

THE WHITE HOUSE

Teacher Guide



From Foundation to
Renovation: Unveiling the
Legacy and Significance
of the White House

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First Grade Teacher Guide



National Mall, Canva Pro

Key Themes

- American Identity and Unity
- Leadership
- Monuments

Core Values

- Community
- Liberty

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

- Identify the White House.
- Outline the major renovations and changes the White House has experienced over the years.
- List two facts about the White House.



The White House, Canva Pro

Key Terms

- 01 **cornerstone:** an important stone that forms part of a corner or angle in a wall.
- 02 **Federal Hall:** the first capitol building of the United States, where George Washington was inaugurated as America's first president in 1789.
- 03 **Oval Office:** a very special room in the White House where the President of the United States works.
- 04 **portico:** a covered walk or porch with a roof that is held up by columns.
- 05 **Resolute Desk:** a nineteenth-century desk used by several presidents of the United States in the Oval Office.
- 06 **Washington, D.C.:** the capital of the United States. It was named after George Washington, our country's first president.

Introduction

TELL Students

Think about your house where you eat, sleep, play, and spend time with your family. Now, think about a very special house in Washington, D.C., called the White House. It is a lot like your house but also very different in some cool ways! **Washington, D.C.** is the capital of the United States. It was named after George Washington, our country's first president.

ASK Students

Who lives in the White House?

TELL Students

In your house, you live with your family. The White House is where the President of the United States lives with their family while they are president. But, it is also their office where they work and meet with other important people from all around the world. Your house might have a few bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room, right? The White House is much, much bigger! It has 132 rooms, including its own movie theater, a bowling alley, and even a big room just for making chocolate!

ASK Students

How is your house similar to the White House? How is your house different from the White House?

TELL Students

Most houses can be all sorts of colors, but the White House is always white. It would be silly to paint the White House blue and call it the White House!

ASK Students

How would you describe the White House?

Introduction

TELL Students

Just like your house has spaces for homework and playtime, the White House has offices and lots of places for fun too. But, the President works in a special room called the Oval Office, which is shaped like an egg! The **Oval Office** is a very special room in the White House where the President of the United States works. You might have friends and family come to visit your house. The White House has visitors too, but it also has tours for people to come and learn about its history and the presidents who have lived there.

ASK Students

Have you ever visited the White House?

TELL Students

You might celebrate birthdays or holidays at your house. The White House hosts big celebrations for things like Easter with the Easter Egg Roll and other important events with leaders from around the world. So, even though the White House might seem really different from your house, it is also a place where a family lives, works, and plays—just on a much bigger scale!



White House, Canva Pro



Easter Egg Roll, Wikipedia

WATCH

[Star Spangled Adventures Cartoon Ep. 28: The White House](#)



Lesson

TELL Students

Did you know that when George Washington, America's first president, was in charge, there was no White House? At this time, the White House had not been built. And Washington, D.C. was not even a city!

ASK Students

Who was the first President of the United States?

TELL Students

Yes, George Washington! The first capital of the United States was in New York City. This is where George Washington took his oath of office in a special place called Federal Hall. **Federal Hall** is the first capitol building of the United States, where George Washington was inaugurated as America's first president in 1789.



George Washington, Canva Pro



Federal Hall, Canva Pro

Lesson

ASK Students

Where do you think George Washington lived?

TELL Students

When George Washington became president in 1789, he did not have the White House to move into because it had not been built yet, and Washington, D.C. did not exist. The first capital of the United States was New York City, where Congress met and where George Washington took his oath of office. Since there was no White House, Congress found a house for him to live in on 3 Cherry Street. It was a good place at first, but soon it became too small and too far from everything important.

ASK Students

Where did George Washington live when he became president?

TELL Students

In 1790, George Washington and his family moved to a larger house on 39 Broadway. The leaders of the country had to decide where the permanent capital should be. After some debating, they agreed on a spot along the Potomac River. George Washington helped plan the new city. They named it Washington, D.C., and it became the capital of the United States.



Washington D.C., Canva Pro

Lesson

ASK Students

Where is the capital of the United States today? Why was it named Washington, D.C.?

TELL Students

When George Washington finished his time as president, John Adams moved into the President's House in Philadelphia, which was the official residence for presidents before the White House was built. During the time when presidents lived in Philadelphia, our nation was busy building its capital city, Washington, D.C.

ASK Students

Who became president after George Washington?

TELL Students

The design of the White House, which was then called the "President's House" or the "Executive Mansion," was decided through a contest announced by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson. The winner of the contest would receive either \$500 or a medal of equal value. An Irish-born architect named James Hoban won the contest.



James Hoban, Wikipedia



War of 1812, Canva Pro

Lesson

ASK Students

Who won the contest to design the White House?

TELL Students

Construction began on October 13, 1792, with the laying of the cornerstone. A **cornerstone** is an important stone that forms part of a corner or angle in a wall. It was a big project! Land had to be cleared, roads built, trees cut down, bridges constructed, and materials gathered. Bricks for the inside of the White House were made nearby, and trees were cut in Maryland and Virginia for floors and roof timbers. Many workers were involved in this hard work.

ASK Students

Do you think the White House was easy to build?

TELL Students

The White House was not easy to build. And, it was rebuilt after it burned down in a war with Great Britain called the War of 1812. It has also been updated over time, just like in the Star Spangled Adventures episode.

ASK Students

What happened to the White House in the War of 1812?

Lesson

TELL Students

During the War of 1812, which was a conflict between the United States and England, British soldiers came to the nation's capital and set fire to the White House on August 24, 1814. Before the attack, President James Madison and First Lady Dolley Madison left to stay safe. When the British soldiers got to the White House and saw that the Madisons were gone, some stories say they had a meal of leftovers using the fancy dishes and silverware from the White House. They also did some things that were unkind, like putting the president's hats on their bayonets and marching around. They broke windows, moved furniture, and even lit torches and threw them through the broken windows.



ASK Students

British soldiers attack D.C., Architect of the Capitol

What did the British soldiers do in the White House during the War of 1812?

TELL Students

After the British soldiers left, the Madisons returned to the city three days later. But they couldn't stay in the White House because it was destroyed. Instead, they moved to the Octagon House. The person who made the White House in the first place, James Hoban, was asked to fix it. And by 1817, he finished. He worked with another builder named Benjamin Henry Latrobe to add a big porch with columns in 1824 (called the South Portico) and another one in 1829 (called the North Portico). A **portico** is a covered walk or porch with a roof that is held up by columns. These porches made the White House look even more beautiful!

Lesson

ASK Students

What is the South Portico and the North Portico?

TELL Students

In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt made some big changes to the White House. He brought the house into the modern age with electric lights and added a whole new section called the West Wing. This is a really important part of the White House because it is where the president works and meets with his top advisors. The West Wing contains the Oval Office, the Cabinet Room, the Situation Room, and the Roosevelt Room. Originally, President Theodore Roosevelt worked in a temporary space in the West Wing, but it wasn't until President William Howard Taft came along that the Oval Office was created. Taft was the first president to use the Oval Office.

ASK Students

Where does the president work and meet with his top advisors?



Madisons in Octagon House, Canva Pro



West Wing, Wikipedia



North & South Portico, Wikipedia

Lesson

TELL Students

The Oval Office is a very special room in the White House, which is where the President of the United States works. Imagine a big, oval-shaped room—like an egg—filled with a large desk, comfy chairs, and lots of pictures and flags. This room is important because it is where the president makes big decisions, meets with other leaders from around the world, and talks to people who help run the country.

ASK Students

What is the Oval Office?

TELL Students

There is a famous desk inside the Oval Office called the Resolute Desk where the president sits to do his work. The **Resolute Desk** is a nineteenth-century desk used by several presidents of the United States in the Oval Office. This desk has a cool history—it was made from the wood of a British ship and has been used by many presidents. The room also has special decorations chosen by each president, so it changes a little bit every time a new president comes in.

ASK Students

How would you decorate the Oval Office if you were the President of the United States?



Oval Office, Canva Pro

Lesson

TELL Students

Today, the White House is a huge building with a lot of interesting features! It is about 55,000 square feet big. That is like having many school gymnasiums all in one place! Over the years, presidents have added rooms and features to the White House. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had an indoor swimming pool installed. And, President Gerald R. Ford added an outdoor pool. There is also a bowling alley, putting green, movie theater, tennis court, and running track.



White House Areas, Wikipedia

ASK Students

What would you add to the White House if you were the President of the United States?

TELL Students

The White House is not just for fun, it is the place where the President works and lives. Important decisions are made in the White House. Visiting the White House is a special experience. You can learn about our country's history and the leaders who helped shape it. Maybe one day, you could even live and work there too!

WATCH

[Learn More With Liberty: What is the Oval Office?](#)



My Day in the Oval Office

Objective: To introduce first graders to the role of the president and the significance of the Oval Office in a fun, interactive manner.

Materials Needed:

- A designated area of the classroom set up to resemble the Oval Office. This doesn't need to be elaborate; a desk, a few chairs, a "presidential" phone (toy or disconnected real phone), some flags, and perhaps a homemade Presidential Seal.
- Costume pieces like suits, ties, glasses, and perhaps some hats to resemble the president or other officials.
- Printed pictures or illustrations of the Oval Office and its common features for reference.
- Simple task cards that describe presidential duties in an age-appropriate manner (e.g., meeting with advisors, signing a bill into law, giving a speech).
- Craft materials for creating flags, seals, or other presidential symbols.
- A digital camera or smartphone for taking photos of each student in their presidential role (optional, with parental permission).

Setting the Scene:

- Begin by briefly explaining what the Oval Office is: "The Oval Office is a special room where the President works and makes important decisions to help our country."
- Show the children the mock Oval Office setup and the costume pieces. Let them explore the setup and try on the costumes.

My Day in the Oval Office

Role-Play:

- Divide the students into small groups. Each group gets a turn in the mock Oval Office.
- Assign simple tasks to each "President" using the task cards. Examples: "Decide on a new rule for our school," "Meet with an advisor (another student) to discuss a fun event," or "Sign a pretend bill into law."
- Encourage them to act out these roles, using the props and costumes available. Teachers or aides can act as advisors or other officials.

Craft Time: While waiting for their turn in the Oval Office or after everyone has had a turn, have the children engage in a related craft activity. They could make their own Presidential Seal, design a flag, or draw a picture of the Oval Office.

Photo Op: If possible, take a photo of each child acting as the President at the desk, making a decision, or giving a speech. These photos can be a fun keepsake for the children and their families.

Reflection: At the end of the activity, gather the children and ask them to share one thing they learned about being the President or the Oval Office. Encourage them to talk about their favorite part of the activity.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Descriptive Writing

The White House



What does the White House look like?
Draw it and describe it.

Resources

- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/new-york-historic/>
- https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/treasures_of_congress/text/page2_text.html
- <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1700s/The-first-inauguration-at-Federal-Hall-in-New-York-City/>
- <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/how-philadelphia-lost-the-nations-capital-to-washington>
- <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/presidential-residency-in-new-york/>
- <https://guides.loc.gov/residence-act>
- <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-first-president/building-the-new-nations-capital/>
- <https://www.history.com/news/how-did-washington-d-c-get-its-name>
- <https://www.nps.gov/inde/learn/historyculture/places-presidentshousesite.htm>
- <https://www.nps.gov/inde/learn/historyculture/the-presidents-house-washington-and-adams.htm>
- <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/photos/fotoware?id=5E1FCB3066744273%2097AC1F8FB685754A>
- <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/questions/how-did-the-white-house-get-its-name>
- <https://www.history.com/topics/landmarks/white-house>
- <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/building-the-white-house>
- <https://www.history.com/news/white-house-history-facts-presidents>
- <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/construction-of-the-white-house>
- <https://www.history.com/topics/landmarks/white-house>
- <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/british-troops-set-fire-to-the-white-house>

Resources

- <https://www.foxnews.com/lifestyle/this-day-history-august-24-british-troops-ransack-torch-white-house-capitol>
- <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/british-troops-set-fire-to-the-white-house>
- <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/white-house-renovations-timeline>
- <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/questions/has-the-white-house-ever-been-renovated-or-changed>
- <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/questions/why-is-the-oval-office-oval>
- <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/questions/how-big-is-the-white-house>
- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/the-grounds/the-white-house/#:~:text=Our%20first%20president%2C%20George%20Washington,architect%20James%20Hoban%20was%20chosen>
- <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/questions/does-the-white-house-have-a-pool>

