

Working with two autobiographies – Michelle Obama and Kamala Harris

by Xenia Riedl



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Autobiografische Texte haben in den letzten Jahren eine immer breitere Leserschaft gefunden. In dieser Unterrichtseinheit werden Auszüge aus zwei Autobiografien behandelt: *Becoming*, die hochgelobten Memoiren von Michelle Obama, der Ehefrau des ersten afroamerikanischen Präsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten, und *The Truths We Hold: An American Journey*, das persönliche und politische Manifest von Kamala Harris. Sie ist die erste Frau im Amt der Vizepräsidentin der USA. Kamala Harris ist die Tochter von Einwanderern aus Indien und Jamaika.

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Competences and skills

The overarching goal of this unit is the acquisition of **cultural competences**. To achieve this, students demonstrate their **reading skills** as they work with texts and their **viewing and listening skills** when they engage themselves with videos. They apply their **analytical and writing competences** by working on the texts and videos. Students interact with partners and, thus, use their communicative as well as their **social competences**. By completing various research tasks, they acquire additional **media competences**.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

A:	Analysis	M:	Mind Map/visualising
C:	Comment	P:	Working with a picture/cartoon
CT:	Creative task	PR:	Presentation
D:	Discussion	R:	Research
E:	Essay/Composition	S:	Summary
G:	Group work	T:	Working with a text
L:	Language development	TPS:	Think-Pair-Share
LVC:	Listening/viewing comprehension	VI:	Working with a video
		W:	Writing

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: Two autobiographies	M1	A, CT, D, G, P
2: Michelle Obama – <i>Becoming</i>	M2–M10	A, C, D, L, LVC, P, PR, R, S, T, VI, W
3: Kamala Harris – <i>The Truths We Hold: An American Journey</i>	M11–M17	D, G, L, LVC, P, PR, R, T, VI
4: Comparing Kamala Harris and Michelle Obama	M18	A, G, M, W
Test: Mediation	M19	W

Topic 1: Two autobiographies

M1 Book covers and worksheet: Michelle Obama's *Becoming* and Kamala Harris' *The Truths We Hold*

Introducing the topic



1. Think-Pair-Share: Think of the most likely reasons why people write autobiographies. Compare your ideas with a partner. Then present and discuss your findings in class.

Analysing the book covers



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M7 Worksheet – Career choices

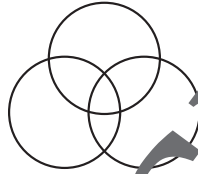


Pre-reading activity

1. Explain the Venn diagram. What other factors might influence people's choice of career?

The ideal job

what you are good at



what pays well

what you love

Reading comprehension



2. Sum up how Michelle Obama explains her decision to become a lawyer.
3. Outline the doubts she soon felt about her choice of career. Use the Venn diagram to describe her situation.

Working with the text/Language



4. Read the text again. Look at some of the images the author uses to illustrate her experiences. Explain and analyse the meaning and function of these expressions.



- a) "I was busy learning my ladder..." (l. 10)
- b) "... people who spend like tigers to their jobs." (l. 51)
- c) "You've jumped the shark." (53/54)

Creative writing: Diary entry



5. While working for the law firm *Sidley & Austin*, Michelle met Barack Obama and was fascinated by his wish to work for a better world. She began to write a diary to reflect about her job situation. Imagine, you are in her place: you have come to the conclusion that you have chosen an occupation you do not really like and want to find a new job. Write a diary entry of 200–250 words, expressing your worries and considerations.

Topic 3: Kamala Harris – *The Truths We Hold*

M11 Worksheet – Introducing Kamala Harris

Listening comprehension



1. Watch the video *Kamala Harris (Politician) – A Black History Month Biography*:

<https://raabe.click/HarrisSpeech> [last access: 19/07/2022]




Take notes of the following points mentioned in the biography. Then watch/listen again and check/complete your list.

Family/origin:	
Education:	
Tasks as (Deputy) District Attorney, Attorney General:	
Political agenda:	

Topic 4: Comparing Kamala Harris and Michelle Obama

Worksheet – Comparing Kamala Harris and Michelle Obama M18

Who said it? A matching exercise

1. Remember what you have read and found out about the biographies of Michelle Obama and Kamala Harris. Match each of the eight quotations with the correct person. 

- “When girls are educated, their countries become stronger and more prosperous.”
- “Always stay true to yourself and never let what anybody says distract you from your goals.”
- “Success isn’t about how much money you make. It’s about the difference you make in people’s lives.”
- “My mother would say: Don’t sit around and complain about things. Do something. So I did something.”
- “Just try new things. Don’t be afraid. Step out of your comfort zones and soar, all right?”
- “While I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last.”
- “Anyone who claims to be a leader must speak like a leader. That means speaking with integrity and truth.”
- “We the people have the power to build a better future.”

Michelle Obama	Kamala Harris

2. Explain which clues helped you to match the quotations correctly.

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