

Ellen Alderton

Language Arts Lesson Plan: The First Lady

Grade:

5

Objectives:

- To review the role(s) of the White House and the people who live and work there.
- To identify new vocabulary words from The Platypus Walk song lyrics.
- To design gestures for these words.
- To dance to The Platypus Walk, acting out new vocabulary word gestures.
- To learn about and discuss the role of the First Lady, respectfully defending and criticizing different points of view orally.
- To write about what students would do if they were First Lady/First Gentleman, incorporating at least four new vocabulary words.

Lesson Time:

(50 minutes)

Materials/Preparation:

Slide projector. Slide of three federal buildings (Appendix A). Platypus Walk lyrics hand-out (Appendix B). Slide of Platypus Walk Lyrics (created from Appendix B). Video of Platypus Walk with Michelle Obama participating (available online at:

<https://search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?p=michelle+obama+platypus+walk&ei=UTF->

[8&hspart=mozilla&hsimp=yhs-002](https://search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?p=michelle+obama+platypus+walk&ei=UTF-8&hspart=mozilla&hsimp=yhs-002)) Slide of essay questions (created from independent

practice section below). Space is needed for the students to dance; desks can be arranged in a circle or a semi-circle.

Activating Prior Knowledge:

(10 minutes)

In a guided group discussion, explore the questions below:

- 1) Show the slide of the three federal buildings (Appendix A). Which are these three federal buildings? (The White House, the Supreme Court, and the Capitol Building.)
- 2) What branch of the federal government is represented by the White House? (The executive branch.)
- 3) Can you name everyone who lives in the White House? (President Obama and his immediate family: the First Lady, Michelle Obama; the Obama daughters, Sasha and Malia, and Mrs. Obama's mother, Marian Robinson. Secret Service officers do not live in the White House, although they often spend the night there.)
- 4) How many people can you think of who work in the White House? (The President, the First Lady, the Secret Service, the White House housekeeping staff, the White House chef and cooking staff. Also, official working meetings are held in the White House with cabinet members, politicians, political advisors and foreign dignitaries. Some political advisors and administrative staff also have offices in the White House.)

Guided Practice:

(13 minutes)

- 1) Play the video of “The Platypus Walk” dance with Michelle Obama participating.

Ask the class why the First Lady would be interested in participating in this dance with kids. (She wants to promote physical fitness.) Ask the class what other steps they think the First Lady might be taking to improve young people’s health. (Mrs. Obama is encouraging healthy eating—meaning fewer desserts and sodas and more fruits and vegetables. She is also encouraging families who can to practice gardening, and she has worked to improve the health quality of school lunches.) Ask the students what are some of the social problems that Mrs. Obama might be countering. (Inactivity among young people. Overweight and obesity among young people. The possibility of developing diabetes, heart problems or other diseases later in life.)

- 2) Pass out the lyrics to The Platypus Walk (Appendix B). Instruct students to read the lyrics silently and to underline vocabulary¹ they are not familiar with. Go over new vocabulary, writing down definitions (using words and drawings) on the board.

¹ Looking at normalized lists of vocabulary words for different reading levels, I concluded that The Platypus Walk is likely best suited for a fifth-grade reading level.

Flocabulary. *5th grade vocabulary word list*. Retrieved from: <https://www.flocabulary.com/5th-grade-vocabulary-word-list/>

- 3) Guide the class in designing body-language signs for new vocabulary words. For example, for “semi-aquatic,” students could make swimming motions with their arms; for “charismatic,” they could grin and make jazz hands.²
- 4) Have the students write the definitions to the new words in their class notebooks, using both words and drawings.
- 5) Project the lyrics to The Platypus Walk, and play the music from the video. Have the students stand up and dance to the music while reading the lyrics on the slide. Dancing can be freestyle, but, for new vocabulary words, have students dance the gestures they designed. Repeat the dance at least once, and more often if time allows.

Closure:

(10 minutes)

- 1) Ask students what the responsibilities of the First Lady are. (Traditionally, the First Lady has acted more as a hostess, re-decorating the White House, and accompanying the President to social events. In modern times, the First Lady often has a cause that she champions. Nancy Reagan asked kids to “just say no” to drugs. Laura Bush promoted reading. Hillary Clinton tried to implement healthcare reform. Write

² Using the body to act out words helps in the retention of new vocabulary.

- answers on the board and encourage debate: Who prefers traditional and who prefers modern approaches?)
- 2) Ask students what topics they might want to take on if they were First Lady or First Gentleman of the United States. (Write responses on the board and guide the answers to also include such social issues as: getting a good education, avoiding school drop-out, not taking drugs, environmental justice, climate change, safety in schools, shooting in schools, shootings in the neighborhood.³ Again, encourage debate: Are there any topics that are not appropriate for the First Lady? Why or why not?)

Independent Practice:

(17 minutes)

- 1) Project a slide of the following questions:
- a. What project would I work on if I were First Lady/First Gentleman?
 - b. Who is the target audience for this project?
 - c. Why would I choose this particular project?
 - d. What are some projects that I think it would be important to avoid if I were First Lady/First Gentleman? Why?

³Ladson-Billings reports that literacy activities that explore social change and justice can be particularly helpful in stimulating learning in language arts classes.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). Reading between the lines and beyond the pages: A culturally relevant approach to literacy teaching. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(4).

- e. Why do I think the project I have chosen is more important than other projects?
 - f. How would I implement this project? (What people and organizations would I work with? What kinds of activities and events would I take part in? What behaviors would I recommend for my audience?)
- 2) Go over the questions and make sure the students understand them. Tell them that they will have until the end of the class to write out their answers in their notebooks. Tell them they must write in complete sentences, and that they must use four new vocabulary words from today's lesson and circle these words.
- 3) While the students are writing, circulate among them and provide individual guidance. Add new words to the vocabulary wall. Collect notebooks when time is up.

Assessment:

Review student essays: Did students answer all questions? Are their answers cogent, and do their answers reflect an understanding of the questions? Did they write in complete sentences? Did they correctly use (and underline) four new vocabulary words?

Appendix A: Slide of Three Federal Buildings



Appendix B**The Platypus Walk**

Walk the platypus walk,

Talk the platypus talk.

Walk the platypus walk,

Talk the platypus talk.

Walk the platypus walk,

Talk the platypus talk.

If you're web-footed, duckbilled and semi-aquatic,

If you're soft, cool, fuzzy and charismatic,

Disappear by day kinda enigmatic

Then you just might be a plata-fanatic.

(Walk the platypus walk...)

You can be a platypus who doesn't do much

Or put on your fedora and come through in the clutch

Get yourself a mission, fire up your jetpack

Keep your duckbill forward and your beaver tail back.

Walk the platypus walk,

Talk the platypus talk.

Walk the platypus walk,

Keep your duckbill forward and your beaver tail back!