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Auszug aus:

Michelle Obama and Kamala Harris

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Working with two autobiographies –
Michelle Obama and Kamala Harris
by Xenia Redl

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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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by Xenia Riedl

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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 **analysing 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 |

Working with two autobiographies – Michelle Obama and Kamala Harris

Facts

Autobiographical writing has found a widening readership in recent years. This unit deals with excerpts from two autobiographies: *Becoming*, the highly praised memoir of Michelle Obama, wife of the first African American President of the United States, and *The Truths We Hold: An American Journey*, the personal and political manifesto of Kamala Harris, the first woman and African/Asian American Vice President of the USA.

Both women have become “celebrities”, each of them in a different way. Michelle Obama, who grew up in a working-class neighbourhood in Chicago, started her career as a lawyer and later changed into public administration. But it was in her role as Barack Obama’s wife and first African American First Lady that she became famous. Millions of girls and women all over the world were encouraged by her example. In her autobiography, she describes her way to a fulfilled life: *Becoming me* (Finding your own identity) – *Becoming us* (Building up meaningful personal relationships) – *Becoming more* (Working for a larger good). Writing about her own doubts and struggles and how she succeeded in overcoming them, Michelle Obama offers advice on a variety of topics.

Kamala Harris, the daughter of immigrants from India and Jamaica, decided to become a lawyer in order to work for more justice, to protect the innocent and prosecute criminals. Her way led her straight from law school into the office of the district attorney in Oakland. Later, she became Attorney General of California, known for her tough stance on crime. As the “rising star” of the Democratic party, she won a U.S. Senate seat in 2016, concentrating on social issues like higher minimum wages, immigration and criminal-justice reform. Accordingly, her memoir, published in 2019, combines episodes from her life with thoughts and discussions about political issues, paving the way for her further career: contender for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2019 and Vice President in 2021. As many critics have observed, her memoir should be read as a political pamphlet, not a work of literature.

Further reading

- ▶ <https://www.gettingsmart.com/2019/04/15/the-educational-implications-of-michelle-obamas-becoming/> [last access: 26/06/2022]
- ▶ <https://qz.com/work/1593918/michelle-obamas-becoming-is-a-lesson-in-how-to-find-fulfillment/> [last access: 26/06/2022]
- ▶ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/feb/03/truths-we-hold-american-journey-kamala-harris-review> [last access: 26/06/2022]

Notes on the material

Excerpts from the two autobiographies and additional materials have been chosen to provide an insight into aspects of the protagonists' lives which will be interesting for young people. The unit offers a variety of suggestions and materials, from which the teacher can choose. It is also possible to deal with Topics 1–3 independently and to use some of the materials in connection with other teaching units.

Topic 1 (M1) aims at familiarising students with the genre of autobiographical writing and some of its typical features. A Think-Pair-Share activity (*Why do people write autobiographies?*) serves as an introduction to the topic. The worksheet guides students through a close analysis and comparison of the covers of the two autobiographies and introduces their authors. The creative task of designing a book cover can be prepared in class and done as a homework or in an additional lesson.

Topic 2 deals with some of the central aspects of Michelle Obama's autobiography *Becoming*. Three excerpts from the text highlight her rise from a "humble, working-class" family to a top position as a lawyer in a Chicago "high-end" firm. *Growing up in South Shore/Chicago (M2/M3)* shows the influence of family and community on Obama's early education and later success; the tasks on the worksheet include reading comprehension and writing a comment. *Developing self-confidence (M4/M5)* makes students aware of the problem of self-doubts and encourages them to reflect about possible counter measures. The lesson is introduced by a matching exercise, followed by comprehension questions and an assignment/research on how to boost self-esteem. *Career choices (M6/M7)* describes the difficulties of finding the "ideal" job. With the help of a Venn diagram, an analysis of Michelle Obama's thoughts about her problems and a creative

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