

OUR WHITE HOUSE

LOOKING IN, LOOKING OUT

EDUCATION RESOURCE GUIDE

PART III. ANNEXATION AND DIVISION

This education resource guide is designed to augment the content included in Part III of the NCBLA’s anthology *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*. Included on these pages are engaging activities and discussion questions regarding some of the articles and stories in Part III of *Our White House*. We invite you to print and share these materials with young people at home and in the classroom. Education resource guides for the other parts of *Our White House* are available on OurWhiteHouse.org.

From *American Notes* (pages 64-67)

Written by Charles Dickens, Illustrated by Claire Nivola

Activity Suggestions and Discussion Questions

Take a virtual tour of Abraham Lincoln’s White House on the White House Historical Association website: <http://www.whitehousehistory.org/abraham-lincolns-white-house>

Ask each young person to think about why Charles Dickens’ description of Lincoln’s White House exemplifies government “of the people, for the people, and by the people.” Have them write a reflection and include examples. If you have access to computers with an Internet connection, consider creating a classroom blog that enables students to express and share their ideas electronically. Google’s free blogging software (<http://www.blogger.com>) is easy to use. Once the account is set up, invite all class members to join. The blog could serve as an online platform for discussion not only about the Dickens’ essay, but other topics as well.

Discuss both literal and figurative **imagery** with young people. Ask them to find examples of imagery in the Dickens’ selection. Have them write a list of each image they find. Compare lists and ask everyone to vote on the most memorable.

Invite young people to create a paper doll resembling themselves using paper, cardboard, or poster board, as well as crayons, markers, colored pencils, or paint. Computer-savvy young people might want to design their paper dolls using a computer graphics program. For the purpose of “dressing” the paper dolls, ask young people to design a “costume” they might have worn to meet President Lincoln. Next, design a costume they would like to wear to visit our current president.

Encourage young people to research Charles Dickens and his work at the library or using a computer with an Internet connection, then pose the following questions:

- Who was Charles Dickens? Why do you think Dickens was impressed to meet the “characters” within the Eastern Drawing Room (during his visit to the White House during Lincoln’s Presidency)?
- Why did Charles Dickens describe Lincoln as a man “at war with everybody?”

Read and Learn MORE

Learn about Lincoln’s term in office on the White House website:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/abrahamlincoln>

Read about Abraham Lincoln in the “Presidential Fact Files:”

<http://ourwhitehouse.org/abraham-lincoln-1861-1865/>

Read more about the “company of many grades and classes” found in the White House during President Lincoln’s term in “High Spirits in the Lincoln White House” by Russell Freedman found in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*.

Marvel at Claire Nivola’s accompanying watercolor for “From *American Notes*” on page 65 of *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*.

Elizabeth Keckly, Seamstress to First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, 1861-1865

(pages 70-73)

Written by Patricia C. and Fredrick L. McKissack, Illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon

Activity Suggestions and Discussion Questions

Ask young people to watch the Smithsonian video “Preparing the Gowns for the First Ladies Exhibition” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb5m2a6aheM>) and to read the National Museum of American History article “The First Ladies at the Smithsonian” (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/first-ladies/first-ladies-fashions>). Discuss with your kids what they have learned and what they think about first ladies’ fashions. For fun, ask young people to take the “Belles of the balls” quiz about inaugural gowns on the CNN Politics website (<http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/01/12/quiz.ball.gowns/>).

Ask young people to put themselves in the shoes of Elizabeth Keckly and write a fictional, first-person letter to Mary Todd Lincoln. What would they say to Mrs. Lincoln? One topic to consider would be to thank the first lady for helping with the “Contraband” Relief Association. Young people can research this topic in the History Matters article “Former Slave Elizabeth Keckley and the ‘Contraband’ of Washington, DC, 1862” (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6223/>).

Invite young people to research the occupation of fashion designer at the library or online. They might want to start with the “Fashion Designers” article on the Occupational Outlook Handbook website (<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/arts-and-design/fashion-designers.htm>). Ask young people to list the pros and cons of entering this profession and to list the subjects a young person must study in order to become an excellent fashion designer.

Pose the following questions to young people:

- What are some of the “soft” relationship skills used by Elizabeth Keckly to calm Mrs. Lincoln’s nerves? Can you think of times when a parent or teacher used soft relationship skills with you? Did you find it helpful?
- Why do you think presidential inaugural events are so important?

Read and Learn MORE

Read about other dresses worn by first ladies in “On Looking Into Dresses Worn by the First Ladies of the White House” (Paper Doll Cut –outs) by Nancy Willard in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*.

Find out about the sad parts of Mary Todd Lincoln’s life in “Mary Todd Lincoln Speaks of Her Son’s Death, 1862” by Paul B. Janeczko in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*.

Read how Mary Todd Lincoln was the first presidential wife to be referred to as “First Lady” in “From White House Hostess to American Powerhouse: The Evolution of the First Lady’s Title and Role” on OurWhiteHouse.org: <http://ourwhitehouse.org/from-white-house-hostess-to-american-powerhouse/>

Admire the accompanying painting for “Elizabeth Keckly” by Leo and Diane Dillon on page 73 of *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*.

High Spirits in the Lincoln White House (pages 74-75)

by **Russell Freedman**

Activity Suggestions and Discussion Questions

Author Russell Freedman has written dozens of books about American history and historical figures. Invite young people to discover the works of Russell Freedman at your school or local library! Before you go, you might want to ask them to read some information about Freedman and his books online if you have access to a computer with an Internet connection. The [Scholastic website biography](#) is a good place to start. Ask kids to see what biographies and works of historical non-fiction Freedman has written and to discover what honors he has been awarded for his work. Together write a list of as many of Freedman's books as you can find, then hold a secret ballot to determine which book each young person would most like to read. Post the results on the board to discover what historical interests are shared among the group. Be sure to invite each young person to check out a copy of one of Freeman's books and have each young person present a short oral summary to class after they have read it.

Check out a copy of Freedman's book *Lincoln: A Photobiography* and share it with the class. Explain the definition of **photobiography**. Once each student has had an opportunity to read the book, ask them to write several paragraphs explaining how Freedman's award-winning book meets the definition. Invite young people to the library to find other photobiographies.

Russell Freedman's essay "High Spirits in the Lincoln White House" shares stories of the exuberant Tad and Willie Lincoln and their "high-spirited antics" while living in the White House. Read this story aloud with young people then discuss the boys' activities and playtime. On a sheet of art or regular paper, ask each young person to draw a line down the center. On one side, draw a depiction of Tad or Willie Lincoln in their home setting of the White House. On the other side, ask young people to draw the scene of a similar activity (playing, eating, studying) in their own home setting. Ask young people to consider how their home lives are similar or different.

Pose the following questions to young people:

- How did Lincoln's boys display a spirit of ingenuity in the same way as their father?
- Why might Lincoln have benefitted from a high-spirited, spontaneous family life during his presidency?

Read and Learn MORE

Many other presidential children have lived in the White House since the Lincoln boys. Invite young people to learn about other presidential kids in the following articles in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*:

- Learn about Theodore Roosevelt's relationship with his children in "Theodore Roosevelt's Letters to His Children" by Leonard Marcus.
- Read about the escapades of Theodore Roosevelt's children while living in the White House in "Storming Down the Stairs" by Albert Marrin.
- Check out Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher's endearing illustration of the Kennedy children on pages 150-151.
- Read how Amy Carter inspired a nation in "From Christmas in Plains: Memories."

Memoir by Mary Henry: Eyewitness to the Civil War in the City of Washington

(pages 77-78)

by **Mary Henry**

Activity Suggestions and Discussion Questions

Memoir is a form of autobiographical writing in which the writer recollects significant events he or she has participated in or witnessed. Memoir typically addresses the words and actions of others, rather than focusing on the writer's own thoughts and life. When a writer chooses to write primarily about his or her own life, thoughts, and experiences, that work is **autobiography**. Read Mary Henry's memoir and discuss with young people whether they think it meets the definition of memoir or autobiography or both. Then ask young people to think about some event they have witnessed and to write their own memoir describing the event.

Discover how librarians evaluate works of non-fiction for children by visiting the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) website (<http://www.ncte.org/awards/orbispictus>). The NCTE recognizes excellence in nonfiction for children each year when they award the Orbis Pictus award. Survey several lists of Orbis Pictus award winners by clicking the appropriate Orbis Pictus Link on the NCTE website (<http://www.ncte.org/awards/orbispictus>), located in the top left corner. With these lists in hand, visit your school or local library to find some of these Orbis Pictus award-winning books. Invite young people to read at least one of these books and to make a list of others they would like to read.

Pose the following questions to young people:

- What personal qualities allowed Mary Henry to remain calm and write her memoir so eloquently while perched, by necessity, at the "Top of the Tower?"
- Why do you believe Mary Henry highlights the "cutting of telegraph wires" and the destruction of Gunpowder Creek bridge?
- Why does Mary Henry pay so much attention to the month, year, and date, as well as the time?

Read and Learn MORE

Mary Henry's memoir is a primary source that relays information of her personal eyewitness account. Other primary sources are available on OurWhiteHouse.org, and both include activities and discussion questions for young people:

- "Dolley Madison's Letter to Her Sister About the Burning of the White House:"
<http://ourwhitehouse.org/primary-sources-dolley-madisons-letter-to-her-sister-about-the-burning-of-the-white-house/>
- "The Letters of John and Abigail Adams, the First White House Correspondence:"
<http://ourwhitehouse.org/primary-sources-the-letters-of-john-and-abigail-adams-the-first-white-house-correspondence/>

In Early April (pages 79-81)

Written by **Kate DiCamillo**, Illustrated by **Chris Sheban**

Activity Suggestions and Discussion Questions

Kate DiCamillo's poignant poem explores death, both the passing of Abraham Lincoln's son Willie as well as Lincoln's own demise. Ask young people to write a creative poem in which they explore a powerful emotion, such as fright, grief, or sadness. Invite young people to employ some of the techniques employed by DiCamillo, such as the portrayal of a dream or the usage of dialog.

DiCamillo uses the butterfly as a powerful literal image. Discuss DiCamillo's symbolic use of butterflies in the poem with young people. For example, why is DiCamillo referencing the butterfly? What does the butterfly mean to them? What do they think the butterfly means to other readers? What kind of sensory experience is associated with watching butterflies? Why is this experience meaningful to an interpretation of the poem? Do they think of the butterfly as an image of life, death, dreams, peace, hope, or something else?

Pose the following additional questions to young people:

- Has something or someone ever filled you with "light and peace" when you were facing a scary situation?
- Can you remember a favorite dream? What person or image made the dream special and memorable?

Learn about butterfly anatomy. Great resources are available on the Enchanted Learning website (<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/butterfly/>). Be sure to type "butterflies for kids" in the search box. You can also check out books about butterflies at your school or local library. Ask young people to draw, label, and color their own butterflies using the online and print resources they have found. You may also ask kids to draw butterflies on paper, cut them out, and hang them using string, ribbon, or yarn in your classroom.

Watch the journey of the monarch butterfly on the PBS website at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/butterflies/>

Read and Learn MORE

Read a poem about Mary Todd Lincoln's reaction to her son's death in "Mary Todd Lincoln Speaks of Her Son's Death, 1862" by Paul B. Janeczko in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*.

Enjoy reading more about the "company of many grades and classes" found in the White House during President Lincoln's term in "High Spirits in the Lincoln White House" by Russell Freedman, found in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*.

Read about Abraham Lincoln's love of books in *Abe Lincoln: The Boy Who Loved Books*, by Kay Winters and Nancy Carpenter.

Float into Chris Sheban's artwork, which accompanies Kate DiCamillo's beautiful poem, in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*.