

**Teacher's Guide
for
IT HAPPENED IN THE WHITE HOUSE**

**by Lynn Ruehlmann
Storyteller**

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Virginia is known as the Mother of Presidents because these eight presidents were born in Virginia:

George Washington (wife Martha). 1st president, 1789-1797

Thomas Jefferson (wife Martha). 3rd president, 1801-1809

James Madison (wife Dolley). 4th president, 1809-1817.

James Monroe (wife Elizabeth). 5th president, 1817-1825.

William Henry Harrison (wife Anna). 9th president, 1841.

John Tyler (wives Letitia and Julia). 10th president, 1841-1845.

Zachary Taylor (wife Margaret). 12th president, 1849-1850.

Woodrow Wilson (wives Ellen and Edith). 28th president, 1913-1921.

Match these president with the appropriate event or accomplishment:

1. _____ William Henry Harrison

2. _____ George Washington

3. _____ Zachary Taylor

4. _____ James Monroe

5. _____ Thomas Jefferson

6. _____ Woodrow Wilson

7. _____ James Madison

8. _____ John Tyler

a. Helped write the Treaty of Versailles.

b. Was elected vice-president and only became president because the president died.

c. President's house was burned down by British during the War of 1812 while he was president.

d. Founded University of Virginia. Was also an inventor and an architect.

e. Led soldiers at Valley Forge.

f. Served as Ambassador to England, France, Spain. Was senator and governor of Virginia.

g. Died after one month in office as president.

h. Served in the military for forty years before becoming president, including during the Mexican War.

Key: 1.g; 2.e; 3.h; 4.f; 5. d; 6. a; 7. c; 8. b

1. Today our view of the roles of wives of American presidents is shaped by our views of women's liberation. Think about the roles that wives have played in the presidencies of their husbands over the course of American history. Some wives have been actively involved. Some have been ill or simply reluctant to be involved in politics.
 - A. Write about how an involved wife affects her husband's presidency.
 - B. Write a second piece about how a deceased, ill or otherwise uninvolved wife affects the presidency.
 - C. If and when we have a female president, will a male spouse affect the workings of the presidency in the same ways or in different ways? Why?

2. There are many readily available books and internet sources on each of our presidents. Choose one president and his wife. Research the period of that presidency and biographies of that president and his wife. Then write or perform a piece that reflects their personalities and activities. This piece can take the form of a ballad or a reader's theater script or a story for one storyteller to tell, or a skit involving several classmates.

3. The following page is a synopsis of research on Abigail Adams. Pick a person who knew her or might have known her. This should be a person who would be able to talk about events in America during the presidency of Abigail's husband, John Adams' (for example: a servant preparing for an official party, the wife of a politician that Abigail might have encouraged to be active politically, or a child in the family). Then write or tell a human interest story that includes some of these facts.

About Storyteller Lynn Ruehlmann

Lynn has been a professional storyteller since 1990. She has taught storytelling at Old Dominion University, won a Folio Award for Best Actress in a Comedy, and Artist of the Year from Young Audiences of Virginia.

Her recording of "Spy! The Story of Civil War Spy Elizabeth Van Lew" won two national awards.

Abigail Adams 1744-1818
Wife of John Adams, 2nd President
Mother of John Quincy Adams, 6th President

Abigail had very little formal education but she read widely in English, French and history, which is what bonded Abigail and John. They were married when she was 20, and the marriage lasted more than 50 years.

After the birth of four children, John and Abigail were separated a great deal while he attended the Continental Congress in Philadelphia and served as diplomat in Europe. She wrote many letter which have been preserved. She wrote about everyday details of home life, and she also wrote about major events of the Revolutionary period, including information about British troops and ships in the Boston area during the Revolutionary War.

She was a strong supporter of colonial independence from England and women's rights (especially in educational opportunities), and she vigorously opposed slavery.

In a letter to John on December 1773 she wrote:

"Alas! How many snow banks divide thee and me...."

And on March 1776 she wrote John (sic):

"Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands... If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound to any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation."

When John Adams was elected President, Abigail held formal dinner parties and receptions even though she thought conditions were primitive at the newly built President's House in Washington, D.C.

EVALUATION FOR PROGRAM BY
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*Lynn Ruehlmann came to your school recently. Could you please take an minute to fill out this evaluation and return it to her at 621 New Hampshire Avenue
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Or e-mail: ruehlmann@erols.com*

Thanks so much for your help!

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What program or workshop did you attend?

What did you or your students like best about the program and/or workshop? Why?

Was there anything you or your students would have wanted changed?

Are there any particular stories or kinds of stories that you would like to hear in the future?

What material or skills would you like covered in the future in a workshop?

Do you have any other comments?

Optional signature

Thank you again for your help and opinions. They are so important and appreciated!