
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Michelle Obama on empowerment



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello. This is 6 Minute English and I'm Rob.

Dan

And I'm Dan.

Rob

Now, do you know who Michelle Obama is?

Dan

Er, yes. Maybe the most famous woman in the world? Former First Lady, which means she was the wife of the President of the United States of America.

Rob

That is correct. She's just published her autobiography and has been talking in the UK about her life. Before we find out more, here is this week's question. When did the title 'First Lady' first become used for the wife of the US president? Was it in the:

- a) 18th Century
- b) 19th Century or
- c) 20th Century

Any ideas Dan?

Dan

This could be a trick question. The first US presidents were in the 18th Century, and they had wives, but I think the actual term may only have been introduced much later – so I'm going to take a wild guess and say the 20th Century.

Rob

OK. Well, I'll have the answer later in the programme. Michelle Obama's visit to the UK was covered on BBC News. According to this report, where did she visit that she had visited before?

BBC News Report

The former First Lady **spoke openly** about a number of issues and one of her main messages was about **empowerment**. Earlier in the day Mrs Obama revisited a school in north London, a place where she says she was first **inspired** to focus on education during her time as the First Lady.

Rob

So, where did she revisit on this trip?

Dan

She went to a school in north London. She said it was at this school that she was first **inspired** to focus on education. If you are **inspired** to do something, you get a strong feeling that you want to do something, you feel a strong motivation to achieve something particular, often because of something someone else has said or achieved.

Rob

The report also mentioned that she **spoke openly** about a number of issues. To **speak openly about something** is when you discuss a subject, often a difficult subject, without trying to hide the facts or your feelings. It's a phrase that is used when people talk about things in their life that they find difficult or embarrassing.

Dan

One of the things she **spoke openly** about was her own feeling that she didn't really belong, that she really have the skills or talent to be doing what she was doing and that she didn't deserve her position.

Rob

There is a name for that. It's called **imposter syndrome** – that feeling where you think one day everyone will realise that you're really not very good at what you do.

Dan

I get that feeling all the time!

Rob

I wonder why? Because the thing with this **imposter syndrome** is that it isn't justified. It's more a lack of confidence or a result of the way society labels us.

Dan

Well, anyway, back to the report. Michelle Obama was also keen to talk about the topic of **empowerment**. That's giving people the strength, confidence and power to achieve what they want in life by themselves.

Rob

Let's hear from Michelle Obama herself now talking about how we sometimes judge people based on their class rather than their individual abilities.

Michelle Obama

That's often the mistake that we make, we **assume** that working-class folks are not highly gifted **in their own right** when a lot of times your **station in life** is limited by the circumstances that you find yourself in.

Rob

She says here that we **assume** things about people based on their social status or **station in life**. To **assume** means 'to make a judgement which is not based on the facts but on what we think is true'.

Dan

She uses the phrase **in their own right**. When you say that someone is talented **in their own right**, it means that their talent comes from their own skills and abilities and not because of any connection with any organisation, individual or class that they happen to be associated with.

Rob

Before we wrap up, time to get the answer to this week's question. When did the title 'First Lady' first become used for the wife of the US president? Was it in the:

- a) 18th Century
- b) 19th Century or
- c) 20th Century

And Dan, you said?

Dan

I thought it was the 20th Century.

Rob

Well, you were right.

Dan

Yay!

Rob

But let me finish. You were right in that it was later than the 18th Century, which was when the first US presidents held their positions, but it wasn't as late as the 20th Century. It was the second half of the 19th Century when the title First Lady began to be used. Now let's review today's vocabulary.

Dan

We started with the phrase **to talk openly** about something. This means to discuss something, usually a difficult subject, without hiding your feelings, emotions or facts about that subject.

Rob

Then there was the noun **empowerment**. This is the process of giving people the feeling that they are in control of their lives, making people more confident in their rights and abilities.

Dan

The verb **inspire** was next. If you **inspire** people, you give them the feeling that they want to and can do something, something difficult or creative. If you have that feeling yourself, you are **inspired**.

Rob

Next there was the verb **to assume something**. **To assume** means 'to make a judgement about someone or something not based on proof, but on things you think or believe to be true'.

Dan

The next phrase was **in their own right**. If someone is successful **in their own right**, for example, it means their success is because of their own skills and abilities, and not because of who they work for, or work with or which social group they come from.

Rob

And finally there was the noun phrase **station in life**.

Dan

Your **station in life** is your position in society – your social status.

Rob

And that brings us to the end of this week's programme. We'll be back soon and in the meantime you can find us on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube our app and of course the website bbclearningenglish.com. Bye bye for now.

Dan

Bye!

VOCABULARY

to speak/talk openly (about something)

to speak/talk about a difficult or embarrassing topic with honesty

empowerment

giving people the confidence and power to improve their lives themselves

to inspire

to create in people the feeling of wanting to do something and achieve something

imposter syndrome

feelings that you don't deserve your position even though there is no evidence you are not suitable

to assume something

to think something is true based on your own beliefs and understanding without knowing the facts

in their own right

because of their own talents and abilities

station in life

position in society or workplace