

Michelle Obama Teacher's Notes **B1** **B1+**

Though “merely” a First lady, Michelle Obama is a world-known figure whose involvement in various projects are still remembered today, even three years after her White House years.

Her newly-released autobiography not only explores her years in the White House but also tells us more about how Michelle Robinson became Michelle (Obama)!

This article gives an insight of Michelle's life as she herself tells it in her autobiography, and looks at the role of First Lady in the U.S. political system.

Vocabulary and structures

- political life (*term, run for president, campaign..*)
- linkwords : opposing ideas / showing paradox (*even though, and yet, contrary to..*)
- studying and working (*law degree, public service job, company, housewife..*)
- changes (*turn upside down, affect*)
- life experience (present perfect vs preterite)

Pronunciation

- “Obama” is often stressed wrongly by students... You can have them listen to the introduction to this excerpt from the audiobook *Becoming*, read by Michelle Obama, and repeat!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWsJw6egyGw>

Reading, speaking, writing

- We suggest starting with the title, “Becoming Michelle”, and let the students voice their ideas / hypotheses about who this “Michelle” could be. Then, show the pictures (starting with the ones at the White House and then showing the “Let's Move” ones and finally the book cover) You can

then help them define her “job”/role while in the White House. Use the book cover to help them make hypotheses about the topic of her book

- Have them talk about the Obamas and what they know about them.
 - As this article gives an insight into her autobiography, the following activities aim to help them sketch out some sort of quick timeline / the different steps in her life so that they can organise their ideas in order to then write (or talk) about her.
 - The final task will enable you to practise differentiated learning/teaching, or simply choose the one which best fits your teaching objectives of the moment. The first option (Way 1) will get the students to re-use their notes while organising them, using appropriate link words and voicing an opinion (which is imposed).
 - The second one (Way 2) offers an interactive writing activity in which each student has to understand and react to a previous post on a forum.
- NB: Depending on the group's motivation and your objectives, “Way 2” can be turned into an oral task, thus becoming a debate.

Going Further

■ Here are some extra documents you can use with your students, either in order to prepare the final task if you decide to make it an oral one, or to go further and help them learn more about Michelle Obama's book.

■ Michelle Obama answers questions about her memoir from John Green (author of *The Fault in Our Stars*) and young "booktubers": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tBFW8nw8_o

■ A short excerpt from the audiobook version of the memoir read by Michelle Obama: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWsJw6egyGw>

SOLUTIONS

1. First Lady / Barack Obama / US president / White House ...

2. a. Before be(com)ing Michelle

Her family

Michelle Robinson born 17 January, 1964 / working-class family

Her mother : Marion, housewife looking after Michelle and her older brother Craig.

Her father : Fraser, worked for the city's water company, and continued working for years with the debilitating condition multiple sclerosis.

Education

Princeton University, then went on to Harvard to do a law degree, like Barack Obama

Michelle worked as a lawyer, then changed to public-service jobs for Chicago town hall, a youth training program and the University of Chicago.

Meeting Barack

Met in the law firm where she was a lawyer and he was an intern / both worked as public servants in Chicago

b. Michelle and the White House

- **Living in the White House** (How long / people/ routine...)

2 terms (8 years) + close watch (bodyguards 24/7)/ life-changing experience for the whole family / the Obamas : MO, Barack and their 2 teenage daughters

-A First Lady's (traditional) role

difficult role / a very public position/ a gracious hostess when foreign leaders visit/ Involved in charitable causes/ non-political role / makes speeches and campaigns for her husband, in his initial campaign and also if and when he tries for re-election.

- Michelle as a First Lady

Michelle Obama created Let's Move, a campaign to fight child obesity through exercise and healthy eating.

She also campaigned for support for military veterans and to help young people access professional training and education, as well as for girls' education internationally.

c. The 2008 Campaign

Routine?

Never alone. Staff + agents guarding them + press waiting for interviews + onlookers snapping pictures from a distance/ programmed life + no privacy , no autonomy / Talking via staff members.

How would you define this period?

This must have been a stressful period / a challenging period for family life + exhausting moments. It may have been frightening.

d. After the White House

Back to normal, no longer journalists and a staff around because away from the WH yet, still secret-service agents / bodyguards.

She felt relieved / experienced relief.

3.a. Examples:

Even though they no longer live in the WH, the Obamas are followed by a staff of bodyguards.

Like previous first ladies, MO got involved in charities.

Despite her involvement in her husband's career, a First Lady is not supposed to be a political figure.

b. Examples:

Contrary to/Unlike Hillary Clinton and Eleanor Roosevelt, Michelle Obama didn't take on a political role in the White House. However, she did campaign for her husband's re-election.

Even if First Ladies have a very public role, there is no job description and no salary.

Unlike/Contrary to previous First Ladies, Eleanor Roosevelt was politically active.

Despite her husband's death, she continued to work on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

4. a. public scrutiny / gracious hostess / secret service protection + earpieces and guns / staff / onlookers / snap pictures / be in the spotlight

b. lawyer / non-profit / careers / working-class student / company / law degree / intern / public service/ professional training

c. be elected/ run for / campaign/ candidate / electoral terms / stand for election / senator / politics