

READING COMPREHENSION

Famous First Ladies

In January, Michelle Obama became the first African-American First Lady in United States history. The wife of a U.S. President is known as the First Lady. The role is unofficial—it's whatever she wants it to be.

Several First Ladies have done great things. On these pages, you will find five of the country's most notable First Ladies. Read about them, then answer the questions that follow.

**MARCH IS
WOMEN'S
HISTORY
MONTH!**



THE NEW FIRST LADY



Before becoming First Lady, **Michelle Obama** worked at a top law firm in Chicago, Illinois. She also was active in her community. Among her many accomplishments, she helped found Public Allies Chicago. The group provides leadership training for young people seeking careers in public service.

Eleanor Roosevelt

First Lady from 1933 to 1945

Eleanor Roosevelt was known not only as the devoted wife of a great President but as the "First Lady of the World."

Her husband, Franklin D. Roosevelt, relied on her to help Americans confront the many challenges that occurred during his presidency. These included the Great Depression of the 1930s, and World War II (1939-1945). In the 1930s and 1940s, Mrs. Roosevelt traveled the nation to raise awareness about the needs of the poor and oppressed.

After President Roosevelt's death in 1945, the new President, Harry S. Truman, chose Mrs. Roosevelt to represent the U.S. at the United Nations. There, she helped to create a global bill of human rights. It said that people worldwide have the right to liberty and justice. Many people believe that it was her greatest accomplishment.

Abigail Adams

First Lady from 1797 to 1801

Abigail Adams's husband, John Adams, was the nation's second President. He helped write the Declaration of Independence and was instrumental in the founding of the nation. John and Abigail shared a close bond, and he often turned to her for advice on political matters. Such a partnership was rare at the time.

Mrs. Adams was one of the country's first champions of women's rights. "Remember the ladies," she wrote to her husband in 1776, when he was attending the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. "And be more generous . . . to them than your ancestors [were]."

Dolley Madison

First Lady from 1809 to 1817

Dolley Madison's elegance and charm as a hostess in the White House made her famous years before her husband was elected President. She often acted as First Lady to President Thomas Jefferson. His wife had died before he was elected. James Madison, Dolley's husband, became President after Jefferson, in 1809.

Mrs. Madison is perhaps best known for rescuing valuables from the White House during the War of 1812. Just hours before the British burned the White House, she helped save a famous portrait of George Washington. She refused to leave the building until the painting was safely taken away.

Jacqueline Kennedy

First Lady from 1961 to 1963

Before becoming First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy worked as a newspaper photographer in Washington, D.C. When her husband, John F. Kennedy, became President in 1961, Mrs. Kennedy brought her keen eye for design to the White House. Her passion for the arts inspired many Americans to become interested in them too.

In November 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated. Mrs. Kennedy handled the tragedy with such courage and grace that she became a symbol of strength around the world.

Hillary Rodham Clinton

First Lady from 1993 to 2001

Hillary Clinton is now the U.S. Secretary of State. She manages U.S. relations with other governments. She is the third woman and first former First Lady to hold that position. In 2001, Secretary Clinton became a U.S. Senator from New York. She was the first former First Lady elected to public office.

Secretary Clinton was a lawyer and businesswoman before becoming First Lady. Her husband, Bill Clinton, became President in 1993. In 2008, Hillary Clinton, then a Democratic Senator, ran a historic campaign to become President herself.

QUESTIONS

1. What qualities did Dolley Madison possess? Why do you think these qualities helped her succeed as a hostess? _____

2. What is unique about Hillary Clinton's achievements, particularly in the past year? _____

3. Why did Jacqueline Kennedy win worldwide admiration after the assassination of her husband? _____

4. Do you think Abigail Adams believed that women in her day were treated fairly? Explain. _____

5. What obstacles did these First Ladies have to overcome? Do you think women are treated equally today? Explain. _____
