

INTRODUCTION

The White House is the official residence of the President of the United States, as well as their families. Children of presidents are often referred to as “first kids.” These children have the opportunity to live in the White House, travel the world, and meet famous people. First kids are challenged by growing up in the public eye and are constantly surrounded by Secret Service agents. Even with this unusual lifestyle, White House history is full of stories of first kids just being kids. These children go to school, spend time with their parents, care for pets, and find ways to have fun. Learn what it has been like to grow up at different moments in White House history through the experiences of several first kids.

CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

In March 1861, Willie and Tad Lincoln moved into the White House with their parents President Abraham Lincoln and First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln (**Image 1**). While Presidents James Monroe and John Tyler brought their young children to the White House, these kids did not receive the same attention as Willie and Tad. When the Lincoln family moved in, Willie was ten years old and Tad was seven years old. Sadly, Willie passed away less than a year later. This meant that Tad, now the only child living in the White House, had to create his own fun in a house full of busy adults. Tad was known for having a mischievous streak, but he was almost never disciplined by his parents. President Lincoln found Tad’s pranks particularly amusing and a welcome relief from his presidential responsibilities (**Image 2**). Tad would at times tether his beloved goats, Nannie and Nanko, to a chair and ride around the White House as if he were on a chariot (**Image 3**).



Image 2

Another group of rambunctious first kids to live in the White House were the six children of President Theodore Roosevelt. The children—Alice, Theodore Jr., Kermit, Ethel, Archie, and Quentin—moved into the White House in 1901 (**Image 4**). Guests visiting the White House would often see the Roosevelt children racing up and down the hallways on roller skates and sliding down bannisters. Quentin, the youngest, was almost four years old when his father became president



Image 5

(**Image 5**). He played in and around the White House with a group of school friends that his father named the “White House Gang.” Once, when his brother Archie was ill, Quentin snuck their pony Algonquin in the elevator to the kids’ second-floor bedroom (**Image 6**). President Roosevelt once said that “I don’t think any family has ever enjoyed the White House more than we have.”

Not all first kids were as young as Tad Lincoln and Quentin Roosevelt. Susan Ford was a senior in high school when her father Gerald Ford became president in 1974. Susan gave her classmates a night to remember when she hosted the first and only high school prom at the White House (**Image 7**). Chelsea Clinton was thirteen when her father Bill Clinton took office in 1993 (**Image 8**). After some unkind things were said about her on television, Chelsea’s parents worked hard to keep stories about her out of the news. When she left for college at Stanford University in 1997, Secret Service officers attended classes with her and lived in her dormitory.

Security has long been a concern at the White House for first kids. In the 1890s, during President Grover Cleveland’s second term, First Lady Francis Cleveland ordered the south lawn gate closed to all visitors after seeing a frightening incident involving their young daughter Ruth. A crowd of curious strangers had surrounded Ruth and her nanny on the White House Lawn and, picking her up, passed her around to be hugged and kissed. Concerns mounted over the next two decades, and in

1917, the decision was made that the Secret Service would protect every member of the first family, not just the president. Since World War II the degree of Secret Service protection for the president and family has increased significantly, and the relationship can be, as President Harry Truman's daughter Margaret wrote in 1972, "often hectic, but never unfriendly" (**Image 9**).

First kids frequently deal with issues other kids do not encounter, but they continue to find ways to simply be kids and make the White House a home in their own unique way. John Jr. and Caroline Kennedy loved to play in the Oval Office and visit their father President John F. Kennedy (**Image 10**). First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy created a classroom in the third-floor Solarium where Caroline and her classmates met (**Image 11**). Amy Carter

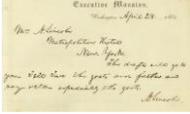


Image 11

attended public school in Washington, D.C., and enjoyed spending time in a tree house that was built for her on the White House Grounds (**Image 12**). When Malia and Sasha Obama moved into the White House in 2009, the staff organized a scavenger hunt to show them around their new home, which included a surprise visit from their favorite band, the Jonas Brothers. For generations, first families have attempted to retain some semblance of a normal life in the White House and protect the privacy of the children living there.

IMAGES

Click on web link to access online and for larger viewing

Source	Title	Date	Created By	Courtesy Of	Thumbnail	Web Link
1	The Lincoln Family	Unknown	Thomas Kelly	White House Collection/ White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Abraham%20Lincoln/1750.tif.info
2	Abraham Lincoln with Tad	1865	Alexander Gardner	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Abraham%20Lincoln/1430.tif.info
3	Letter from Abraham Lincoln to Mary Todd Lincoln	1864	Abraham Lincoln	National Archives and Record Administration		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Abraham%20Lincoln/1112755.tif.info
4	Theodore Roosevelt Family	1903	Unknown	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Theodore%20Roosevelt/1637.tif.info
5	White House Policeman Holds Algonquin's Reins	1902	Frances Benjamin Johnston	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Theodore%20Roosevelt/1082.tif.info

6	Algonquin Visits Archie in Bed with the Measles	Unknown	F. W. Brouard	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Theodore%20Roosevelt/2243.tif.info
7	Susan Ford and Guests at her High School Prom	1975	Ricardo Thomas	Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Gerald%20Ford/2081.tif.info
8	President Clinton, Chelsea Clinton and Socks Clinton (Cat) in the Oval Office	1994	Robert McNeely	William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Bill%20Clinton/572.tif.info
9	The Truman Family	Ca. 1946	Brooks	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Harry%20Truman/1160.tif.info
10	Kennedy Children Visit the President in the Oval Office	1962	Unknown	John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/John%20F%20Kennedy/2976.tif.info

11	Caroline Kennedy in the Solarium School	Ca. 1961-1963	Unknown	John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/John%20F%20Kennedy/1517.tif.info
12	President Jimmy Carter, Amy Carter, and Jason Carter	1981	Unknown	Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Jimmy%20Carter/4232.tif.info

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Video: “Picturing Life at the White House During the Civil War” featuring Evan Phifer, Research Historian at the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Article: “The White House Album: The Theodore Roosevelt Years” by James M. Goode for the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Article: “Nellie Arthur in the White House” by Edward G. Lengel for the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Article: “Alice Roosevelt Longworth: Presidential Daughter and American Celebrity” by Lina Mann, White House Historian at the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

For Younger Learners

- Explore the White House on a virtual scavenger hunt! Take a free virtual kids’ tour on a tablet or smart phone to see important rooms and spaces and how they have looked over time and use the attached scavenger hunt page to find clues about different rooms on the tour!
Ask an adult to download the White House Historical Association’s WH Experience app [here](#).
- Imagine you are a first kid leaving the White House and writing a letter to the next first kid. What would you tell them about growing up in the White House? What would be your favorite things to do? What made you happy or sad? Draw or write your response.

For Older Learners

- Create a script or storyboard of a historic first kid moment using the above essay or researching another event. Perform your play at home or ask others to participate in a “table reading” of the script with you.
- Consider all of the rules, responsibilities, restrictions, and excitement that may come with being a first kid. List the pros and cons of being a first kid and decide if you’d want to be first kid. Discuss the list with friends and family, and ask them if they would want to be a first kid, and why.