

Public Image

Managing the Image

Look for the Merrick thread card.

What do all of the things in this case have in common? How are they different? Can you figure out why the country was so fascinated by Frances Cleveland, who became first lady when she was only 21?



Look for photos of Edith Roosevelt and Jacqueline Kennedy with their children.

Nearly 60 years separated Theodore Roosevelt's and John Kennedy's presidencies, but their wives managed their families' images in similar ways. Both Edith Roosevelt and Jacqueline Kennedy were very careful about which pictures of them and their families they allowed people to see. Do you see why the first ladies approved these photos?



How do you manage *your* image? Do you ever hide unflattering pictures of yourself from your friends? If people who don't know you ever saw pictures of you and your family, what would they think of you? Would they be able to guess what you're really like?



Emblems of Style



Look for drawings of the turkey.

Most first ladies have chosen the china used for entertaining at the White House. When Lucy Hayes moved to the White House in 1877, the country was still recovering from the Civil War. Looking for a way to show a reunited America, she had china designed that depicted plants and animals from all parts of the United States.

What are the things that every town has in common? What would you draw to create a symbol of national unity?

Find Edith Wilson's green satin shoes.

When might Edith Wilson have worn these shoes?

If the museum were doing an exhibition about you, what articles of clothing would best represent you?



After the White House

Find the crystal apple.



Barbara Bush, like her daughter-in-law Laura Bush, cares very much about education. After leaving the White House, she has continued to encourage people to learn to read. This apple is an award she received.

Leaving the White House after you've been first lady is a little bit like retiring from a job. Former first ladies volunteer and sometimes take new jobs. Are your grandparents retired? What do they do? Do they volunteer or pursue hobbies or maybe work at a new job? What do you think you'll want to do when you retire?

Thanks for visiting . . . Want to know more?

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression by Robert Cohen (University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

First Ladies by Amy Pastan (DK Publishing in association with the Smithsonian Institution, 2001).

First Ladies: Political Role and Public Image by Edith P. Mayo and Lisa Kathleen Graddy (Scala Publishers Ltd., 2004).

It Happened in the White House: Extraordinary Tales from America's Most Famous Home by Kathleen Karr (Hyperion Books for Children, 2000).

The Look-It-Up Book of First Ladies by S.A. Kramer (Random House, 2001).

The Smithsonian Book of the First Ladies: Their Times, Lives, and Issues by Edith P. Mayo (H. Holt, 1996).

The White House, An Illustrated History by Catherine O'Neill Grace (Scholastic Nonfiction with the White House Historical Association, 2003).

Visit the National Museum of American History's website (americanhistory.si.edu) to learn more about the Museum's exhibitions, collections, and programs.

All object photographs courtesy National Museum of American History.

Dolley Madison portrait, Abigail Adams painting, White House dining table photo courtesy White House Historical Society (White House Collection); Eleanor Roosevelt photo © Bettman/Corbis; Laura Bush photo courtesy White House/Carol Powers; President and Mrs. Carter photo courtesy Jimmy Carter Library; Kennedy family photo courtesy Mark Shaw Collection/Photo Researchers; Roosevelt family photo courtesy Library of Congress.

Sarah Polk writing box lent by James K. Polk Memorial Association; Barbara Bush crystal apple lent by Museum of the George Bush Presidential Library.

Written by Heather Phillips | Designed by The PRD Group Ltd.

© 2004 Smithsonian Institution

First Ladies: Political Role and Public Image was developed by the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, Behring Center, and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service.

First Ladies is made possible by A&E Network. Additional support is provided by The Fannie and Stephen Kahn Charitable Foundation and the Smithsonian Special Exhibitions Fund.



First Ladies

Political Role
& Public Image



Family Guide



Dolley Madison, by Gilbert Stuart, 1804

As you go through the exhibition, imagine what it would be like to move into the White House and become someone that other people look to for help, for political or social advice, or even for fashion ideas! See if these women inspire you to run for election at your school or volunteer for a good cause.

Have fun learning about their lives in and after the White House and investigating the things that were important to them.



Dolley Madison's gown

Political Role

Inventing the Role

Find the wall lamp.



Before the White House was built, George and Martha Washington lived in mansions in New York and Philadelphia. They wanted the president's house to look elegant and important, but they did not want to seem like European kings and queens. Can you think why?

If you had just moved into the White House, how would you decorate your new home? Would it be fancy with lots of furniture, curtains, and silver or cozy and informal? How would you like your guests to feel when they're visiting you?

Look at the Washingtons' lamp, tea tray, and plates.

Imagine you are Martha Washington making sure that the tables are set and the lamps are lit for your guests. Now imagine you are her guest. How do you feel?

Find a drawing of a woman hanging laundry.

What do you see in this picture? Is there anything unusual about the room? The woman on the left side of the picture is Abigail Adams. When she moved into the White House, the house wasn't finished, and the new capital city of Washington was still under construction. Imagine being expected to have people over for tea when the city you live in and even your house are still being built!



Social Partner

Find the gilt epergne (*ay PEARN*).

First ladies have always been expected to be the nation's hostess, so many of the objects in the Smithsonian's first ladies collection are things they used for special occasions.

Louisa Catherine Adams used this epergne—a decorative dining room centerpiece—when she entertained. What do you think it held? Look around at the different dishes in the nearby cases. Do you have party plates at home? Do you use them with different silverware or nicer tablecloths when special friends or relatives visit?

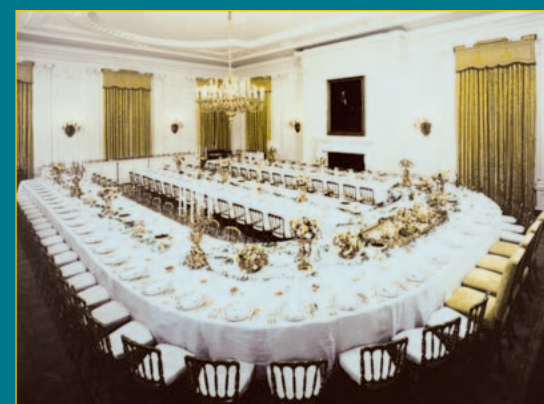


Find the "at home" card.

Edith Roosevelt, like many other women in her social circle, sent cards like this to let people know when she was at home and available to see visitors. How have traditions changed? When you want to have friends over, how do you let them know?

Look for the photograph of an E-shaped dining table.

Mamie Eisenhower thought it would be a good idea to have more people attend the official dinners she and the president hosted in the 1950s. She changed from a U-shaped table to one that was shaped like an "E"—it's also the same letter that begins her last name. The E shape worked so well that other first ladies used it, too. Can you imagine arranging tables to make the first letter of your last name? Will your letter allow more people to sit at the table?



Advocate of Social Causes

Find the wildflower scarf.



Many first ladies pick a special project that's very important to them. Often it's something they believe will help others or will make the country a better place to live. Lady Bird Johnson encouraged people to clean up their neighborhoods, plant trees and flowers, and protect the environment.

Would you have guessed that the flowers on Lady Bird Johnson's scarf were meant to remind others to make the world beautiful? What concerns you about the world? Homelessness? Cancer research? Equal rights? How would you encourage people to do something about it? Would you design a sports cap, pin, or t-shirt? Draw your design when you get home.

Find the photo of Laura Bush reading.

Before she came to the White House, Laura Bush was a teacher and a librarian. She believes education is very important. If you lived in the White House, would you publicly encourage people to support issues that are important to you?



Look for these photos . . .



Eleanor Roosevelt was one of our busiest first ladies. Walking through the exhibition, you'll see her feeding the poor in a soup kitchen, visiting coal miners underground in a mine, meeting troops in World War II, and working as a delegate to the United Nations after she left the White House.

Political Partners

Find the writing case.

Sarah Polk used this writing case, which was used to store pens and paper, when she reviewed her husband's speeches. Imagine you're Sarah talking with James Polk about the future of the country. It's 1845, and you're discussing the possibility of expanding the United States to include all the land out to the Pacific Ocean. You give him your opinion and tell him what the congressmen you've been talking to think of the idea.

If you were married to the president, would you be bold, like Sarah, and give the president your opinion and advice?



Look for a picture of a president and a first lady sitting at a table.



This photograph shows Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter having what they called a "working lunch." The Carters might be discussing what happened during the morning, what's going on in the country, or even around the world!

What things do you talk about at the dinner table? Do you describe what happened during the day?

First Ladies on the Campaign Trail

Look for the Pat Nixon table decoration.

Describe some of the other campaign items that you see nearby. If your school were holding an election, what would you use to campaign—buttons, ribbons, posters? Would you use the computer to make fliers with your photo on them or create a website? Would you get friends or your family to help you? Would you try to talk to everyone in your class or your school and ask for their vote?

