

## What if My Parent were President?

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**About this Lesson**

*Americans have long been fascinated with the children of their presidents. Whether they have been used as political tools or protected from public eyes, these children have become the subject of intense media coverage. Both major candidates in the 2008 campaign have children who have joined them on the campaign trail and who would live in the White House. This activity is designed to familiarize elementary students with the experiences of children in presidential campaigns and in the White House, including historic and contemporary examples. Using primary source documents, students will be able to analyze how their lives would change if their parent decided to run for president of the United States. This lesson can be used as part of a unit on the Constitution or as a current events activity. It incorporates technology, class discussion and small group work.*

**Grade(s) Level**

3-5

**Classroom Time**

One 90-minute class period or two 45-minute periods

**Handouts**

Presidential Pros &amp; Cons Graphic Organizer

**Constitution Connections**

Article II

**Background**

From the Lincoln boys to Chelsea Clinton and the Bush twins, presidential children have been the focus of intense media and public interest. Children in the White House receive many special privileges but those privileges come with heavy burdens. In addition to changing schools and homes, presidential children have to cope with being covered by the media and losing their privacy.

This lesson plan will have significant importance in 2008, and in the next four years, since both major candidates have children taking part in the campaign. John McCain has seven children, including a daughter in high school and another daughter who blogs regularly from the campaign trail. Barack Obama has two school-age daughters who have attended campaign events and are featured in his campaign literature. This article from the Belleville News-Democrat includes many details on the lives of children in the White House (<http://www.bnd.com/living/story/396090.html>)

**Objectives**

Students will:

- Examine historical experiences of children living in the White House.
- Identify and analyze the pros and cons of having a parent as president and living in the White House.
- Identify candidates and families in the 2008 presidential campaign.

**Standards**

From National Council for the Social Studies,  
[www.ncss.org/standards/strands](http://www.ncss.org/standards/strands)

- **IV: Individual Development and Identity:** *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.*
- **X: Civic Ideals and Practices:** *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.*

## Activity

### Warm Up:

1. Begin with a discussion on the 2008 presidential candidates and what the students know about John McCain and Barack Obama and their children, or anything else about life in the White House. List students' prior knowledge in a visual space or use a KWL chart to discuss what they know and would like to learn.

### In-Class Activity:

1. Read aloud one of the following books, or share the following video with the class:
  - *So You Want to Be President* by Judith St. George
  - *If These Walls Could Talk: Family Life in the White House* by Jane O'Connor.
  - If I Were President... <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gapCySSNxow>
2. Display any or all of the following primary sources either on a projector or in hard copy, and discuss with students:
  - [Kennedy picnic at the White House](#)
  - [Kennedy children with pony at the White House](#)
  - [JFK Jr. in the Oval Office](#)
  - [Amy Carter in the Cabinet Room](#)
  - [Tricia Nixon's White House wedding](#)
  - [Susan Ford washes her car at the White House](#)
  - [Chelsea Clinton with Socks in the Oval Office](#)
  - [Laura Bush with dogs in the Rose Garden](#)
  - [Laura and Jenna Bush land in Air Force One](#)
  - [2008 White House Easter Egg Roll](#)
3. Discuss with students negative aspects of having a parent elected president – changing schools, moving houses, being followed by press, Secret Service protection, etc.
4. In groups or in pairs, students should work to fill out the *Presidential Pros and Cons* graphic organizer.
5. As a class, discuss pros and cons. Students will share with the class whether they would want their parent to be president and why or why not. Keep a tally of all student responses (this could be used for math activity).

## **Assessment-Options**

- Write a story complete with illustrations or create a comic strip depicting your perfect day in the White House, taking advantage of everything being the president's child has to offer.
- Students will write a letter to his/her own parents telling them why or why not to run for president.
- Research the McCain and Obama families on their websites (listed below) and prepare interview questions for the families.

# Presidential Pros and Cons

Directions: With a partner or in a group, fill out the chart below with pros and cons of having your mom or dad run for president. How would your life change in positive or negative ways? List as many as you can.

Pros +	Cons -