

**“Becoming”**  
**by Michelle Obama**

skyteach

# Activity 1

## Answer the questions:

- Who is this person? What do you know about her?
- What do you think her book is about?
- Why do you think it's called "Becoming"?



## Activity 2

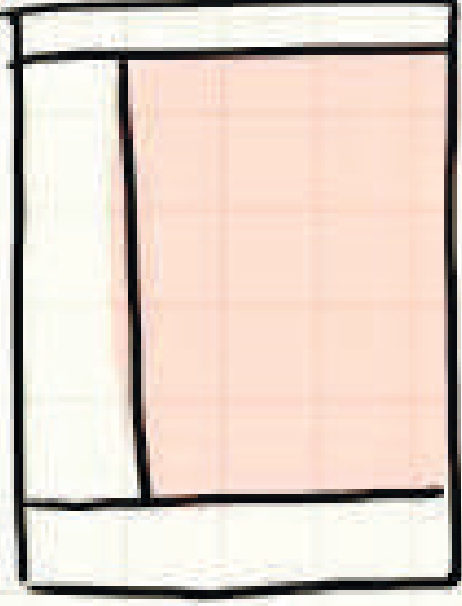
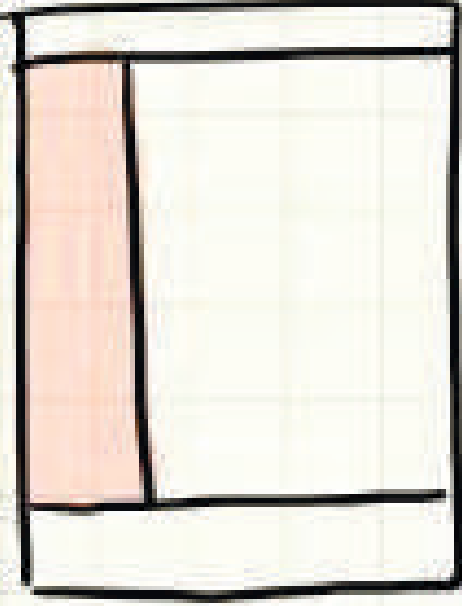
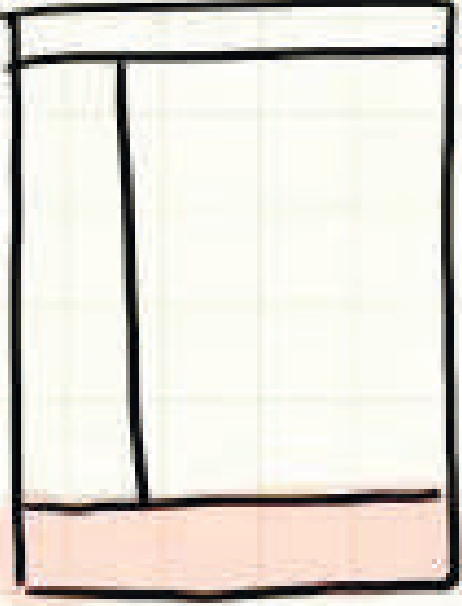
Watch the interview (0:00-6:05) and mark the sentences TRUE or FALSE:

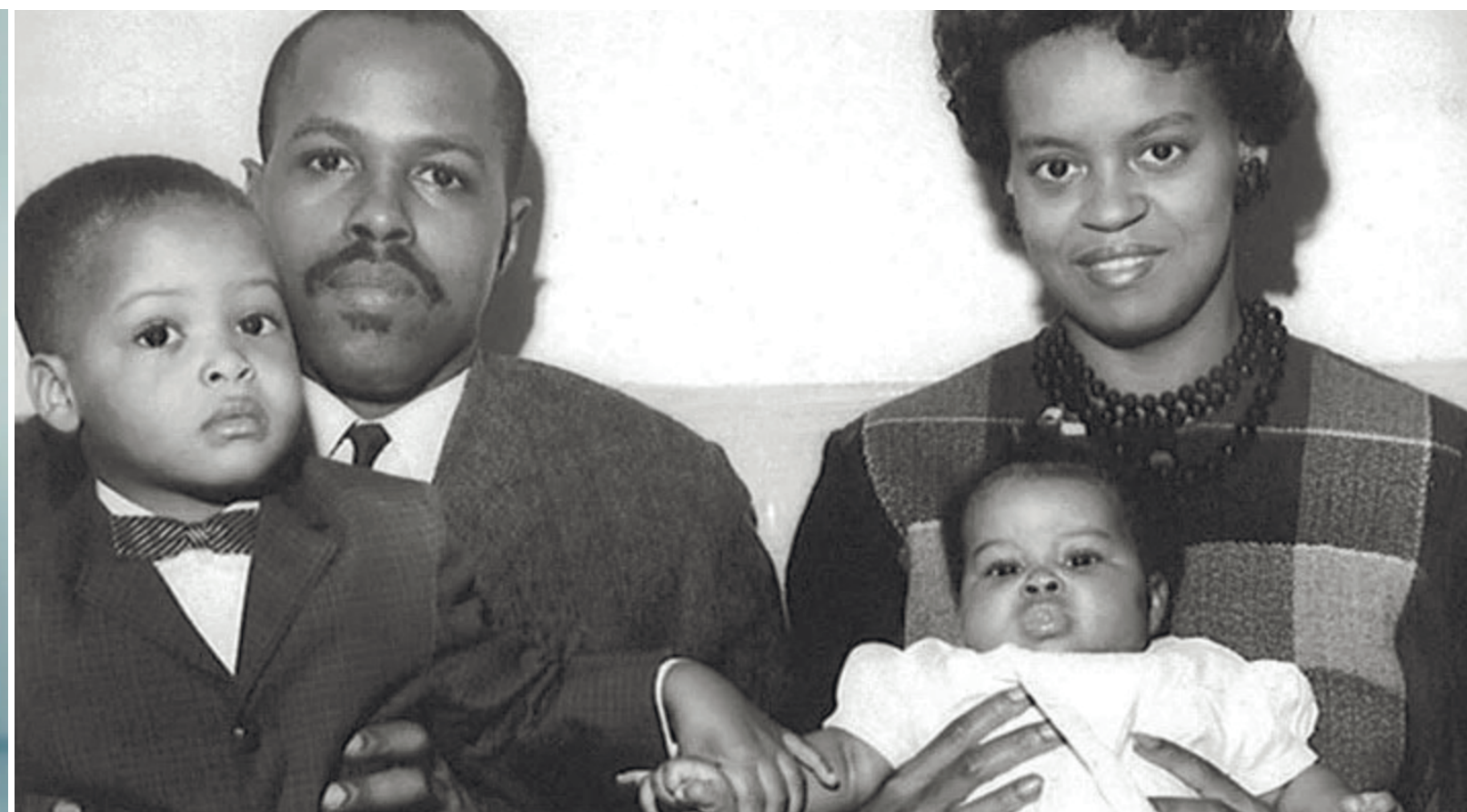
1. Mrs. Obama has been keeping a diary all her life.
2. Michelle says she can't remember the White House years in details.
3. It's easy to sneak out of the White House.



# Activity 3

Read the first chapter of the book and make a list of new information you've learnt about Michelle Obama.

Notes	Keywords, Comments	My thoughts
		

## Activity 4

Discuss the questions with your partner:

- What have you learnt about Michelle Obama and her family? Was there anything that surprised you?
- What do you think of the book? What do you think of the simplicity of Michelle's language?
- What new words have you written down?



## Activity 5

Find the words in the text and guess their definitions.  
Then check with the dictionary:

- Amateur (page 21)
- Implacability (page 22)
- To deteriorate (page 23)
- To assume (page 23-24)
- Polite-ish, to pipe down (page 25)
- To indulge (page 25)
- Gifted (page 26)
- To chew out (page 29)
- On and off (page 30)
- Immobility (page 31)
- To sneak, to roam (page 32)
- A recital (page 32)
- To recall (page 33)



## Activity 6

### Discuss the questions:

1. Chapter 1 starts with the description of the place. Where did the family live? What do you know about this place? Do you think the place and the conditions of living influenced Michelle's personality?
2. What does the first sentence of the chapter ("I spend much of my childhood listening to the music of STRIVING") mean?
3. Why was aunt Robbie kind of terror for her? Find words to prove it. What does Michelle mean by saying "Few, it seemed, could live up to Robbie's standards"?
4. What relationship did Michelle have with her parents and brother in childhood?
5. What did her family teach her?
6. How does Mrs. Obama describe Terry? What's he like?
7. How were Michelle's music lessons going? Why was she driven?
8. Why did Michelle write "The car provided another form of closeness for my family"?
9. Why did the car have to provide some sort of sideways relief?
10. How did he first recital go? How did she feel? Find words and phrases to prove your answer.

## Activity 7

In the book, you find some names connected to the history and culture. Look at the list below, what are they?

1. "Hot Cross Bun"
2. "Brahm's Lullaby"
3. Cubs
4. The Kennedys
5. Martin Luther King Jr.
6. Vietnam War
7. the NHL
8. Jackson 5
9. Jim Crow
10. Planet of the Apes
11. Buick





# Activity 8

## Read the other chapters of the book and take notes.


### Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Becoming Me</i>	1
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The sound of people trying, however, became the soundtrack to our life. There was plinking in the afternoons, plinking in the evenings. Ladies from church sometimes came over to practice hymns, belting their piety through our walls. Under Robbie's rules, kids who took piano lessons were allowed to work on only one song at a time. From my room, I'd listen to them attempting, note by uncertain note, to win her approval, graduating from "Hot Cross Buns" to "Brahms's Lullaby," but only after many tries. The music was never annoying; it was just persistent. It crept

As a boy, he'd taken classes at the Art Institute of Chicago, and in high school he'd painted and sculpted. He'd been a competitive swimmer and boxer in school, too, and as an adult was a fan of every televised sport, from professional golf to the NHL. He appreciated seeing strong people excel. When my brother, Craig, got interested in basketball, my father propped coins above the doorframe in our kitchen, encouraging him to leap for them.

Everything that mattered was within a five-block radius—my grandparents and cousins, the church on the corner where we were not quite regulars at Sunday school, the gas station where my mother sometimes sent me to pick up a pack of Newports, and the liquor store, which also sold Wonder bread, penny candy, and gallons of milk. On hot summer nights, Craig and I dozed off to the sound of cheers from the adult-league softball games going on at the nearby public park, where by day we climbed on the playground jungle gym and played tag with other kids.

Craig and I are not quite two years apart in age. He's got my father's soft eyes and optimistic spirit, my mother's implacability. The two of us have always been tight, in part thanks to an unwavering and somewhat inexplicable allegiance he seemed to feel for his baby sister right from the start. There's an early family photograph, a black and white of the four of us sitting on a couch, my mother smiling as she holds me on her lap, my father appearing serious and proud with Craig perched on his. We're dressed for church or maybe a wedding. I'm about eight months old, a pudgy-faced, no-nonsense bruiser in diapers and an ironed white dress, looking ready to slide out of my mother's clutches, staring down the camera as if I might eat it. Next to me is Craig, gentlemanly in a little bow tie and suit jacket, bearing an earnest expression. He's two years old and already the portrait of brotherly vigilance and responsibility—his arm extended toward mine, his fingers wrapped protectively around my fat wrist.

At the time the photo was taken, we were living across the hall from my father's parents in Parkway Gardens, an affordable housing project on the South Side made up of modernist apartment buildings. It had been built in the 1950s and was designed as a co-op, meant to ease a post-World War II housing shortage for black working-class families. Later,

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# Activity 9

## Discuss with your partner:

1. The first chapter cover the period until kindergarten. How do those kinds of early memories leave an imprint on us as we grow older? What were the sights and smells that you remember from visiting grandparents or other elders, and how have they left a mark on you?
2. In discussing her neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago, Mrs. Obama writes, “Failure is a feeling long before it becomes an actual result. It’s vulnerability that breeds with self-doubt and then is escalated, often deliberately, by fear.” How did this insight shape Mrs. Obama’s work and mission as First Lady? What can we all do—as individuals, parents, and community members—to help break this cycle?”
3. Early in her senior year at Whitney Young High School, Mrs. Obama went for an obligatory first appointment with the school college counselor. Mrs. Obama was treasurer of the senior class. She had earned a spot in the National Honor Society. She was on track to graduate in the top 10 percent of her class and she was interested in joining her older brother, Craig, at Princeton University. The guidance counselor said to her, “I’m not sure that you’re Princeton material.” How did Mrs. Obama handle hearing that statement? How does one avoid having one’s dreams dislodged by someone else’s lower expectations?
4. In high school, Mrs. Obama said she felt like she was representing her neighborhood. At Princeton, faced with questions of whether she was the product of Affirmative Action programs, she felt like she was representing her race. Was that more than a feeling? Was she actually representing her communities in those settings? Have you had moments in life where you feel as though you are representing one of your communities?
5. In her early life Mrs. Obama writes about being a “box checker,” but as she gets older she learns how to “swerve” to adjust to life’s circumstances. What does it mean to swerve and how do we develop that skill in life?
6. In *Becoming*, Mrs. Obama describes a number of women who have served as mentors for her at different times in her life, including Czerny Brasuell, Valerie Jarrett, and Susan Sher. What do these women have in common? What lessons did Mrs. Obama learn from them about finding a fulfilling career as a parent? Who are your mentors and how do you cultivate those relationships?

Source: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com>

# Keys:

## Activity 2

1. Michelle Obama has been keeping a diary all her life. **F** (only when Michelle and Barack were dating, but in the White House she didn't have time for it)
2. Michelle says she can't remember The White House years in details. **T**
3. It's easy to sneak out of the White House. **F** (it's incredibly difficult)

## Activity 5

### - Amateur (page 21)

It came in the form of bad music, or at least amateur music, coming up through the floorboards of my bedroom—the plink plink plink of students sitting downstairs at my great-aunt Robbie's piano, slowly and imperfectly learning their scales.

### - Implacability (page 22)

He's got my father's soft eyes and optimistic spirit, my mother's implacability. inexplicable - The two of us have always been tight, in part thanks to an unwavering and somewhat inexplicable allegiance he seemed to feel for his baby sister right from the start.

### - To deteriorate (page 23)

Later, it would deteriorate under the grind of poverty and gang violence, becoming one of the city's more dangerous places to live.

### - To assume (page 23-24)

My parents slept in the lone bedroom, while Craig and I shared a bigger area that I assume was intended to be the living room.

### - Polite-ish, to pipe down (page 25)

When it got to be too much for Robbie down below, she'd emphatically flick the light switch in our shared stairwell, which also controlled the lightbulb in our upstairs hallway, off and on, again and again— her polite-ish way of telling us to pipe down.

### - To indulge (page 25)

He'd indulge himself by having exactly one cigarette a day and exactly one cocktail a month, and even then he wouldn't loosen up the way my father and mother would after having a highball or a Schlitz, which they did a few times a month.

### - Gifted (page 26)

I just wanted to go downstairs and demonstrate to my exacting great-aunt what a gifted girl I was, how it would take no effort at all for me to become her star student.

### - To chew out (page 29)

I got chewed out the way I'd heard her chewing out plenty of students before me.

### - On and off (page 30)

My mother had lived with Robbie on and off since she was about sixteen.

### - Immobility (page 31)

He'd been in his thirties when a doctor informed him that the odd weakness he'd started to feel in one leg was just the beginning of a long and probably painful slide toward immobility, that odds were that someday, due to a mysterious unsheathing of neurons in his brain and spinal cord, he'd find himself unable to walk at all.

### - To sneak, to roam (page 32)

When we went shopping at the mall, he'd park himself on a bench, content to watch the bags or sneak in a nap while the rest of the family roamed freely.

### - A recital (page 32)

I do know that on the day of my big piano recital, he was already walking with a slight limp, his left foot unable to catch up to his right.

### - To recall (page 33)

I don't recall who played in what order that day.

# Keys:

## Activity 6

3. "She represented a rigid kind of authority I hadn't yet encountered elsewhere".
4. " My family was my world, the center of everything" (page 21).
5. "My mother taught me how to read early, walking me to the public library, sitting with me as I sounded out words on a page. My father showed us what it meant to love jazz and art. When my brother, Craig, got interested in basketball, my father propped coins above the doorframe in our kitchen, encouraging him to leap for them.
6. Page 24.
7. "I was probably no better than her other students, no less fumbling, but I was driven. To me, there was magic in the learning. I got a buzzy sort of satisfaction from it" (page 28).
8. "The car provided another form of closeness for my family, a chance to talk and travel at once" (page 31).
10. "With a tight throat and chugging heart, I looked out to the audience, trying not to telegraph my panic, searching for the safe harbor of my mother's face".