

Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out

David McCullough introduction

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While presidential elections inspire Americans to look toward the future, this transition also leaves citizens reflecting upon the previous men who held the position. No matter their appearance or character, all of these men (with the exception of George Washington) have called the White House home. David McCullough describes the world's most famous home as "filled with—no, overflowing with—stories." Some of these amazing stories are captured in this impressive compilation of text and images by 108 authors and illustrators.

Arranged chronologically by historical periods, *Our White House* is composed of essays, short stories, poems, creative nonfiction, and historical and literary excerpts. Susan Cooper's "The Burning of the White House," a fictional letter in which a British soldier describes setting the mansion on fire, and Homer Hickam's "The White House, the Moon, and a Coal Miner's Son," a first-person account of meeting John F. Kennedy and sharing his goal to reach the moon, highlight well-known White House and presidential events. Lesser-known anecdotes are described in such entries as "Jefferson's Monstrous Bones," a narrative of the president's fascination with mastodon fossils (which he spread out on the floor of the East Room) by Barbara Kerley, and Richard Peck's "The White House Cow," which recounts the day William Henry Harrison went to market to buy a cow for his new estate.

Although the focus of the book is the presidents and their legacies, it also brings to light the diverse people who have served in, worked in, and visited the White House, including the slaves who helped build it, Native American leaders, women's-right-to-vote picketers (the White House's first protestors), secret service, and press corps. Many of the children, pets, and even ghosts who have roamed its halls are remembered as well.

Created by the National Children's Book and Literacy Alliance, this compilation contains the works of such notable children's and young adult authors as Jon Scieszka, Linda Sue Park, and Walter Dean Myers, with additional excerpts from presidential speeches, letters, and books. What makes this compilation a stunning achievement are the host of illustrations, ranging from realistic to dramatic and satirical, by Brian Selznick, David Small, Roxie Munro, and other award-winning illustrators.

Our White House is not meant for one sitting; instead, entries should be savored one at a time. While written for older children and teens, they should be shared with parents and educators, who can add their own personal stories to the experience.

ANGELA LEEPER (August 15, 2008)

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