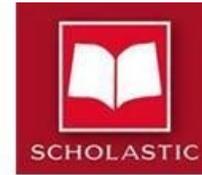




Activities

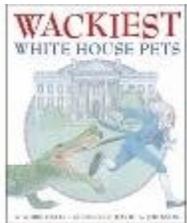


Adapted from  
[www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com)

## Activities

### Wackiest White House Pets

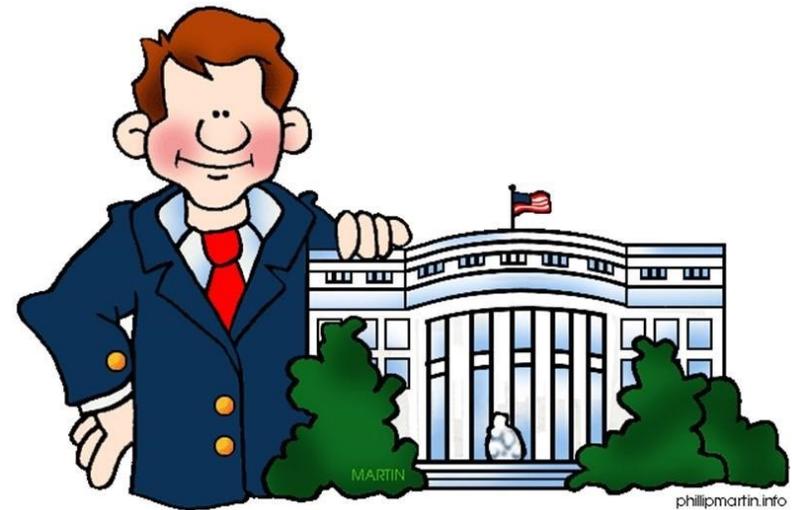
Grades: 1–2, 3–5



**Wackiest White House Pets**  
By Kathryn Gibbs Davis

#### Overview

Starting with *Wackiest White House Pets* by Katherine Gibbs Davis, kids research the animals, White House history, make a Presidential Pet Portrait, and conduct a mock campaign to elect a White House Pet.



## **Background**

Did you know that John Quincy Adams had a pet alligator living in the East Room of the White House? Or that Thomas Jefferson had two pet grizzly bears that lived in a cage on the South Lawn? Or what about William Howard Taft, who at 350 pounds loved fresh milk so much that he kept a pet dairy cow in the garage with his fancy cars? White House pets come in every size, shape, and species! With comical anecdotes and hilarious illustrations, this is a side-splitting look at American history shown through the most child-appealing White House residents.

## **Activities**

Learn more about the wackiest pets that lived in the White House with the First Family. The activities below can be done with a small group within a class, set up as a center activity, or completed with an entire class.

### **Science/Math**

- Research the animals listed in the book. Which were mammals, amphibians, etc.? Which type of animal was kept as a White House pet the most? Which was the least? Show your discoveries by creating a graph of the various types of animals. Using your graph create a scale diagram of the White House grounds on graph paper. Plot the animals on the graph paper to illustrate population density. Which President had the most "populated" White House? Which the least?
- Create a food web or food chain using the animals from the book. Which pets would not have lived harmoniously at the White House at the same time? Draw a diagram of a food web/chain using the pets from the book.
- Many of the Presidents' "gifts" ended up at the Washington Zoo. Research the zoo's history. Include facts about any endangered or rare zoo residents.

### **English/Language Arts**

- Write a White House mystery from the pet's point of view.
- Famous animal quotes (i.e. Truman's quote to end the book). Using a book of quotes or the internet, locate a quote that teaches a life lesson that uses an animal in it. Create a poster by writing the quote at the bottom and illustrating it above. Hang the poster to share.

- Create an ABC book of Presidential Pets.
- Warren Harding's pet terrier, Laddie Boy participated in a "mock interview" with a major newspaper, offering opinions on a variety of topics. Ask your students to choose one of the pets in the book to "interview"; then have them write a newspaper article based on the interview. **Social Studies/Geography**
- Research the history of the White House. How did the capital come to be located in Washington, D.C.? Locate interesting facts about the White House. Create an artistic representation of the White House using paper, paint, clay, or other art supply. Display your model and information for others to see.
- The White House. What secrets does it hold? Find out about the grounds and gardens. What types of special rooms does it have? Create a three dimensional model of the White House or one of its features.
- Many of the pets in the book were gifts to the first family. What is a "Gift of State?" Research this and other interesting gifts that the President has received over the years. Write a composition about the one you find to be the most interesting. Draw a picture of it to share with your class.
- Choose a "Vice-Presidential Pet" and explain why it would make a good running mate for your First Pet. Write a composition to convince others your choice is the best bet.

## **Art**

Take a piece of 8.5 x 11 paper. Fold in half. Draw and attach a picture of the Presidential Pet on the right-hand side of the page. Fill in the pet's vital information on the left side. Fold the page so that the front has the vital information and the back has the pet photo. Glue inside the folds to create a trading card.

- Discuss and look at the official Presidential Portraits. Have students create an "official" Presidential Pet Portrait.
- Trading Cards — Have students draw a picture of the pet. Students will then create trading cards for each "wacky pet" to share and trade. Make up a game using the cards or try memorizing which pet went with which President.

## **Vital Information**

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Presidential Administration:

Human and Non-Human Family Members:

Special Talent:

Best Known For:

## **Mystery in the White House**

Follow these steps to write your own White House mystery. Illustrate your story when you finish.

Choose a favorite White House pet.

Research your pet's super-hero qualities. Make a list. Example: can see in dark, can climb trees. (Even spiders can be superheroes! Remember *Charlotte's Web*?)

Describe your pet's personality. Use adjectives like brave, bossy, nervous.

What does your pet most like about living in the White House? What does it dislike?

Who are your pet's President and First Family? Research them. Make a list of interesting facts. Get to know your pet. Write a sample entry in your pet's diary. Remember to write from your pet's point of view. Use the pronoun "I."

A mystery needs a BIG problem. The trouble starts when...what happens next? Remember, pets make terrific spies because no one notices them.

Need some help getting started? Ask yourself these questions:

Is something missing from the White House?

Is the President in danger? Does your pet find a way to warn him?

Is someone visiting the White House such as royalty or a celebrity?

Does your pet discover a thief or a ghost?

Is your pet jealous of a new White House pet?

Still stuck? Don't worry! Think of the big problems in some of your favorite books or movies. Write them down. Now, use them in your White House mystery. Be sure to include your Presidential Pet as the star!

### **Plan an Election Campaign**

Writing assignment: Choose a pet president from the book's backlist of 400 pets. Write about why your pet wants to run for office. Write from the point-of-view of your pet.

Hold a primary to narrow class choices down to 4 candidate pets (2 per ticket).

Choose a campaign team for each party to design ads, banners and presidential buttons. Decide what your slogan will be, what platform you will run on and how you will reach your voting audience.

Draw a funny political cartoon featuring your candidate pet. Refer to David Johnson's illustrations. You are speaking for your candidate and running mate. In 3 minutes give a speech telling your "voting" audience what your candidates want to do for animals, if elected.

Vote.

Announce the winners and have a victory party!

### **Resources**

#### ***Books to Read:***

Karr, Kathleen. [\*It Happened in the White House: Extraordinary Tales from America's Most Famous Home\*](#) . New York: Hyperion, 2000.

Keenan, Sheila. [\*Animals in the House: A History of Pets and People\*](#) . New York: Scholastic, 2007.

St. George, Judith. [\*So You Want to Be President?\*](#) (Illustrated by David Small). New York: Penguin Putnam Books, 2000.

#### ***Sites to Visit:***

<http://presidentialpetmuseum.com/>

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/kids/presidents/>

<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/>

[http://www.whitehousehistory.org/04/images/student\\_guide.pdf](http://www.whitehousehistory.org/04/images/student_guide.pdf)

**Curriculum guide designed by Sally J. Hughes**

▣ **Subjects:**

**American History, Charts and Graphs, Arts and Crafts, Reading, Research Skills,  
Writing, Animals, Classification, The Presidency, Historic Figures, Science**

While many presidential pets moved into the White House with their owners, Miss Beazleyâ€™the Bush familyâ€™s Scottish Terrierâ€™was adopted during George W. Bushâ€™s time in office. The pup was a gift from the then-president to his wife, Laura Bush, in 2004, and moved back to Texas with the family before passing following a battle with lymphoma in 2014.Â Though the majority of White House pets have been those of the feline or canine variety, Calvin Coolidge decided that the mansion was also the ideal place to house a raccoon. After being sent the raccoon, later named Rebecca, to be cooked for Thanksgiving dinner in 1926, the Coolidges opted to spare her life instead and keep her as a pet.