

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



The Educator Materials for this Young Reader edition of *Michelle Obama: In Her Own Words* are organized according to the main parts of the book (Part I, Part II, and Part III). For each part, you will find:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This is information you may wish to share with students to help them better understand the context of or references in a quotation.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

These prompts are connected to specific quotations but allow students to conduct research and engage in discussion beyond the information provided in the text.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONNECTIONS

These prompts are connected to specific quotations and allow students to consider questions related to one or more SEL topics such as: identity, identifying or managing emotions, relationship building, empathy, or decision-making.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

This is a page that can be given directly to students and asks readers to consider multiple quotations from one part of the text. Students may work on this page individually, with a partner, or in small groups.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I	I Had Nothing or I Had Everything: Personal Life	
	Background Information	<u>3</u>
	Research and Discussion Topics	<u>5</u>
	Social and Emotional Learning Connections	<u>6</u>
	Student Activity	<u>7</u>
PART II	There Isn't One Right Way to Be an American: Public Life	
	Background Information	<u>8</u>
	Research and Discussion Topics	<u>10</u>
	Social and Emotional Learning Connections	<u>11</u>
	Student Activity	<u>12</u>
PART III	A Better World Is Always Possible: Worldview	
	Background Information	<u>13</u>
	Research and Discussion Topics	<u>15</u>
	Social and Emotional Learning Connections	<u>16</u>
	Student Activity	<u>17</u>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[p. 14] Yeah, I went to Princeton and Harvard, but the lens through which I see the world is the lens that I grew up with. I am the product of a working-class upbringing. I grew up on the South Side of Chicago in a working-class community.

—“Michelle Obama on Elitism,” *The New York Times*,
April 15, 2008

NOTE: Princeton and Harvard are both historic universities that are considered very prestigious, meaning that both getting accepted into and graduating from these universities is seen as a significant accomplishment.

[p. 24] I have found that at Princeton no matter how liberal and open-minded some of my White professors and classmates try to be toward me, I sometimes feel like a visitor on campus; as if I really don't belong.

—“Michelle Obama's Career Timeout,” *The Washington Post*,
May 11, 2007

NOTE: When Michelle Obama entered Princeton University in 1981, Black people made up less than 9 percent of the student body.

[p. 30] And meeting Barack Obama and falling in love with him and having somebody in your life that you cared about that influenced you and encouraged you to take some risks helped me begin to start my swerve and to leave the law and start going into public service and working for the government.

—“Michelle Obama Shares Her Chicago Lessons,”
WBEZ 91.5, November 13, 2018

NOTE: Michelle Obama was highly involved in public service in the city of Chicago. She was the assistant to Mayor Richard M. Daley and the assistant commissioner for the Chicago Department of Planning and Development. She also founded and served as the executive director of the Chicago branch of Public Allies, a nonprofit organization that focuses on social justice and helping young people develop leadership skills.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[p. 41] Having [Sasha and Malia] in schools where some kind of mandatory community service was a part of the curriculum has always been important to me.

—“Meet the Author: Michelle Obama,” *Virgin*, December 11, 2018

NOTE: While in Washington, DC, Sasha and Malia Obama attended Sidwell Friends School. Sidwell is a private school that Chelsea Clinton, daughter of former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, also attended while living in the White House. After graduation, Malia started school at Harvard University and Sasha started school at the University of Michigan.

[p. 45] Even in hard times, our stories help cement our values and strengthen our connections. Sharing them shows us the way forward.

—Instagram, April 27, 2020

NOTE: In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began, which is the “hard time” that Obama refers to in this quotation. The Centers for Disease Control recommended that Americans take precautions such as avoiding public gatherings to keep from contracting and spreading the virus.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

[p. 17] When I think of [Euclid Avenue, Chicago], when I think of our childhood, I think of music. Music was the backdrop of everything. We didn't do anything without music, and that's because our father was a big jazz lover and had a huge jazz album collection that he cherished.

—**“Growing Up Robinson with Craig and Michelle,” *The Michelle Obama Podcast*, August 19, 2020**

TOPIC: *Obama identifies music in general, and jazz in particular, as a formative part of her childhood. Ask students to choose a jazz musician such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, or Billie Holiday and learn about their career and influence on other musicians.*

[p. 47] The problem is, we don't know each other, we don't let each other in. And I said in [*Becoming*], it is hard to hate up close. It is easier to hate when you are hating a person through a filter.

—***The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, December 1, 2018**

TOPIC: *Ask students to research the ways social media has impacted society and the manner in which people communicate with each other. Lead a discussion about the benefits and challenges of social media. Students could be asked to debate this question: Has social media been more helpful or harmful to society?*

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONNECTIONS

[p. 21] I grew up with a disabled dad in a too-small house with not much money in a starting-to-fail neighborhood, and I also grew up surrounded by love and music in a diverse city in a country where an education can take you far. I had nothing or I had everything. It depends on which way you want to tell it.

—*Becoming*, p. 416, November 2018

CONNECTION: Ask students to respond to the following questions as part of a class discussion or journal writing activity: How does a person's attitude or perspective affect their state of mind? Is a positive attitude enough to improve a challenging situation? Why or why not?

[p. 25] I know how it feels to be overlooked. To be underestimated. To have someone only half-listen to your ideas at a meeting.

—Let Girls Learn Event Celebrating International Women's Day, March 8, 2016

CONNECTION: Ask students to respond to the following questions as part of a class discussion or journal writing activity: Have you ever felt the way Michelle Obama describes feeling in this quotation? How did you handle this feeling? When people are part of a group at school or in a social situation, what can they do to ensure that others do not feel this way?

[p. 47] Whenever I have moments of fear or anxiety, I try to find ways to connect with others. I might call someone who I know is struggling and just let them know that I'm thinking of them. That simple act of reaching out lifts my spirits, too.

—*O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, April 15, 2020

CONNECTION: Ask students to respond to the following questions as part of a class discussion or journal writing activity: Has there been a time when someone has reached out to you that really made a difference? Has there been a time that you've reached out to someone else to help them at a difficult time? How did it feel to you to reach out to them?

STUDENT ACTIVITY: CONNECTING QUOTATIONS



Read the quotation in the first column. Find a quotation in Part I of *Michelle Obama: In Her Own Words* that connects to that quotation. Write it in the second column. In the third column, explain the connection between the two quotations.

QUOTATION	QUOTATION FROM PART I OF <i>MICHELLE OBAMA: IN HER OWN WORDS</i>	CONNECTION BETWEEN THE QUOTATIONS
<p>“Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time.”</p> <p>—Marian Wright Edelman (civil rights activist)</p>		
<p>“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”</p> <p>—Maya Angelou (poet and author)</p>		
<p>“I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.”</p> <p>—Audre Lorde (poet and author)</p>		
<p>“It is a brave thing to have courage to be an individual; it is also, perhaps, a lonely thing. But it is better than not being an individual, which is to be nobody at all.”</p> <p>—Eleanor Roosevelt (American First Lady)</p>		

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[p. 60] If we don't know who people are inside, if we don't trust their instincts and understand where they're coming from, then we can't follow them, which is why we've tried to be so open and clear about who we are and how we think.

—*“Wife Touts Obama’s ‘Moral Compass,’”
The Washington Post, May 8, 2007*

[p. 60] The ability to vote freely, fairly—and safely—is bigger than any single issue, party, or candidate.

—*Twitter, May 21, 2020*

[p. 66] I don't lose sleep over it, because the realities are, you know, as a Black man, Barack can get shot going to the gas station. You can't make decisions based on fear and the possibility of what might happen. We just weren't raised that way.

—*on if she worries the Presidency makes Barack a target for violence, “A Political Phenomenon,” 60 Minutes, December 25, 2008*

NOTE: During President Obama's two terms in office, his administration used social media along with public events and performances to allow the American people to get a better look into life in the White House and the role of the presidency. The administration used platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to deliver statements and information to the public.

NOTE: During the 2020 election year and throughout 2021, some states proposed and passed bills to make it more difficult for people to vote by, in part, reducing polling locations and hours. These voting restrictions disproportionately impact communities of color and low-income working individuals and families, who have historically been disenfranchised and already face many difficulties when voting, such as long lines, limited polling locations, and threats of violence. Various attempts to protect and enhance voting rights have also been suggested and passed by state and federal governments.

NOTE: Barack Obama faced multiple threats of violence throughout his two terms in office, many of them from white supremacist groups and other terrorist organizations. Michelle Obama also faced threats of violence during her time as First Lady.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[p. 74] There is no handbook for incoming First Ladies of the United States. . . . It's a strange kind of sidecar to the presidency, a seat that by the time I came to it had already been occupied by more than forty-three different women, each of whom had done it in her own way.

—*Becoming*, p. 283, November 2018

NOTE: While many of the former First Ladies have been spouses of the president, in some instances, a president's daughter, niece, or sister acted as First Lady. Prior to getting married, President Grover Cleveland asked his sister, Rose Cleveland, to serve as First Lady. President Andrew Jackson's niece, Emily Donelson, and daughter-in-law, Sarah Jackson, both acted as First Lady to the widowed president.

[p. 87] A lot of kids don't understand that food is fuel in a very fundamental way. And sometimes they don't listen to grown-ups, and they don't listen to the First Lady. But many of them will listen to you [fellow kids] because you're living proof of that reality.

—*Kids' State Dinner*, July 10, 2015

NOTE: The Kids' State Dinner was a series of luncheons hosted at the White House in which children from all over the United States were invited to cook the food served at the event, with certain dishes selected as winning recipes.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

[p. 60] The ability to vote freely, fairly—and safely—is bigger than any single issue, party, or candidate.

—Twitter, May 21, 2020

TOPIC: Ask students to research the history of voting rights in the United States. How have groups that were originally disenfranchised gain the legal right to vote? What protections have been provided and challenges faced around the issue of voting? Lead a discussion that allows students to share their research and offer their conclusions about voting rights.

[p. 65] It's important for young people, in particular our kids, kids of all backgrounds, of every race, and every socioeconomic background, to feel like they have a place in the Nation's house. And to do that, you have to do things that make them comfortable as well. And if it's hip-hop dancing, well let's do it, you know? If it's a sleepover on the south lawn with the Girl Scouts, then let's do it. . . Let's breathe some life into this house.

—“The Final Interview With The Obamas (Full Interview),”
PeopleTV, December 20, 2016

TOPIC: Ask students to research the different types of public events held by the Obama White House and share their findings with the class. Lead a discussion about the positive impacts of diverse representation in the White House and its public engagements. Students could be asked to respond to this question: What events would you hold at the White House to make people of all backgrounds feel represented?

[p. 68] We wanted to change things up here in the White House a little bit. We wanted to open the doors really wide to a bunch of different folks who usually don't get access to this place. We also wanted to highlight all different kinds of American art—all the art forms: paintings, music, culture—especially art forms that had never been seen in these walls.

—“Hamilton at the White House” workshop, March 14, 2016

TOPIC: During “Bam4Ham,” the cast of the Broadway musical Hamilton was invited to perform and speak at the White House in a showcase of diversity in arts and culture in America. Ask students to research other performances featured at the White House during any administration and to discuss the significance of these events.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONNECTIONS

[p. 63] These days, it can be hard to feel grounded or hopeful—but the connections I've made with people across America and around the world remind me that empathy can truly be a lifeline.

—Twitter, April 27, 2020

CONNECTION: Ask students to respond to the following questions as part of a class discussion or journal writing activity: Are there people you have met or read about who made you feel hopeful about the future of the world (like Michelle Obama describes feeling in this quotation)? What did they do that made you feel this way? Who or what inspires you and makes you feel grounded or positive?

[p. 63] We grow up with messages that tell us that there's only one way to be American—that if our skin is dark or our hips are wide, if we don't experience love in a particular way, if we speak another language or come from another country, then we don't belong. That is, until someone dares to start telling that story differently.

—*Becoming*, p. 415, November 2018

CONNECTION: Ask students to respond to the following questions as part of a class discussion or journal writing activity: What does "belonging" mean to you? What do you think is the importance of people from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences sharing their personal stories of identity and belonging? How do you think these stories may impact another person's sense of belonging?

[p. 77] I needed to demonstrate to the nation that I can do the work. I work hard and I work smart, and let me just show you. And in the end I have to count on the fact that what I produce will define me. And so that's what it means to go high. In the end, don't seek revenge, don't harbor resentment. Just do the work.

—Conan O'Brien *Needs A Friend*, March 17, 2019

CONNECTION: Ask students to respond to the following questions as part of a class discussion or journal writing activity: Think about a moment in your life when you "went high" instead of "going low." How did that moment make you feel? What do your achievements show the world about who you are?

STUDENT ACTIVITY: LIVING HER VALUES



There are many quotes in *Michelle Obama: In Her Own Words* where Michelle Obama talks about staying true to herself and her values throughout her time as First Lady. Find quotes from Part II of the book that you feel best represent this idea and write them in the first column. In the second column, explain why you chose these quotes.

QUOTATION FROM <i>MICHELLE OBAMA: IN HER OWN WORDS</i>	EXPLANATION FOR THIS QUOTATION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[p. 100] History is made by the people who show up for the fight, even when they know they might not be fully recognized for their contributions.

—*Harper's Bazaar*, June 22, 2020

NOTE: To “show up for the fight” references the idea of participating in the fight for social progress, which oftentimes means using privilege to support marginalized groups. Allies are encouraged to “show up” by attending protests and demonstrations, raising awareness, and having discussions with friends and family about particular causes and topics.

[p. 105] When it comes to all those tidy stories of hard work and self-determination that we like to tell ourselves about America, well, the reality is a lot more complicated than that. Because for too many people in this country, no matter how hard they work, there are structural barriers working against them that just make the road longer and rockier.

—“Dear Class of 2020” Commencement Address,
June 7, 2020

NOTE: A common sentiment in American life and pertaining to the “American dream” is that hard work can get a person anywhere in life. In this quote, Michelle Obama is referring to factors like race, class, gender, and sexual orientation that often complicate this idea.

[p. 111] If these ten women can endure death threats and horrifying violence and years behind bars to stand up for what they believe in, then surely our young people can find a way to stand up for what they believe in.

—on the ten honorees at the International Women of
Courage Award Ceremony, March 8, 2012

NOTE: The International Women of Courage Award Ceremony honors women who are advocates for women’s rights around the globe. Oftentimes, the honorees’ activism puts them at risk of harm from others or imprisonment by their government.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[p. 117] I love how creative and confident Gen Z is, especially the young women. They're far more outspoken and driven than girls were when I was growing up—they don't as quickly cede ground to the boys or accept different treatment, and that's terrific. Technology has allowed their entire generation to learn and experience so much so quickly.

—*The National, Amtrak, August/September 2019*

NOTE: *Generation Z refers to Americans born between the late 1990s and 2012. It is often thought to be the most socially progressive generation. Gen Z is also notable for using technology like social media and online search engines to access and disseminate educational information.*

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

[p. 100] For so many people, TV and movies may be the only way they understand people who aren't like them. It becomes important for the world to see different images of each other, so that we can develop empathy and understanding.

—*Variety*, August 23, 2016

TOPIC: Ask students to research examples of television shows and/or movies that were important for developing empathy and understanding in the mindsets of the American people. Lead a discussion and ask students to share their findings. Students may be asked to respond to this question: How does diverse representation in television and movies help people to understand one another?

[p. 114] When we talk about the potential of our young people, we often think about it as some far-off promise, years or decades away. But the truth is they have so much to offer us right now.

—*Instagram*, August 1, 2019

TOPIC: Lead a discussion about ways that young people can make a positive impact on their local communities, the country, or the larger world. Ask students to research young people who have made such an impact. Students might choose someone who is well known, like Greta Thunberg, or someone whose efforts have not been as widely reported. Invite students to share their findings.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONNECTIONS

[p. 94] We want our children—and all children in this nation—to know that the only limit to the height of your achievements is the reach of your dreams and your willingness to work for them.

—Democratic National Convention, August 25, 2008

CONNECTION: Ask students to respond to the following questions as part of a class discussion or journal writing activity: What dreams do you have for your future? What do you think it will take to achieve them? If you believe there may be obstacles between you and your dreams, what do you think is necessary to overcome those obstacles?

[p. 98] Through service, we can heal ourselves.

—commencement address at Virginia Tech, May 14, 2012

CONNECTION: Ask students to respond to the following questions as part of a class discussion or journal writing activity: Think about a time that you have performed a service for someone else. What was that experience like for you? Do you agree that service to others also benefits the person performing that service? Why or why not?

[p. 117] We have to feel that optimism. For the kids. . . . Progress isn't made through fear. We're experiencing that right now. Fear is the coward's way of leadership. But kids are born into this world with a sense of hope and optimism.

—O, *The Oprah Magazine*, December 2018

CONNECTION: Ask students to respond to the following questions as part of a class discussion or journal writing activity: What do you think makes a person a good leader? How can leaders inspire optimism in others? What is your leadership style?

STUDENT ACTIVITY: PERSONAL CONNECTIONS



In Part III of *Michelle Obama: In Her Own Words*, Michelle Obama says, “My story can be your story. The details might be a little different, but let me tell you, so many of the challenges and the triumphs will be just the same.” Find quotes from Part III of the book that you feel relate to your experiences. In the second column, explain how this quote relates to your own story.

QUOTATION FROM <i>MICHELLE OBAMA: IN HER OWN WORDS</i>	HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO YOUR STORY?