. 1833; 1848; 1866
5. Bulldozer
6. Harry Truman
7. Jacqueline Kennedy
8. Entrance Hall; East Room; Green Room; Blue Room; Red Room; State Dining Room
9. Map Room
10. Greenhouses
11. William Howard Taft; 1909
12. Queen Victoria
13. Music and/or dance
14. George Washington
15. Seven; Abraham Lincoln, Warren Harding, John F. Kennedy
16. Nellie
17. 500
18. 140
19. Truman Balcony
20. Emancipation Proclamation

## AFTER STUDENTS VIEW

Give students an opportunity to provide their impressions of the White House. To get them started, ask such questions as: Does the White House seem like a place worthy of our president? Should it be fancier, or is it too fancy? How does it compare to where other world leaders live, such as the queen of England? Does the White House seem adequate to the needs of our vast modern nation? Ask the students if they can picture the White House as being located anywhere else in the United States besides Washington, D.C. Explain that the White House is only a temporary residence for the president and is owned by the American people. That being the case, can the students relate to the house? Do they feel proud and/or protective of the house? Were they surprised by anything they learned?

After students have had 10 minutes or so to discuss some of their impressions, ask them to add to their pre-viewing writing by providing as many examples as they can in support of the statement below:

*The White House is a place where the president works; it provides an office as well as an impressive ceremonial setting for him as he carries out the business of government. Even though the president and his family reside at the White House, it is also a museum that must be protected and preserved. The President's House has been structurally changed many times to accommodate the expanded needs of the executive branch. Serving as a symbol of our nation's ideals, the art and furnishings of the White House reflect the history of American culture and society.*

After students complete the writing, break the statement above into categories and form a column for each category (office, ceremonial setting, family home, museum, executive branch headquarters, symbol) on the board. Have students provide support from their writings to illustrate these White House roles. As they complete some of the suggested activities, they should be able to strengthen their understanding of these key points.

# ACTIVITIES FOR GRADES 4–8

## WHITE HOUSE HOLIDAYS

### **Background:**

Like most families in America, the first family celebrates holidays throughout the year. Unlike most families, they share these holidays with thousands of visitors to their home. Some of these White House celebrations follow traditions from more than a century ago. These White House festivities take place at the White House in the state rooms, the private quarters, and even outside on the White House lawn.

The Christmas season at the White House has evolved from a private family commemoration to glittering public tours of the decorated house. The White House Christmas tree has been the centerpiece of the decorations for years. The first president to celebrate the season with a Christmas tree may have been President and Mrs. Benjamin Harrison. In 1889 they exchanged gifts with family, then offered presents to the White House staff. First Lady Lou Hoover decorated the first official tree in 1929. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy established the tradition of decorating the White House Christmas tree with a theme. She decorated the tree with ornaments depicting the *Nutcracker Suite* ballet by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Recent administrations have expanded the theme to include decorations throughout the state rooms. Skilled artisans, craftsmen, and citizens from around the country create ornaments and decorations for the tree, while



*Rolling Easter eggs on the South Lawn, 2002*

White House florists and volunteers add the finishing touches to decorations that grace numerous tables, mantels, walls, and stairways. Even the White House pastry chef participates in the merriment by adding a signature gingerbread house that matches the Christmas theme selected by the first lady. Themes often reflect the interests of the first family or provide a glimpse of one aspect of American culture or tradition. Past themes include state flowers selected by Patricia Nixon, antique toys by Rosalynn Carter, and historic presidential homes to complement the theme “Home for the Holidays” selected by First Lady Laura Bush.

Another traditional event held at the White House is the annual Easter Egg Roll. Rolling eggs on Easter Monday was a tradition for many families, especially those living in Washington. Early egg rolls in the capital city were held on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol. This event shifted to the White House in 1878 when President Rutherford B. Hayes invited children to roll Easter eggs on the South Lawn after a policy change at the Capitol.

The president and first lady host this annual event and have added music, dance, and storytelling. Thousands of eggs are boiled and colored in the White House kitchen, and on Easter Monday thousands of young children gather on the South Lawn to roll them—and to enjoy a rare public event on the White House grounds.

While Christmas and Easter are major holidays for White House visitors, others are also noted. The president traditionally pardons a Thanksgiving turkey, a menorah is lit during Hanukkah, and the changing seasons are marked with garden tours in spring and autumn. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the president and first lady annually hosted a New Year's Day open house reception, and the Fourth of July was filled with sounds of crowds and the Marine Band playing on the South Lawn.

### **Reflection and Discussion:**

1. How does a tradition help “create history”?
2. Do you have family traditions (whether or not they are related to holidays)? When were they established? Who started them?

### **Activities:**

1. Select a winter holiday theme for the White House. Design an ornament for the White House Christmas tree or make an invitation to the holiday event of your choosing that reflects this theme. Share your creation with your family or class. Why did you select this theme? Does it represent a personal preference, or does it reflect a part of American culture?
2. There are some holidays that are not celebrated in a public event at the White House. What holiday would you like to celebrate at the White House that you think is overlooked? Prepare a persuasive proposal letter to the president suggesting that this holiday be included on the yearly calendar.

## TOUCHING HISTORY: THE RESOLUTE DESK

### Background:

In the video, President John F. Kennedy talks about the power of artifacts that have been used by presidents over the course of decades. They make “these men much more alive.” The White House is a repository of historic furnishings and artworks that have served—and continue to serve—presidents and first families. In this way, the White House is a living museum. The objects in the collections are not just beautiful examples of craftsmanship or artistry to be admired by visitors; they are used by the occupants of the house on a daily basis. Presidents and first ladies select pieces from the permanent collection to use in their private quarters and in the Oval Office.

One of the best examples of an artifact’s association with presidential history is the *Resolute* desk. Britain’s Queen Victoria presented this oak desk to President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1880. The desk was created using ship timbers salvaged from the HMS *Resolute*. It was made by William Evenden, a skilled carver and joiner employed at the Royal Naval Dockyard, where the *Resolute* was dismantled. An inscription on the desk records the history of its creation:

*H.M.S. “Resolute”, forming part of the expedition sent in search of Sir John Franklin in 1852, was abandoned in Latitude 74° 41’ N. Longitude 101° 22’ W. on 15th May 1854. She was discovered and extricated in September 1855, in Latitude 67° N. by Captain Buddington of the United States Whaler “George Henry”. The ship was purchased, fitted out and sent to England, as a gift to Her Majesty Queen Victoria by the President and People of the United States, as a token of goodwill & friendship. This table was made from her timbers when she was broken up, and is presented by the Queen of Great Britain & Ireland, to the President of the United States, as a memorial of the courtesy and loving kindness which dictated the offer of the gift of the “Resolute.”*

The desk has changed very little since it was originally received from England. One key exception is a front panel installed at the request of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to conceal his leg

braces. Nearly every president since Hayes has used the desk in the White House. A number of recent presidents have used the desk in the Oval Office.

### Reflection and Discussion:

1. The *Resolute* desk is just one example of a historic object used by presidents in the past and now displayed or used in the White House. Several different objects with presidential connections were presented in the video. Can you remember them? [Answers would include the Steinway grand piano in the East Room, John Adams's coffee urn in the Green Room, the French furniture purchased by James Monroe in the Blue Room, the cabinet table ordered by Ulysses S. Grant in the Treaty Room]
2. How can a desk (or historic object) play a part in history?
3. Why is it important to preserve historic furnishings and objects in the White House?
4. Why do you think Queen Victoria decided to send this gift to the United States? Is it an appropriate gift? Why or why not?
5. How is the White House different from other historic house museums you have visited? How is it similar?

### Activities:

1. Using a world map, use the coordinates Latitude 74° 41' N. Longitude 101° 22' W. to determine where the *Resolute* was abandoned. Research the story of the HMS *Resolute*. Who was Sir John Franklin, and what was the goal of his journey? What was the task of the *Resolute's* crew? Share your findings with your family or class.
2. Do you have a special object or piece of furniture in your home? Why is it important to your family (or you)? What is the history of the object? What story does it tell? What material is it made of (wood, iron, paper, etc.)? Pretend you are a museum curator who is going to display the object. Write a 50-word label that would be read by museum visitors.

## WHERE HISTORY LIVES: THE WHITE HOUSE STATE DINING ROOM

### Background:

Like any old home or building, the White House has changed over time. Many of these changes have been reflected in the interior of the building as the president's needs for the spaces have evolved. For much of the 19th century, the use of rooms was generally at the discretion of the first family. For example, today's Green Room was used by John Adams as a bedroom in 1801. What is known as the Lincoln Bedroom, today a guest room, was actually Abraham Lincoln's office. The rooms on the public tour that are depicted in the video are considered to be of museum quality and are not substantially altered, although they are available for daily use by the first family.

The State Dining Room represents a good example of the changing nature of the White House rooms. Some changes over time were purely aesthetic; others greatly altered the interior architecture of the building. Early records show that the State Dining Room was used as an office, parlor, cabinet room, and dining room for some of the presidents. Thomas Jefferson was particularly fond of this room and used it for his private office. Much of the planning of the Lewis and Clark expedition took place in this room, and Jefferson's papers, notes, and maps could be found covering tables, desks, and even the walls. It has been known as the State Dining Room since the administration of Andrew Jackson.

During Theodore Roosevelt's administration the State Dining Room was enlarged. More room was needed for larger dinners and receptions. America was taking its place as an international power, and Roosevelt felt the White House should reflect this new status. A stairway leading from the Cross Hall to the second floor quarters was removed, and the resulting additional space now allowed for more than 100 dinner guests.

The decoration of the room has changed with time, as well. The Theodore Roosevelt renovation of 1902 called for wild game heads to be mounted from the dark-stained paneled walls.

The heads were removed during Warren Harding's tenure. Roosevelt's architects also designed a new plaster ceiling, chandelier, and wall sconces. Fifty years later, Harry Truman had the wall paneling painted a pale green when the White House was renovated again.

While the size of the room has not changed in the past century, different seating arrangements—guests seated at round tables—increase the capacity to 140 for a seated dinner. The room has been the site of many international gatherings, as world leaders have enjoyed the hospitality of the White House.

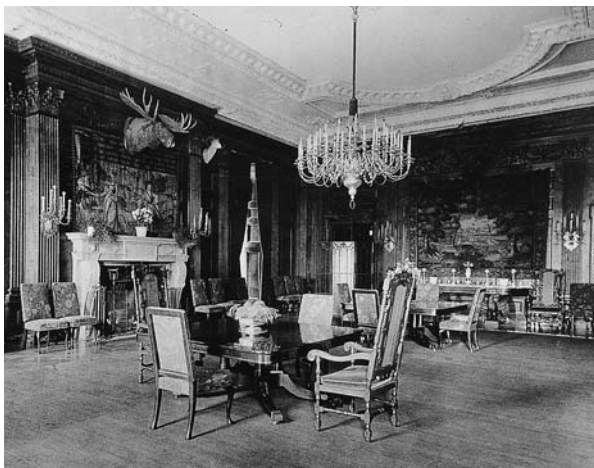
### Reflection and Discussion:

1. What did President John Adams write to his wife, Abigail, which was later inscribed on the mantel in the State Dining Room? ["I Pray Heaven to Bestow The Best of Blessings on THIS HOUSE and on All that shall hereafter Inhabit it. May none but Honest and Wise Men ever rule under This Roof."] Why do you suppose he wrote this?
2. The president is America's chief diplomat. He represents the United States during meetings with leaders from other nations. Why is it important that a world leader be treated well when he visits our country? Do you think the State Dining Room is an impressive place for a special dinner?

### Activities:

1. Study the photographs of the State Dining Room, or review the segment of the video on this room. The room is seen during different historical periods, but the room is the same size in both photographs. What are some differences found in the pictures? What do the images have in common? Times change and ideas for decorating change, too. The size of the State Dining Room will probably not change in the future, but the carpet, draperies, and furniture might. Imagine yourself at a state dinner when you are an adult. Draw a detailed picture of the State Dining Room at that future time.
2. One of the most important moments of a state dinner takes place when the leaders toast one another. All guests raise

their glasses as the president and his guest of honor take turns with their toasts. Using newspapers or television newscasts, select a current foreign leader and pretend he has been invited to a state dinner by the president of the United States.



*State Dining Room, 1902*



*State Dining Room, 2000*

From what you can learn about the leader and his or her nation's relationship with the United States, take on the role of a presidential speech writer and create a brief toast for both leaders.

## REFLECTIONS OF AMERICA: THE WHITE HOUSE CHINA

### Background:

The White House is often called a symbol of the American presidency, largely because it is the place where the chief executive does his work. But within the walls of the White House reside historical furnishings, objects, and paintings that represent the tastes of the leaders who once lived there. The house is a museum filled with artifacts that also reflect the presidency. As Jacqueline Kennedy states in the video *Where History Lives: A Tour of the White House*: “It’s so important, the setting in which the presidency is presented to the world.”

One way presidents—and first ladies—have presented themselves is through the design and use of White House china. From the beginning presidents have purchased china for entertaining, and they used government funds to do so. Congressional appropriations also allowed presidents to replace “decayed furnishings,” including china.

The frequent use of china in the White House for entertaining at state dinners and receptions often led to breakage and loss. Some early administrations used this reason to “clean the cupboards” of old china, sell the pieces at auction, and use the proceeds to purchase new sets of china that reflected both the tastes of the first family and of current American culture. Rutherford B. Hayes purchased china from the Haviland company in Limoges, France, in 1879. American artist Theodore Russell Davis designed the service. Plants, animals, seafood, and fish native to North America are depicted on the service.

Often the purchase of china follows a major renovation or refurbishment of the White House. The Theodore Roosevelt renovation in 1902 led to the purchase of a simple but elegant

service in gold and creamy white with the Presidential Seal embossed on each piece. The service met the needs of the expanded State Dining Room. Until the Roosevelt purchase, the only full set of china in the White House was the Hayes service. To entertain the growing number of guests at the White House, a new service was desperately needed. Edith Roosevelt viewed the White House as a national treasure and appreciated the history of the White House. She encouraged journalist Abby Gunn Baker to research the past presidential china and to locate pieces that had once been in the White House and have them donated. These pieces were the beginning of the collection displayed today.

Some administrations have decided to purchase china to commemorate a special event or reflect a personal interest. The Clintons selected a service to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the White House in 2000. First Lady Ladybird Johnson selected a service decorated with native American wildflowers, one of her passions.

First Lady Edith Wilson saw the need to preserve and protect the White House china collection and converted one of the rooms in the ground floor corridor to the China Room. She ordered the installation of glass-front cabinets that would house and display examples of the extensive collection. In the China Room, the tastes of first families and the history of the White House are represented in porcelain.

### **Reflection and Discussion:**

1. Describe some of the china patterns shown in the video.  
What prominent design motif is used by many first families?  
[American eagle]
2. Why was it necessary to purchase china for the White House?
3. Do you feel the purchase was a valid use of public funds?  
Why or why not?

### **Student Activities:**

1. Research a china pattern from one presidential administration. Note: Not all presidents have created their own service; some use china of past presidents. Write a descriptive para-

graph about the pattern that you have studied. Share your description with your family or classmates.

2. Design your own White House service. What decorations and symbols would you include in this service? How would your china reflect the dignity and importance of the presidency?

## **BEHIND THE SCENES: THE WHITE HOUSE STAFF**

### **Background:**

As reflected in the video, the White House serves as a home to the first family and as an international stage where important people from across America and around the world come to meet, celebrate, and make decisions. The White House is a bustling place that must be managed by a competent and qualified staff. Staffing needs have grown since the Adamses first resided in the White House with only a half dozen servants to support the household. Today the residence staff numbers about 100. They include plumbers, maids, engineers, waiters, florists, curators, chefs, and more. They do not hold political positions that come and go with each administration; in fact, some staff have served for more than two or three decades. Loyalty, discretion, and commitment to their position make them one of the best household staffs in the country. They ensure that the White House remains a place that is both host to many events and home to the first family.

The chief usher is the key person who manages the White House for the first family and answers their needs on a daily basis. The chief usher is a leader and a decision maker responsible for all functions, meetings, and events that take place in the historic home, particularly the state rooms and the private quarters. (A separate staff has responsibility for the East and West Wings.)

The social secretary works in the office of the first lady and is responsible for planning and executing dinners, receptions, and other events at the White House with the assistance of the chief usher. The social secretary must be detail oriented, well organized, and willing to put in long hours at the White House.

The executive chef at the White House is responsible for designing and preparing the meals for both the first family and their guests. The executive chef often has impressive training in food preparation and presentation and must be accustomed to managing a staff of chefs that will help prepare meals and receptions. The White House kitchen must be able to prepare a working breakfast for two, Christmas cookies, birthday cakes, a multi-course state dinner for 140, and a barbeque on the South Lawn.

The chief floral designer works with a staff of several florists. They are responsible for decorating the White House each day—the state rooms, the private family quarters, and the West Wing—and for creating centerpieces and decorations for special events. One of their most complicated and time-consuming tasks is decorating the house for the winter holidays. Volunteers assist the staff to achieve this feat every year.

Since the White House is a museum, curators are on staff to research, acquire, display, organize, and preserve the objects in the collection. While only a small percentage are displayed at any one time, there are 30,000 objects in the permanent collection, including artwork, silver, furniture, textiles, decorative arts, manuscripts, and photographs.

### **Activities:**

1. You have just been appointed curator of the White House. What object or painting would you select to add to the permanent collection at the White House? Why? Write a memorandum to the first lady. Describe your selection, your reasons for acquiring it, and your plans to display it. Attach to your memorandum a photograph or drawing of the object.
2. The staff positions shown in the video and described above are but a few of the positions that are required to keep the White House running smoothly. Using the Resources listed in this Learning Guide, research another residence staff position and write a job description for it. Be sure to include the duties required and the qualities and background needed by a person who would apply for the job.

# ACTIVITIES FOR GRADES 9–12

## THE WHITE HOUSE IS A PLACE WHERE THE PRESIDENT WORKS

### The President Wears Many Hats

After students view the video, ask them to check newspapers, magazines, television news coverage, or websites to discover ways that the president fulfills his tasks as chief executive at the White House. Remind students that the president has many roles: he is the chief executive officer of the nation, the commander in chief of military forces, the head of state, and the leader of his political party. After sufficient lead time, ask students to share these articles to support the point that the White House is, indeed, a place of work. Help students evaluate what problems are presently getting most of the president's attention, and why. Post the articles on the classroom bulletin board. Consider adding to the display throughout the year. (An excellent website for this activity is [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov). Students can read articles relating to the president's daily appointments, along with White House press briefings and see current photographs.)

### Moments of Crisis

The White House is often the focal point of leadership, especially in times of crisis. "No easy matter will ever come to you," said President Dwight D. Eisenhower to President-elect John F. Kennedy in 1961. As Eisenhower explained, "If they're easy they



*The Oval Office of President George W. Bush, 2002*

will be settled at the lower level.” Theodore Roosevelt once said, “Every day, almost every hour, I have to decide very big as well as very little questions, and . . . what it is possible to achieve.”

Ask students to brainstorm a list of crisis moments at the White House, days when unprecedented, tragic, or overwhelming events demanded a careful but timely response from the president. If students need examples, you might supply some: Have them picture the White House after the firing on Fort Sumter (Lincoln), the sinking of the *Lusitania* (Wilson), the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (Franklin Roosevelt), the failed Bay of Pigs invasion (Kennedy), the taking of American hostages in Iran (Carter), and the terrorist events of September 11, 2001 (George W. Bush).

Divide the class into groups, and ask each one to concentrate on one event, describing what immediate action they believe the president should have taken. Have them consider: What members of his cabinet or staff would the president alert? What other government or private groups should he contact? How would he help the citizens of the nation cope with this crisis? What would have been his toughest problem? After students share their thinking with the class, ask them to research their group's "crisis" by using library and internet sources to see what each president did do and how his actions are viewed by history. Many presidents kept diaries describing their workdays in the White House. Ask students to process their learning by writing one to five diary entries of the president whose event they studied. Share these entries with the class.

### **The President Requests Your Presence**

As a symbol of our nation, the White House is a highly respected place. Presidents and first ladies use the White House as a setting for meetings whose purpose is to encourage open dialogue and problem solving. President Theodore Roosevelt called for a conference on the conservation of natural resources, in May 1908. Present in the East Room meeting were the nation's governors, the entire Supreme Court, many members of Congress, members of 68 professional societies (including those representing historic preservation, mining, lumber, and forestry), 21 editors and reporters, and 48 special guests including geographers, biologists, soil experts, and commissioners of Indian affairs. For many, it was their first visit to the White House, and they were somewhat awed by their reception. The conference was the first such meeting of its kind in America, and one of the results was the creation of the National Conservation Commission. This group of state and federal representatives sought to calculate the nation's natural resources and make recommendations for their use.

Ask students to consider current problems facing the nation, and have them imagine a conference that today's president or first lady might convene. Ask them to list possible participants, reminding them that, as Roosevelt did, they should draw from a broad range of groups. Invite students to draw up a list of dis-

cussion topics. If time permits, invite them to write a mission statement for the conference and welcoming speeches for the opening session.

## **THE WHITE HOUSE IS A PLACE OF CEREMONY**

### **Play Ball**

President John F. Kennedy presents astronaut Alan Shepard with NASA's Distinguished Service Medal in the White House Rose Garden in 1961. In June 1994, President Bill Clinton and Japanese Emperor Akihito review troops on the South Lawn. In May 2002, President George W. Bush tosses a baseball to begin the 2002 White House T-ball season on the South Lawn. For events both great and small, presidents are often called upon to fulfill ceremonial roles. Have students search website, newspaper, or news magazine sources to find out about recent ceremonial events at the White House: a welcoming ceremony for a head of state, a gathering to honor Olympic winners, the traditional pardoning of a Thanksgiving turkey, or the lighting of the Christmas tree, for example. Ask them to clip pictures of the events and discuss what they see as the purpose of such ceremonies: do they believe that this is an appropriate use of the president's time? Why or why not? Is it the duty of the president to participate in such events? If the president represents the American people, how do these ceremonies reflect national values?

### **Strike a Medal**

When Native American chiefs visited President Thomas Jefferson at the White House in 1805, they were greeted in the Entrance Hall of the White House, and a gift exchange ceremony took place. President Jefferson presented the chiefs with a medal of silver or pewter to be worn around the neck. The medal showed a profile of the president, an unsubtle message to them that he held the power advantage. Other presidents have given tokens of honor, such as the Medal of Freedom, to people whose contributions to the nation have been significant. Ask the students to think about individuals within their community or state who, they believe,

should be honored at the White House. Have them explain what makes these persons worthy of such recognition. Invite the students to design a medal that would be struck and given to the honorees in a White House ceremony. Where would the event take place? Display the students' designs. If time permits, have students plan and act out an appropriate ceremony.

## THE WHITE HOUSE IS THE FIRST FAMILY'S HOME

### Just Like Us

Though the White House as a home may seem elaborately decorated and fancy to many Americans, historian Daniel J. Boorstin makes the point that in the representative government of the United States, citizens like to think that the president's life at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is somewhat like their own. The fact that the president and his family live in a large white house, not a "sumptuous and resplendent" palace typical of European monarchs, is very important. Boorstin says Americans enjoy White House scenes that remind them of their own lives: Thanksgiving dinners, holiday decorations, and Easter egg rolls; children and cats and dogs; and birthday parties and favorite leisure activities. The White House photographer often documents these scenes, while newspapers and magazines cover every detail, including what Christmas gifts are exchanged by the president and first lady.

Ask students to write down details they can think of relating to the current first family. In a class discussion, invite them to compare their lives with those of the first family and to note similarities and differences. Ask them: To what degree are you similar to the family who lives in the White House? Invite students to write a short essay, called "Just Like Us" in which they support or refute Boorstin's notion of "representativeness." (Boorstin, "Roles of the President's House," in *The White House: The First Two Hundred Years*, 1994).

### **Living Above the Store**

President Ronald Reagan said of living in a public facility such as the White House, “You get a little stir crazy during the week.” He also commented, “Now, here I am, sort of living above the store again,” just as he had when, in his youth, his family had owned a small business. Ask students to discover through current newspapers, magazines, or web sources in what ways the president’s personal needs and wishes are taken care of at the White House, making his work life easier. What services, for example, would be provided for him that would not be typical in the students’ households? Ask students to discuss whether or not the advantages outweigh the disadvantages of “living over the store,” especially if that store is the White House.

### **A Working Vacation**

As a follow-up, ask students to consider in what ways a president can continue his work while at the same time get away from the hustle and bustle of the White House. Invite students to describe what they think it means when newscasters say that the “president is enjoying a working vacation.” Further, after the discussion, ask students to make a list of modern equipment or other technology that might allow the current president to work in his favorite place. Invite several students to choose the name of a president who served in the 19th century. Have them do some reading in a biography of that president. Calculating the distance between his home and the capital city, the students are to estimate how often he was able to come and go and what modes of transportation were available. Students should explain in what ways “a working vacation” for the president was different—for better or worse—in the past.

## THE WHITE HOUSE IS A MUSEUM THAT REFLECTS AMERICA'S CULTURE AND SOCIETY

### A Grand Piano

A concert grand piano, designed by Steinway & Company as a special state piano for the White House, has been played by performers for decades. The piano is supported on three sturdy legs carved as large eagles, and its sides feature gilded scenes of American music and dance forms. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in accepting the gift of the piano from the Steinway Company in 1938, said that it “represented the advancement of music in every city, town, and hamlet in the country.” Ask students if they can guess what music or dance forms might have been featured on the piano. After students list their choices tell them the five motifs that appear on the piano—the Virginia reel, a New England barn dance, an Indian ceremonial dance, African Americans dancing, and a cowboy with a guitar, presumably representing folk music. The video shows details of the barn, cowboy, and Native American dance. Check to see if any of the students’ guesses were on the mark. Ask students to imagine that they are redesigning the piano, giving it a look that reflects the 21st century. What five groups would they choose? Would some of them be the same as those selected in the 1930s? If not, how do the students’ choices represent American culture? Invite some students to draw their own musical motifs, and ask others to find CDs that reflect those selections. Set aside time for students to share both projects.

### More Than a Painting

For many years, the Executive Mansion has been a showcase for culture. While artworks by European masters are represented, the White House collection of more than 500 paintings, sculptures, and works of art on paper strongly reflects American artistry. Have students use [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org), [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), *Art in the White House: A Nation's Pride*, or other sources to find images of some of these paintings. Discuss in what ways the artists, subjects, or themes in some way



*State portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart, 1797*

reflect aspects of American life. Ask several students to present their selections to the class, and explain why they are representative of our nation's spirit and character.

### **An Armchair Tour**

Since 1801, the White House has been open to the public. Though during times of crisis security considerations have led to the temporary interruption or closing of tours, presidents have generally seen the importance of making the house accessible to the people. Over the years the occupants have become increasingly interested in preserving the historic nature of the White House. President Herbert Hoover's wife, Lou, was concerned to record the history of White House furnishings, an

effort that was begun in 1929. The televised tours of the White House by President Harry Truman in 1952 and Jacqueline Kennedy in 1962 heightened a desire to preserve the house. In 1961, Congress passed legislation to establish the museum character of the public rooms at the White House and to give its objects permanent protection. In 1964, under President Lyndon Johnson, the permanent position of White House curator was established, along with a preservation committee made up of expert advisers. Since 1961, the White House Historical Association has published educational materials (including this Teaching Guide) about the White House as the home and office of the president and as a museum of American history.

After students view *Where History Lives: A Tour of the White House*, ask them to take a virtual tour of the White House at [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org). Choose five to seven students as White House “tour guides,” by asking each to become a specialist on one White House room. Invite them to learn more about their selected rooms by visiting other areas of the same website or through books available in public or school libraries (see Resources). Ask each tour guide to give the class a “desk chair” view of his or her room. The tour presentation should include discussion of the style of the room, its art and objects, its last renovation, and a description of some important events that have occurred there. Encourage the students to get copies of pictures from books or online resources that show the room, or allow them to show the video segment that features their room.

## WHITE HOUSE HISTORY RESOURCES

### White House on the Web

[www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org)

Classroom resources, virtual tours, and more from the White House Historical Association.

[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

The federal government's White House site includes daily news updates from the White House and a link to a site for students.

[www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

The site of the National Archives and Records Administration and links to presidential libraries and their collections.

### Published by, or in cooperation with, the White House Historical Association

*Art in the White House: A Nation's Pride*

by William Kloss et al

Beautiful color images of the White House art collection and a catalog of the entire collection, 1992. An updated edition (2002) includes information on artworks acquired from 1992 to 2002. Published in cooperation with the National Geographic Society.

*The First Ladies*

by Margaret Brown Klapthor and Allida Black

Biographies and portraits of the women who have fulfilled the role of White House hostess during the administration of each president. Paperback, 2001.

*The President's House* by William Seale

A highly readable, chronological narrative covering the White House and its occupants from John Adams through Harry S. Truman. Published in cooperation with the National Geographic Society, 1986.

*The Presidents of the United States of America*

by Frank Freidel and Hugh Sidey

Biographies of the 42 men who have served as president of the United States and color reproductions of their official White House portraits. Paperback, 2001.

*The White House: An Historic Guide*

Extensively illustrated room-by-room descriptions of the decor and furnishings of the White House accompanied by historical text. Paperback, 2001.

*The White House: An Illustrated History*

by Catherine O'Neill Grace

A comprehensive work on the White House for students that includes behind-the-scenes interviews with a number of White House workers. Published by Scholastic in cooperation with the White House Historical Association, 2003.

*The White House Garden*

by William Seale

A richly illustrated book with original plans, historic images, and beautiful photography of the gardens and grounds at the White House. Paperback, 1997.

*The White House: Its Historic Furnishings and First Families*

by Betty Monkman

A presentation of the tastes of each administration through the furnishings acquired by presidents and first ladies over two centuries, with beautiful photographs of furniture, silver, china, and decorative objects of many kinds as well as images of the state rooms from different historical periods. White House Historical Association and Abbeville Press, 2000.

*The White House: The First Two Hundred Years*

edited by Frank Freidel and William Pencak

A dozen essays by prominent presidential scholars. Topics include the role of first ladies, music in the White House, and the relationship of the media and the presidency. Northeastern University Press, 1994.