

Young Portrait Explorers: Dolley Madison



Learning Objective: Learn how Dolley Madison shaped the role of **first lady of the United States** (*the wife of a U.S. president*) by serving as a trusted friend and hostess (*someone who entertains people*) to important guests at the White House.

Portrait Discussion:

Spend 30 seconds letting your eyes wander from top to bottom and through the center of the painting.

Facial Expression: Look closely at Dolley Madison's face. Where are her eyes looking? Are they looking at you? Now look at her lips. Is she smiling or relaxing her mouth? *Dolley Madison was known for her cheerful and bubbly personality.* Does she look cheerful in this painting? *Many people **admired** (looked up to) her, and she was known for being able to make friends with almost anyone.* Who are some of your friends? What do you like about being with them? Are they nice? Do they make you laugh? Do they share with you?

Pose: Dolley Madison is posed at an angle in this portrait. Her face, shoulders, and torso are turned toward us (the viewers) but the rest of her body faces sideways. Do you think she is sitting or standing? Can you pose like Dolley Madison?

Clothing: What kind of clothing is Dolley Madison wearing? Which piece of clothing did you notice first? *Dolley Madison is wearing a bright red shawl, which appears even brighter against her black shirt. She often wore clothing that would make her stand out in a crowd. Specifically, she loved wearing turbans (a long piece of silk or cotton that you wrap around your head).*

Historical Context: *Dolley Madison was married to James Madison, the fourth president of the United States, making her the first lady of the United States. She took her role as first lady very seriously and used her friendly personality to bring together leaders with different views. She also spoke out about helping children.*

Related Children's Book:

Women Who Broke the Rules: Dolley Madison by Kathleen Krull

Activity: Make a Connection

Materials:

A friend or family member that lives in a different home
Telephone, internet, or letter writing supplies

Instruction:

Dolley Madison was known for connecting people. Choose a friend or family member to connect with. You can use internet apps (like Zoom or Skype), the telephone, or simply write a letter.

Ideas for connecting:

- Create a list of interview questions about likes, dislikes, hopes, fears, memories, etc. Then interview a friend or family member.
- Tell the other person what you like about them.
- Draw a picture about a time when you shared a special or fun moment with them. Then share your drawing.
- Ask this friend or family member to make a connection with someone else.



Dolley Madison by William S. Elwell, oil on canvas, 1848.
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Find the portrait on our website, here: https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.74.6