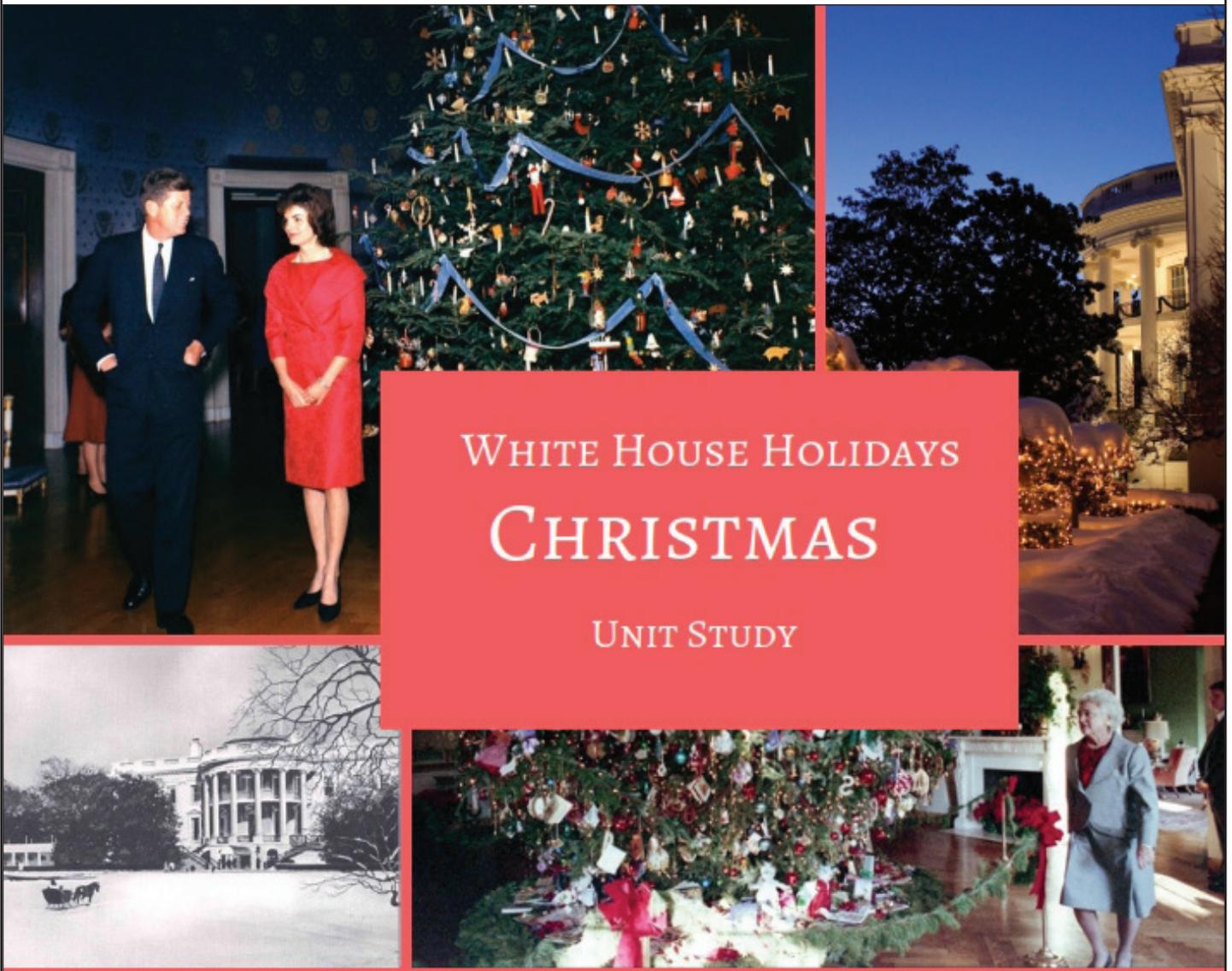


# SILVERDALE PRESS



*presents*



WHITE HOUSE HOLIDAYS  
CHRISTMAS

UNIT STUDY

## Introduction

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### Why Study the Holidays?

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Welcome to the White House Holidays, Christmas Unit Study!

I went to public school from grades K through 12. Some of my fondest memories were celebrating the holidays with my classmates. I remember the parties and crafts. I especially remember the excitement that came with a celebration, break from routine, and a change of pace.

While we did mark the holidays, I do not remember learning much about the rich history behind those holidays. I believe the same is true for many school-age children today. This is a shame because our holiday history really is so rich.

Learning about our holidays is important for children. For younger children, holidays are a way to mark the seasons of the calendar and the progress of time. For children of all ages, holidays bind us together as a nation. They instill in us a sense of patriotism, unity, and togetherness.

I have also heard parents of middle and high school kids lament that when their students phase out of elementary school, holiday celebrations end. I found this to be true during my own schooling. I think this so sad. Holiday celebrations should continue on through the upper grades. For older kids, the holidays can be a time for deeper learning and understanding—and for developing a greater sense of meaning in history.

As a homeschool mom, I know that the holidays can be overwhelming. We do our best to mark them, but it is up to us to invent holiday lessons and come up with fun and creative activities. Sure, we can check out a book or two from the library. But coming up with objectives, lesson plans, and enrichment activities? That's up to us. And that's a good deal of work to pile onto our already busy lives.

As a presidential scholar, I also know that so many of our holidays and traditions are tied to American presidents. That is why I wanted to invent a holiday curriculum with a unique twist—one that uses the American presidency as a window into the holidays.

I also know how important primary sources are to our students' learning. That is why I weave primary sources—like speeches, posters, letters, and photographs—throughout the lessons and activities.

And so I began writing these holiday unit studies—first for my own children, then for families with children of all ages. They have enriched my kids, and they have enriched me. My hope is that they will enrich your entire family as well.

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## How To Use

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The White House Holidays, Christmas Unit Study is designed for students in grades K-12. It has 24 activities. It is divided into four lessons, with six activities related to each lesson. This allows families to complete an activity during each December day, leading up to Christmas.

The unit study also allows for flexibility. The activities do not build on one another, so families can skip activities or double up on activities if they wish.

I do recommend, however, that families work through the unit study chronologically as much as possible. For example, on December 1st, families can read Lesson 1 and complete Activity 1. On December 2nd, they can complete Activity 2, and so on.

Each of the four lessons covers a historical White House Christmas theme and a special feature of White House Christmases. Each lesson has a written portion to read aloud with your children. The lessons are brief but informative and are written so that students at all grades levels can learn from them and enjoy them together.

The twenty-four activities that accompany each lesson are also designed so that students of all ages can complete them together. The level of parental assistance will be greater for younger children and less for older children.

Before each lesson, there is a brief “Introduction and Overview for Teachers.” We recommend that teachers read through this before going through the lesson. This overview contains learning outcomes and has a list of subject areas the activities cover. We made a special effort to include a variety of subject areas: history, government, art, literature, music, nature study, and more! The lesson overview also lists the materials needed for each activity.

We include all the materials we possibly can, including primary sources. A few activities do require craft supplies. If an activity requires craft supplies, we try to keep them to a minimum. We want to stay true to White House history, but we also want to keep it easy for parents! Most lessons have community service activities. There are also some baking activities that require ingredients and supplies. An answer key is also included as a separate document.

And last but not least...have fun, make memories, and learn history!

*Jill Hummer*



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Why Study the Holidays?.....	2
How To Use.....	3
<b>Lesson 1: Jacqueline Kennedy, <i>The Nutcracker Suite</i>, and the White House Crèche</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Introduction & Overview for Teachers.....	6
Lesson 1: Jacqueline Kennedy, <i>The Nutcracker Suite</i> , and the White House Crèche.....	7
Lesson 1 Activities.....	13
<b>Lesson 2: Betty Ford, Handmade Folk Art, and the Gingerbread House</b> .....	<b>24</b>
Introduction & Overview for Teachers.....	24
Lesson 2: Betty Ford, Handmade Folk Art, and the Gingerbread House.....	25
Lesson 2 Activities.....	32
<b>Lesson 3: Barbara Bush, a Story Book Christmas, and the White House Tree</b> .....	<b>42</b>
Introduction & Overview for Teachers.....	42
Lesson 3: Barbara Bush, a Story Book Christmas, and the White House Tree.....	43
Lesson 3 Activities.....	48
<b>Lesson 4: Michelle Obama, Simple Gifts and Military Families, and Christmas Cards</b> .....	<b>60</b>
Introduction & Overview for Teachers.....	60
Lesson 4: Michelle Obama, Simple Gifts and Military Families, and Christmas Cards.....	61
Lesson 4 Activities.....	67

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# Lesson 1: Jacqueline Kennedy, *The Nutcracker Suite*, and the White House Crèche

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## Introduction & Overview for Teachers

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### Lesson Plan

• First, read Lesson 1. Over the following days, complete the activities 1-6. Detailed instructions for each activity are included in the pages that follow. Please pace yourself according to your family's needs. To make planning ahead easier, materials not included herein are noted immediately below.

### Learning Outcomes and Content Areas

- Understand the history of White House Christmas themes and Jacqueline Kennedy's role in establishing them (History)
- Understand the history of the White House crèche (Art History, Religion)
- Appreciate "The Nutcracker" and its role in Christmas traditions (Literature, Music)
- Analyze the White House crèche and create nativity artwork (Religion, Art, Art History)
- Analyze JFK's 1962 Christmas address (Government, History)
- Research this year's White House Historical Association ornament (Government, History)
- Empathize with those suffering at Christmas (Poetry, Literature, Community Service)
- Bake Hillary Clinton's chocolate chip cookies (Baking Skills, Food History)

### Materials Needed

- Activity 1—Nutcracker (Internet access)
- Activity 2—Crèche (Bible; art supplies—white printer paper, butcher paper, or canvas; paints, colored pencils, crayons, or markers)
- Activity 3—JFK Address (Everything is provided)
- Activity 4—White House ornament (Internet Access)
- Activity 5—For part of this activity, we encourage you to "adopt" a family in need. Materials can vary but can include gifts, toiletries, gift cards, toys, etc.
- Activity 6—Cookie baking (flour, salt, baking soda, vegetable shortening, light brown sugar, sugar, vanilla, eggs, rolled oats, semi-sweet chocolate chips)

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## Lesson 1: Jacqueline Kennedy, *The Nutcracker Suite*, and the White House Crèche

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### *Christmas at the White House*

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Glistening trees, intricate gingerbread houses, children’s laughter, and delicious confections all mark Christmas at the White House.

To pull off the gatherings, glitz, and gingerbread, it takes a whole year of planning and preparation. As soon as the decorations from one Christmas are taken down, the president and first lady must choose the theme for the next Christmas. The theme is the focal point of White House Christmas celebrations. The theme helps weave together the setting and ambiance—the decorations, the ornaments, the cookies, and the activities.

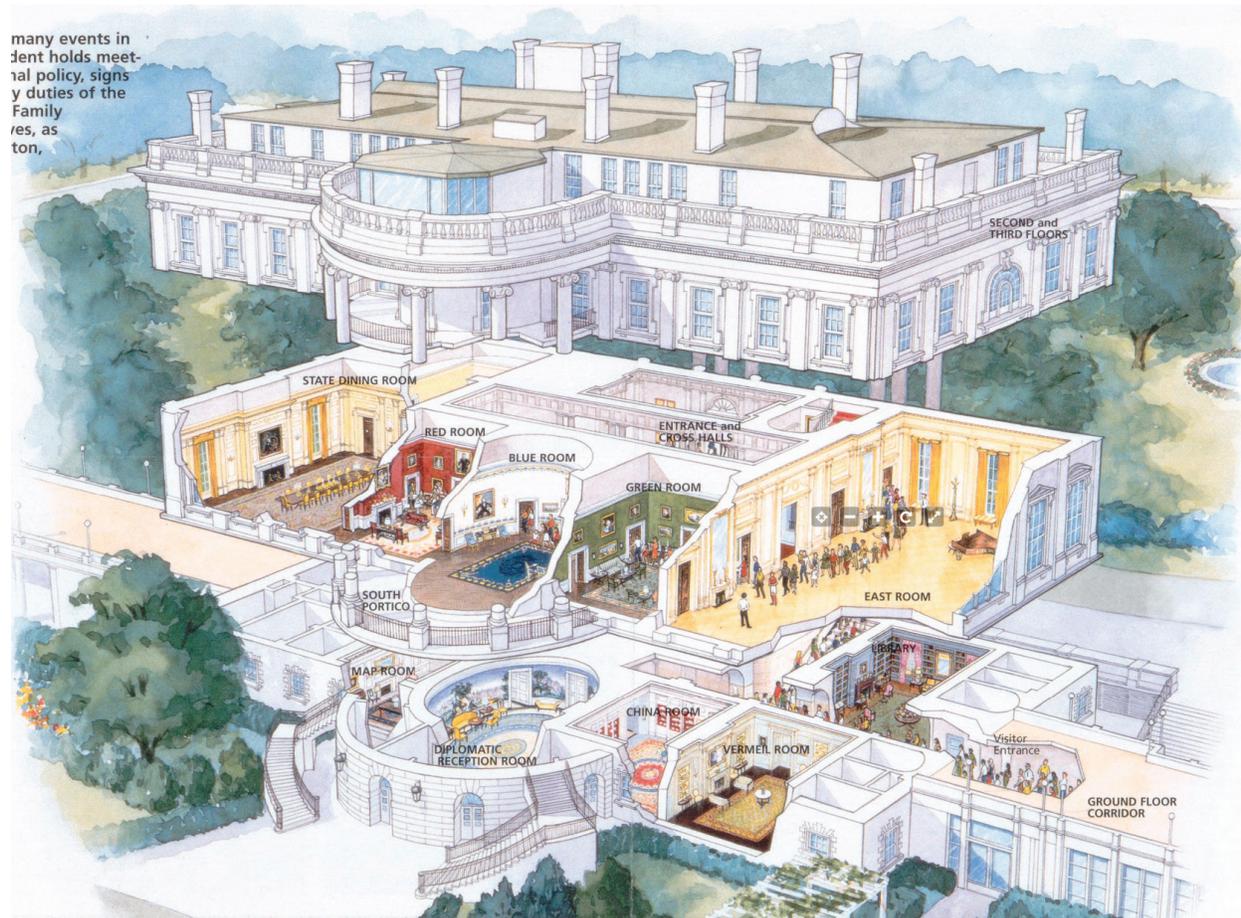
Themes also allow presidents and first ladies to add their own special touches. They reflect the president and first lady’s personal interests.

Over the years, special White House Christmas traditions have also arisen. These carry over from year to year and include the White House crèche, the gingerbread house, the Blue Room tree, and the presidential Christmas card.

Each of the four lessons that follow tells the story of one special White House Christmas theme

and one tradition. The activities that follow each lesson will help students engage more deeply in these historical themes and traditions.

Christmas traditions are intimately connected to the different rooms of the White House. Before you begin, take a few minutes to study this map, which shows all of the State Rooms, those that are open to the public and featured in the Christmas celebrations. Please refer back to it as needed.



### *Theme: Jacqueline Kennedy and The Nutcracker Suite*

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy started the tradition of choosing a White House Christmas theme. For her first Christmas in the White House in 1961, she chose the theme *The Nutcracker Suite* to honor the ballet that is popular at Christmastime.

Jacqueline Kennedy loved the arts and culture. As first lady, she wanted to bring arts to the White House and to share them with the American people. Her choice of *The Nutcracker Suite* reflected her love of ballet and classical music.

For the first time, she had the presidential Christmas tree displayed in the center of the Blue Room, where White House trees are still displayed today. The Blue Room is one of the three State Rooms named after a color. (The other two are the Red Room and Green Room.) The Blue Room is



John F. and Jackie Kennedy (top left); Caroline Kennedy (top right); Jackie Kennedy with Her Children (bottom)

in the shape of an elegant oval and is mainly used as a reception room. Presidents have received many distinguished guests in the Blue Room.

The 1961 Christmas tree, an eighteen-foot balsam fir, was decked with candy canes, snowflakes, mice, musical instruments, lighted candles, sweets, birds, and sugar plum fairies. For garland, Mrs. Kennedy used a blue velvet ribbon, draped whimsically from branch to branch, accenting the azure décor of the Blue Room.

Jacqueline had ten other trees spread throughout the mansion, and she left most of them undecorated, reflecting her understated taste.

The year 1961 was the first time in a long time that children lived in the White House. First daughter Caroline was four years old, and John Jr. was one year old. The American people loved seeing little children in the White House at Christmas.

The president and first lady invited newspaper reporters to see the tree. Jacqueline did not want her children to become spoiled by always being in the news, so she tried her hardest to keep them away from reporters. So, when Caroline happened to walk into the Blue Room to see the tree at the same time reporters were there, President Kennedy whisked her away.

Another time Caroline and her cousin came into the Blue Room to see the tree while reporters were there. Caroline was wearing her holiday best—a white dress with tiny red braid trim. Once again, she was whisked away when reporters got too close...but not before they got a photograph.

Every year, the president and first lady throw a Christmas party for the White House staff. That year, at the traditional White House staff Christmas party, President and Mrs. Kennedy posed beside the Nutcracker-trimmed tree. Jacqueline wore a heavy silk brocade suit with a wide shawl collar; President Kennedy wore a gray suit and tie with small polka dots.

The Marine Orchestra played in the background and a choir from a local university sang. As



1961 Blue Room Tree

they left, guests were handed a gift wrapped in silver and red ribbon: a picture of the White House taken in the spring when the yellow tulips surrounding the duck pond were at peak bloom.

### *Crèche*

Crèche is the French word for nativity, a scene portraying the birth of Christ.

St. Francis of Assisi first came up with the idea for a crèche in the year 1223. In the Italian village of Greccio, St. Francis set up a manger with hay and two live animals in a cave. He then invited villagers to come to ponder the display. He wanted to give villagers a visual way to focus on Christ during the Christmas season. Nativity scenes quickly spread all around Europe.

Each year, the White House also displays a nativity scene. They have used the same nativity since the year 1967, when President Lyndon Johnson and his wife Lady Bird lived there.

The Johnsons, however, were not the first presidential couple to put up a nativity. Grace Coolidge set up a nativity in 1924 because she wanted to highlight the religious meaning of Christmas. In

the Great Depression years, First Lady Lou Hoover set up a nativity scene under the Christmas tree. Mamie Eisenhower, who loved the holidays, also put up nativity scenes. In 1960, Mrs. Eisenhower's nativity carried the angelic message, "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

In 1962, an artist from New York, Loretta Hines Howard, loaned the White House a crèche that was crafted in Naples, Italy. It had forty-two pieces. Jacqueline Kennedy and then Lady Bird Johnson prominently displayed the crèche in the East Room, where it stood each Christmas from 1962 through 1965. Mrs. Howard traveled to the White House to set up the crèche each year, but she eventually donated it to a museum.



1963 Kennedy Crèche Card

In 1967, Charles and Jane Engelhard of New Jersey gave the White House the gift of a permanent crèche. Charles was a billionaire industrialist and heir to a precious metals company. Jane had helped Jacqueline Kennedy complete her first lady project: to restore the White House's historic grandeur.

Jane traveled all over the world looking for the perfect crèche for the White House. When she came across the Catello family's crèche in Naples, Italy, she knew she had found the perfect one. The family had been collecting nativities for centuries. It was hard for the Catello family to let go of their treasured crèche, but they were willing to do it for the White House.

The White House crèche was created in Naples in the late 18th century. Today, the crèche includes 47 baroque figures that are made of carved wood and terra cotta. The figures are richly clothed and stand 12 to 18 inches high.

The figures include Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus; the three Magi, their servants, and their horses; shepherds, angels, and cherubs; dogs, a goat, and cows; a man with a camel, a woman carrying a basket, and many others.

While the crèche has always been displayed in the East Room, its stage setting has changed over the years. From 1999 until today, the figures have been set up against a backdrop of a village featuring classical ruins.



## Lesson 1 Activities

### The Nutcracker



Clinton Family Portrait

Along with Jacqueline Kennedy, Barbara Bush and Hillary Clinton also chose *The Nutcracker Suite* as a White House Christmas theme.

Barbara Bush sent ballet pointe shoes to artists around the country. She asked the artists to decorate the shoes. The artists then sent them back to the White House, where they were displayed at Christmastime.

*The Nutcracker Suite* had special meaning for the Clinton family, since first daughter Chelsea, who had danced since she was young, performed in *The Nutcracker Suite* with the Washington Ballet.

To understand why this has been such a popular theme, let's explore *The Nutcracker Suite*. If you do not have time to do this activity in one day, spread it out over several days.

- The ballet is based on a book called *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* by E.T.A. Hoffmann. Listen to it on [LibriVox](#) or read it [online](#).

- Next, listen to the music from the ballet. Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky composed the score. Focus on the “Waltz of the Snowflakes,” “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy,” “Chocolate” (The Spanish Dance), “Coffee” (The Arabian Dance), “Trepak” (The Russian Dance), “Tea” (The Chinese Dance), and “Waltz of the Flowers.” You can listen to Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker* score on YouTube for free.

- Finally, if time and money allow, consider going to watch a live, local performance of *The Nutcracker Suite*.

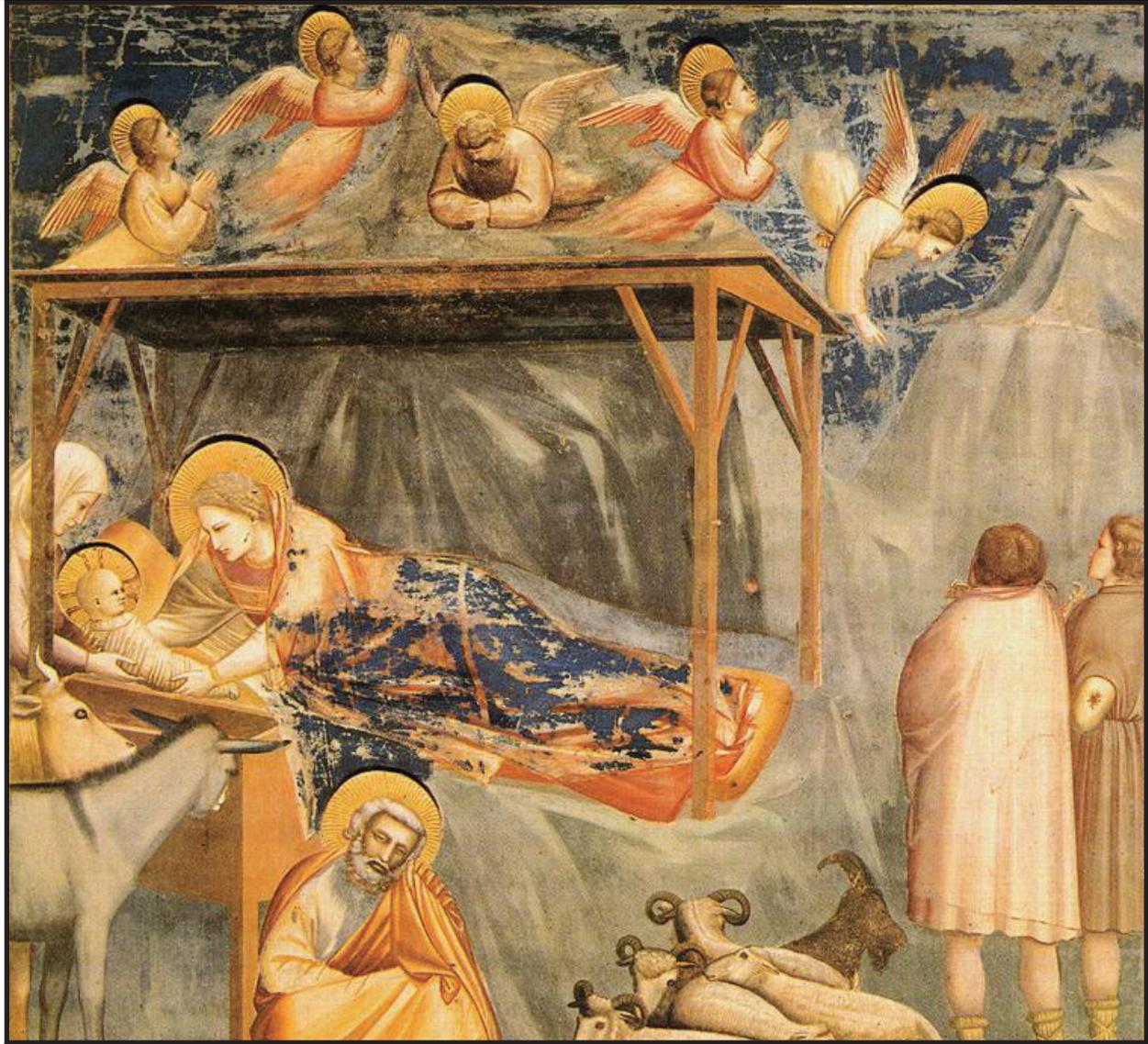
*Activity 2: The White House Crèche*

Artists, sculptors, and live performers have portrayed nativity scenes in many different ways. In this activity, students will compare the White House's crèche to Scripture accounts of Christ's birth. Students will also create their own nativity scenes.

- First, read from the Bible about the birth of Christ: Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 2:1-12. List the people, animals, and other characters mentioned in these passages from the Bible.
- Second, look at this photograph of the present-day White House crèche. What characters do you see in the nativity? What animals? What is the setting? Compare the White House crèche to the Scripture passages.
- Third, create your own nativity scene. There are a few options here:
  - o Draw or paint your own picture of the nativity scene as you envision it
  - o Draw or paint a picture of the White House crèche
  - o Draw or paint (reproduce) the following nativity scene by a Giotto di Bondone, an Italian Renaissance artist



White House Creche



Painting of a Nativity by Giotto

*Activity 3: John F. Kennedy Presidential Address & Pageant of Peace Tree Lighting*



John F. Kennedy Giving his 1962 Remarks at the Pageant of Peace

Calvin Coolidge was the first president to light the National Christmas Tree on the White House Ellipse, located on the south side of the White House. The tree lighting and accompanying Pageant of Peace ceremony are traditions that continue to this day.

Read President John F. Kennedy's 1962 remarks at the Pageant of Peace aloud. Then answer the questions that follow.

“Ladies and gentlemen, Secretary Udall, members of the clergy:

With the lighting of this tree, which is an old ceremony in Washington and one which has been among the most important responsibilities of a good many Presidents of the United States, we initiate, in a formal way, the Christmas Season.

We mark the festival of Christmas which is the most sacred and hopeful day in our civilization. For nearly 2,000 years the message of Christmas, the message of peace and good will towards all men, has been the guiding star of our endeavors. This morning I had a meeting at the White House which included some of our representatives from far off countries in Africa and Asia. They were returning to their posts for the Christmas holidays. Talking with them afterwards, I was struck by the fact that in the far off continents Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, as well as Christians, pause from their labors on the 25th day of December to celebrate the birthday of the Prince of Peace. There could be no more striking proof that Christmas is truly the universal holiday of all men. It is the day when all of us dedicate our thoughts to others; when all are reminded that mercy and compassion are the enduring virtues; when all show, by small deeds and large and by acts, that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

It is the day when we remind ourselves that man can and must live in peace with his neighbors

and that it is the peacemakers who are truly blessed. In this year of 1962 we greet each other at Christmas with some special sense of the blessings of peace. This has been a year of peril when the peace has been sorely threatened. But it has been a year when peril was faced and when reason ruled. As a result, we may talk, at this Christmas, just a little bit more confidently of peace on earth, good will to men. As a result, the hopes of the American people are perhaps a little higher. We have much yet to do. We still need to ask that God bless everyone. But yet I think we can enter this season of good will with more than usual joy in our hearts.

And I think all of us extend a special word of gratitude and appreciation to those who serve the United States abroad; to the one million men in uniform who will celebrate this Christmas away from their homes; to those hundreds of young men and women and some older men and women who serve in far off countries in our Peace Corps; to the members of the Foreign Service; to those who work in the various information services, AID agencies, and others who work for us abroad who will celebrate this December 25th thousands of miles from us at sea, on land, and in the air, but with us. It is to them that we offer the best of Christmases and to all of you I send my very best wishes for a blessed and happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year. Thank you.”

1. Why does Kennedy call Christmas the “universal holiday of all men”?
2. What did Kennedy have to say about peace?
3. To help you understand the answer to the last question, do a little outside research on the Cuban Missile Crisis. What initiated the Cuban Missile Crisis? How did President Kennedy respond?
4. President Kennedy also calls out some special people and groups worthy of recognition. Who are they, and why does he give them a special greeting?



White House Ellipse at Christmas

*Activity 4: Official White House Christmas Ornament*

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy founded the White House Historical Association in 1961. It is a non-profit educational organization that acquires and preserves artifacts for and about the White House. Every year since 1981, the White House Historical Association has designed the Official White House Christmas Ornament. It is displayed on the Blue Room tree. The Association also sells the ornament to the general public. Proceeds support the White House Historical Association.

Each year, the ornament honors a president. For example, in 2015, the Official White House Christmas Ornament honored Calvin Coolidge, who served as the nation's 30th president from 1923-1929. The ornament is in the shape of a tree and is decorated with ornaments that represent Coolidge's life and presidency.



The Official 2015 White House Christmas Ornament

- First, go to the website [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org) to research this year's official ornament. Answer the following questions:
  - o Which president does the ornament honor?
  - o When did the president serve?
  - o What is the design inspired by?
  - o What are the details on the ornament and what do they represent?

- o What materials is it made out of?
  - Next, check out a biography at your local library or do Internet research to learn even more about the president and the history behind the ornament.
  - Finally, if your budget allows, order an ornament of your very own to commemorate the Christmas your family studied the White House!

*Activity 5: Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men*



**Part A. Jacqueline Kennedy’s “An Ancient Tale Tells Us”**

The Kennedy family celebrated only two Christmases in the White House. On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy was struck by an assassin’s bullet during a parade in Dallas, Texas and died.

Just before the tragic death of her husband, Mrs. Kennedy wrote about the meaning of Christmas for *LOOK* magazine. Read her words aloud:

“An ancient tale tells us of the Christmas custom of burning a Yule log in every fireplace and of how, as the log was drawn from the forest, ‘each wayfarer raised his hat as it passed, for he knew that it was full of good promises, and that its flame would burn out old wrongs...’”

The lights of our trees and homes in this season still signal this most ardent promise of Christmas—the end of all wrongs, the fulfillment of old hopes... But even though the White House is often a center of national attention—a public building—

during the Christmas season it is the home of an American family sharing in the anticipation of the joy of this festival. The world around us is a complicated and troubled place. But through Christmas, we keep imbroken contact with the simple message of redemption and love that God sent into the world so many years ago. To many of us, Christmas has a deep religious significance. To all of us, it celebrates the most profound hopes for the comradeship of man.

‘Peace on earth, good will to men,’ the angels said. ‘Peace on earth, good will to men,’ may we all repeat to our children and those we love, in villages and cities; this Christmas Eve, wherever men may gather.”

**B. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s Poem, “Christmas Bells”**

On Christmas Day 1863, poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote of the sadness it is so easy to feel at Christmas. In 1863, America was devastated by the Civil War. One hundred years later, in 1963, America was devastated by the Kennedy assassination. In 1863, widower Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was mourning his wife, who had recently died. In 1963, widow Jacqueline Kennedy was mourning her husband, who had also recently died.

- First, read Longfellow's Poem aloud.

### Christmas Bells

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
 Their old, familiar carols play,  
     And wild and sweet  
     The words repeat  
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,  
 The belfries of all Christendom  
     Had rolled along  
     The unbroken song  
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till, ringing, singing on its way,  
 The world revolved from night to day,  
     A voice, a chime,  
     A chant sublime  
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth  
 The cannon thundered in the South,  
     And with the sound  
     The carols drowned  
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent  
 The hearth-stones of a continent,  
     And made forlorn  
     The households born  
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;  
 "There is no peace on earth," I said:  
     "For hate is strong,  
     And mocks the song  
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
 "God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!  
     The Wrong shall fail,  
     The Right prevail,  
 With peace on earth, good-will to men!"

- Next, discuss the meaning of the poem. Describe the emotions expressed in the poem. Have you ever felt like Longfellow did on Christmas? Is the meaning of the poem still relevant today? How? Why do you think Longfellow chooses to end each stanza with the same repeating phrase? Which is your favorite stanza and why?
- Finally, use “Christmas Bells” as a model to create your own poem that rhymes in the same way as Longfellow’s (AA/BB) and uses the same repeating phrase at the end. The poem should be about something that is meaningful at Christmas. (Note: It does not have to be as long).

### **Part C: Adopt a Family in Need**

Reflect on the meaning of the above passage and poem. Recognize the sadness many families feel at Christmas. Then plan to “adopt” a family that is in need or is grieving this Christmas. Maybe the family has suffered a job loss or the loss of a loved one—or could just use some cheering up. The family can be from your church, neighborhood, co-op, or anywhere.

You can get together boxes of things they would want or need at Christmas: food, clothes, toiletries, toys, candy, gifts, gift cards, etc. Or simply deliver a plate of cookies (maybe from a recipe in this unit study) and a card with an encouraging note. If possible and appropriate, deliver the gifts anonymously and experience a true sense of “peace on earth, good-will to men!”

*Activity 6: Hillary Clinton's Chocolate Chip Cookies*

When Hillary Clinton was a little girl, she and her brothers would have a cookie-baking contest on Christmas to see who could bake the largest cookie. Her mother wanted to keep the kids busy while her dad put up the tree. Then when Hillary became a mother, she baked cookies with her daughter, Chelsea, each Christmas.



In 1992, the year Bill Clinton was elected president, *Family Circle* magazine held a cookie-baking contest between the candidates' wives. Hillary Clinton entered her chocolate chip cookies and won, beating Barbara Bush.

This Christmas, bake Hillary Clinton's chocolate chip cookies with your family.

- 1 ½ cups unsifted all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup solid vegetable shortening
- 1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 (12-ounce) package semi-sweet chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease baking sheets. Combine flour, salt, and baking soda. Beat together shortening, sugars, and vanilla in a large bowl until creamy. Add eggs, beating until light and fluffy. Gradually beat in flour mixture and rolled oats. Stir in chocolate chips. Drop batter by well-rounded teaspoons onto greased baking sheets. Bake 8 to 10 minutes or until golden. Cool cookies on sheets for 2 minutes. Remove cookies to wire rack to cool completely.

Source: William J. Clinton Presidential Library

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