

Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery Study Guide

**Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery by Russell
Freedman**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery Study Guide..... | 1 |
| Contents..... | 2 |
| Plot Summary..... | 3 |
| Chapter One: First Lady..... | 5 |
| Chapter Two: Poor Little Rich Girl..... | 6 |
| Chapter Three: Mademoiselle Souvestre..... | 8 |
| Chapter Four: Cousin Franklin..... | 10 |
| Chapter Five: A Conventional Society Matron..... | 11 |
| Chapter Six: The Education of Eleanor Roosevelt..... | 13 |
| Chapter Seven: Friendship and Politics..... | 15 |
| Chapter Eight: A President's Wife..... | 17 |
| Chapter Nine: Partners..... | 19 |
| Chapter Ten: The War Years..... | 20 |
| Chapter Eleven: On Her Own..... | 22 |
| Characters..... | 24 |
| Objects/Places..... | 27 |
| Themes..... | 29 |
| Style..... | 32 |
| Quotes..... | 34 |
| Topics for Discussion..... | 36 |



Plot Summary

Eleanor Roosevelt, *A Life of Discovery*, is the story of Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady, champion of the weak and poor, UN delegate and one of the most beloved figures in American history. Sixteen years after Franklin Roosevelt died and she vacated her post as First Lady, she was still voted the country's most popular person—winning out over presidents and generals.

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt was born into a wealthy family. Both her mother and father came from New York's high society. Eleanor was the first child of the handsome sportsman, Elliot Roosevelt, and his wife Anna, a legendary beauty and glamorous woman. Eleanor felt a remoteness from her mother at an early age which she attributed to her plain—she even said ugly—appearance. Anna placed a great deal of importance on beauty and Eleanor knew from an early age that she fell far short of that mark. Eleanor idolized her father who recognized the intelligence, natural charm and abilities that his daughter possessed. Unfortunately, Eleanor was abandoned by both parents by age ten. Her mother died of diphtheria at age twenty-nine and a few years later, Elliot—who was an alcoholic and addicted to pain killers—died from a bad fall when he was on a drunken binge.

Eleanor and her brothers were then raised by Mary Hall, their maternal grandmother. That household had its share of problems, which Eleanor had to learn to navigate through. Two adult uncles who lived at home were playboys and drunks and two adult aunts who lived with their mother went through numerous love affairs and had emotional problems. Eleanor flourished when she was sent to Allenswood, an elite finishing school in London, where she was recognized for her intelligence, kindness and abilities. After her return to the States, Franklin began courting her and they were soon engaged.

After Franklin became bored with his law practice, he entered into politics. He served in the New York State senate, was named Assistant Secretary of the Navy, ran on an unsuccessful ticket as VP and was elected Governor of New York. During these years, Eleanor had to put her shyness and reserved ways aside and become the political wife and partner. She was intrigued by the issues of the day that faced the country and the world and developed a keen interest in politics. Tragedy struck the family during the couple's early political days. They lost a seven-month-old son, Franklin, Jr., to sickness. Franklin was stricken with polio, which caused him to be permanently paralyzed from the waist down. Eleanor's heart was broken when she discovered that Franklin was having an affair with her social secretary. The couple made it through these tragedies but were scarred by them forever.

Eleanor came into her own as First Lady. The country had never seen a First Lady quite like Eleanor. She helped the movers move furniture around, insisted on driving her own car, held press conferences, traveled the world, wrote articles for newspapers and magazines and became a strong advocate for minorities and the downtrodden. Franklin was president during some of the worst times that the country had seen—the Great Depression and World War II. Though Eleanor had at first been less than enthusiastic



about living in the White House and giving up her beloved teaching career, she knew that the country needed her husband and supported his reelections.

After FDR died, Eleanor was among the first delegates of the newly created United Nations. She became a strong voice for the millions of refugees around the world who were seeking political asylum after the war's conclusion. President Harry Truman referred to her as First Lady of the World. Eleanor traveled to all parts of the world spreading the goodwill of the United States and speaking out for justice and peace. At seventy-eight, age and health caught up with her. She was suffering from a rare blood disease when she died of a massive stroke.



Chapter One: First Lady

Chapter One: First Lady Summary and Analysis

Eleanor Roosevelt did not want to become the First Lady. She had enjoyed her life as a teacher, writer and political activist, and she saw it all being taken from her when her husband was running for the presidency. But Eleanor kept silent about her concerns and performed all her duties as First Lady. She took the position of First Lady to new heights during the many years of FDR's presidency. The country had never before seen a First Lady like Eleanor Roosevelt. She opened her doors to reporters, had press conferences, drove her own car, traveled the country and world by plane and made official trips on her own. She liked to have time by herself and insisted on taking drives in her car alone. Of course the Secret Service had a problem with that, but Eleanor was adamant. The Secret Service gave her a gun to protect herself. She didn't claim to be an expert shot but she let everyone know that she knew how to use it if she had to.

As a youngster growing up, Eleanor was not considered an attractive girl—confirmed by, of all people, her own mother. Tragically, she lost both parents by the time she was ten years old. She was a timid and shy girl, commenting that she was always afraid of something. But as First Lady, she would not be allowed the luxury of hiding behind her timidity. She was First Lady during tumultuous times in the US - the Great Depression and World War II. Over the years, her voice strengthened against social injustice and world peace. After her husband died, she devoted her time and efforts to the United Nations where she was dubbed First Lady of the World.

There was an aura about Eleanor. She could literally light up a room with her vibrancy and elan. She modestly claimed that even a person without talents like she could contribute to the world if they got beyond their own inhibitions and fears.



Chapter Two: Poor Little Rich Girl

Chapter Two: Poor Little Rich Girl Summary and Analysis

As a child, Eleanor displayed such old-fashioned ways that her own mother nicknamed her "Granny". This characterization by her mother hurt and stung her for years. Eleanor was, by her own assessment, plain at best; in fact, she thought she was "a blue-eyed rather ugly little girl" (p. 5). Her mother, Anna, was a beauty, and she was in stark contrast to her daughter's appearance. Her mother, who put great emphasis on appearances, was largely responsible for the feelings of inferiority that Eleanor struggled with the rest of her life. Eleanor adored her father, Elliott, who was a handsome, charming man and famed big-game hunter. Elliott recognized the talents of his young daughter and doted on her.

Anna Hall was a glamorous and beautiful debutante when the dashing Elliott Roosevelt began courting her. Their subsequent marriage in 1883 united two old and prominent families of New York's high society. Anna Eleanor Roosevelt was born on October 11, 1884—reportedly more wrinkled and unattractive than the normal baby. But Elliot immediately fell in love with his daughter whose godfather was Elliott's older brother, Theodore, who later went on to become President of the United States. Eleanor was born into a family of wealth and privilege. Her parents owned a townhouse in New York City, staffed with servants. Anna's legendary beauty and Elliot's reputation as a sportsman made them a popular and sought after couple. Eleanor was tended to by a French nurse. She spent so much time with her nanny that she spoke French before English.

But there were serious problems in the Roosevelt household. The charming and talented Elliott suffered from inner demons and developed a serious drinking problem. His drinking escalated when he suffered a serious broken ankle. To relieve the pain, Elliot increased his consumption of liquor and began taking powerful pain-killing drugs. Anna, concerned about her young husband's addictions, begged him to rein in his dependence on them. His addictions led to chronic depression. Anna, to save her family, suggested they take a long vacation in Europe. The memories of the time Eleanor spent with her father on those leisurely days in Europe stayed with her forever.

The European vacation was only a temporary respite from the family's problems. By the time their third child, Hall, was born in 1891, Elliot was drinking heavily, chronically depressed and suicidal. Ann and the children returned to the US without Elliot, who stayed behind in a French sanitarium for a "cure". Theodore Roosevelt interceded on his brother's behalf. He insisted that he live apart from his family until such time he could rehabilitate himself. Elliot lived and worked on his brother's farm in Virginia while Anna stayed in New York with the children. The children were kept in the dark about their father's condition. Eleanor began to imagine all sorts of things about her beloved father. Had he abandoned them? Did he not love her any longer? Although Anna would



have a "mother's hour" with the children everyday, Eleanor felt a barrier between herself and her mother and two brothers. She never felt she could quite measure up to her mother's standards. Eleanor, seven years old by then, was educated by a private tutor.

Anna became very ill and had to be hospitalized for an unknown condition. After undergoing surgery, Anna contracted diphtheria and died at age twenty-nine. Elliot returned to his children but was unable to see them immediately. Anna's will instructed that they be raised by her mother, Mary Hall. Eventually, the children were reunited with their father at their grandmother's Manhattan brownstone. But the children stayed with Mary Hall and Elliot returned to Virginia, promising to stay in contact with them by letters and visits and that they would all be together again one day. When both Elliot, Jr. and Hall were stricken with scarlet fever, Eleanor was sent away to stay with other relatives. Hall recovered but Elliot, Jr., like his mother, contracted diphtheria and died at three years of age.

Eleanor tried to comfort her father, who was distraught over the loss of his son. She dreamed of the day when she and her father would live together again. He visited her often at her grandmother's house and farm, showering her with attention and gifts. But typical of an alcoholic and addict, Elliot didn't always show up when he promised to. One day, when Eleanor and her father were walking the family dogs, he handed her the leashes and told her to wait for him while he went in for a quick drink at the Knickerbocker Club. Six hours later, Elliot was dragged out from the club completely senseless. Mary Hall curtailed his visits after that episode. Elliot's problems worsened. After a drinking binge in Virginia, he lapsed into a coma after a fall and died.

Eleanor was destroyed by the news and continued to hold on to a fantasy world where she and her father lived a happy life together. Grandmother Hall began to isolate herself in her room. She had her own problems—four of her grown children still lived at home. Two beautiful and spoiled daughters were involved in one tempestuous love affair after the other. Dealing with her daughters and the problems of her two playboy sons had exhausted Mary Hall. Mary was determined to do a better job of raising Eleanor and Hall than she did with her own children. Since Mary suspected that Eleanor suffered from curvature of the spine, the young girl was forced to wear a back brace for over a year.

Eleanor continued to be educated by private tutors and did well with her classes. She also took piano and dance lessons. Eleanor, tall and skinny and somewhat awkward, hated her dance classes. There were happy times during those years, especially at her grandmother's country estate at Oak Terrace. Her aunts and uncles spent time with her having picnics, taking long hikes and rides in row boats in the lake. Her main companion during these years was her younger brother, Hall. When Eleanor attended her first dance at fourteen, she was humiliated by the "little girl" dress her grandmother insisted she wear. She stood out from the other girls who wore sophisticated dresses. She was literally a wall flower as she watched her cousin Alice dance with another cousin, sixteen-year-old Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Probably feeling sorry for Eleanor, Alice urged Franklin to ask Eleanor to dance. Eleanor was forever grateful for that act of kindness.



Chapter Three: Mademoiselle Souvestre

Chapter Three: Mademoiselle Souvestre Summary and Analysis

At fifteen, Eleanor was enrolled in Allenswood, an exclusive girls' finishing school in London. Her grandmother alerted the school's headmistress, Marie Souvestre, about the tragedies of Eleanor's childhood and how she suffered from fear and from being unattractive. The girls who attended the school, all from well-to-do families, weren't treated with kid gloves. They lived in drafty rooms; could shower for only ten minutes three times a week; had to take brisk walks daily despite the weather; and, their rooms were inspected while they were in class. If a drawer wasn't neat enough, its contents were dumped on the floor. But Marie Souvestre was a warm person who loved to teach and challenge her students.

Eleanor enjoyed the classes that Mademoiselle Souvestre taught herself—literature and history. Her classes were held in the library that was filled with books and flowers. Sometimes in the evening, Mlle. would invite some of the girls to her study for poetry readings and discussions. Sometimes Mlle. would direct the conversations toward politics and current events. Reflecting on her time there later, Eleanor credited Mlle. Souvestre with opening her mind and thinking in terms of the entire world. Mlle. recognized Eleanor's special qualities and talents and gave her the "seat of honor" across from her at dinner. Eleanor's fears began to vanish as she flourished under the positive tutelage at Allenswood. For the first time in her life, she felt young and made friends easily. When her cousin, Corrine, enrolled during Eleanor's last year at Allenswood, she was stunned at the change in Eleanor and noted how everyone loved her. The three years at Allenswood were the happiest of her life. And Mlle. Eleanor counted Souvestre as one of the most influential people in her entire life. Eleanor returned to the US at age eighteen for her debutante party. More family sadness awaited Eleanor on her return. Her uncle Vallie had slipped into alcoholism. Vallie was dangerous—he took to shooting his shotgun from his bedroom window at anything that moved in the yard. Grandmother Hall was at a loss as to what to do about her son. Eleanor's Aunt Pussie was still falling in and out of love on a continual basis. When one of her romances went under, she would lock herself in her room for days at a time. Eleanor was not looking forward to her coming out party. Her mother, grandmother and aunts had all been legendary beauties during their debutante days. Eleanor knew she fell far short of that mark.

But Eleanor's spirit and personality showed through during her debutante days. She was invited to attend many exclusive dinners and parties. Yet, when compared to her glamorous mother, she felt inadequate. But Eleanor, too tall for most of the boys, was always pleasant and gracious and was a good conversationalist. When Grandmother Hall moved full time to the country, Eleanor moved in with a cousin, Susie Parish. She enjoyed those days as she had developed many new friendships and was quite busy



socially. She was a member of high society's Junior League, which was an organization established to help the needy. Eleanor took her charity work a step further. Feeling so much sympathy for the poor, she volunteered to teach at one of the settlement houses in the slums. Her political nature was beginning to emerge. She joined the Consumer's League, which was focused on the poor working conditions of young women. She was appalled when she visited sweatshops in the ghetto areas and found children as young as four or five working to exhaustion. At nineteen, Eleanor became secretly engaged to a young Harvard student who she had been seeing and who was taller than she.



Chapter Four: Cousin Franklin

Chapter Four: Cousin Franklin Summary and Analysis

After Eleanor returned from Europe, she ran into Franklin on a train on her way to visit her grandmother. She had not seen Franklin since the Christmas party three years before. He stopped by to chat. Eleanor was wearing a stylish outfit, had a glowing complexion and shining hair and the softest and sympathetic blue eyes he had ever seen. The two young people were fifth cousins, once removed. Franklin was traveling with his mother, Sara, who was widowed three years before. Eleanor visited with Franklin and Sara until they exited the train at the Hyde Park station.

During the winter of Eleanor's coming out, she began running into Franklin quite often. They even saw each other at the White House when her Uncle Ted, who had been elected Vice President, became President when an assassin killed President McKinley. Franklin invited Eleanor to weekends at the cottage on Campobello Island and parties at Hyde Park. It was 1903, and the two young people were never alone. Eleanor was always accompanied by a chaperone on her visits. Victorian standards ruled the day— young men didn't dare call a young woman by her first name. A young man signing a letter to a young woman in those days with "very sincerely yours" was considered too forward. A girl who received a piece of jewelry from a man to whom she was not engaged was considered a "fast woman".

Eleanor had no confidence that Franklin was truly interested in her, yet his attention to her didn't wane. Franklin liked talking to Eleanor and often sought her advice and opinions. When he wasn't around, she missed him. On a visit to his school at the Harvard-Yale football game, Franklin and Eleanor slipped away from her chaperones and took a long walk. When he proposed, she was stunned. What could she offer him— she was plain and had nothing to give him. He wanted her as his wife because she would bring out the best in him. With her, he told her, he might amount to something worthwhile.

Eleanor told her grandmother who was surprised but happy for her. Sara Roosevelt, Franklin's mother, was less than thrilled. She was a widow and depended on her son. She asked, since they were so young, that they keep their engagement a secret for a year during which time they could test their true feelings for one another. After the year, their love had only grown and they formally announced their engagement. Sara fell under the spell of Eleanor and grew to adore her soon-to-be daughter-in-law. Eleanor asked her uncle Ted to give her away. He happily agreed to but they had to work around his busy schedule to settle on a wedding date. They picked March 17, 1905, St. Patrick's Day, since President Roosevelt was scheduled to be in town that day. After the ceremony, President Roosevelt told Franklin that there was nothing like keeping the family name viable. Marie Souvestre sent her best wishes by wire.



Chapter Five: A Conventional Society Matron

Chapter Five: A Conventional Society Matron Summary and Analysis

Franklin entered Columbia Law School in New York and had to take final exams before the newlyweds could leave for their honeymoon in Europe. They returned in September 1905 and came home to a townhouse that was rented and filled with new furnishings, all arranged by Sara Roosevelt. The following spring, Eleanor had her first child, a girl, Anna Eleanor. Franklin joined a Wall Street Law Firm as an apprentice. He earned no money as a first-year apprentice, but the young couple had their inheritances to live on and Sara was always willing to help them when they needed it. At Sara's insistence, Eleanor gave up her teaching job in the the slums. Instead, she volunteered her time to charitable boards. After their second child, James, was born, Sara decided they needed a bigger house. She bought a plot of land which would accommodate a townhouse for the young couple and an adjoining one for Sara. Eleanor completely deferred to her mother on plans for the house and, for that matter, anything that came up. She never wanted to disappoint Sara.

As time wore on, Eleanor became depressed about the living conditions. Sara could enter any time, day or night, through sliding doors that connected the two homes. Eleanor was surrounded by servants which she didn't feel comfortable with. She didn't feel like the house was hers since she had no part in the plans. Franklin told her she should have spoken up and that she'd get used to her new surroundings. Eleanor felt she had no identity. Their third child, Franklin, Jr., came down with the flu in late 1909 and died at seven months of age. Eleanor was naturally devastated and blamed herself. Elliot was born ten months after Franklin, Jr., died. Stark differences were seen between Eleanor and Franklin. He was lighthearted and fun-loving while Eleanor was more serious and always felt a sense of duty. When Eleanor faced a problem she withdrew, unlike Franklin who was open about his problems and mostly laughed them off.

Franklin grew bored with law and decided to follow his cousin Teddy into politics. In 1910, he ran for New York State senator as a Democrat. He had enough money to fund his own campaign. Eleanor supported him and was willing to move to Albany if he won. He ran in a Republican district and no one expected him to win but he surprised everyone and won the election. Eleanor was actually happy to move to Albany and get away from Sara. Once in Albany, Eleanor did her part as a Senator's wife—hosting gatherings and visiting around in the capital to make friends and contacts for him. She became interested in politics but fundamentally felt it was a man's profession. She was shocked when her husband supported the woman's right to vote—always having thought that men were the superior sex and knew more about who to vote for than women.



Franklin was a big supporter of Woodrow Wilson, who ran for President. In 1912, at only thirty-one years of age, Franklin was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy. The family moved to Washington, D. C. Eleanor became acquainted with the wives of congressmen and other politicians. She was learning to leave her shyness behind. They were a popular couple. He was considered one of the handsomest men in town while Eleanor was considered warm and charming. The Roosevelt's social life had become so chaotic that Eleanor was forced to hire a social secretary, Lucy Mercer. During those early years in Washington, Eleanor had two more children—the second Franklin, Jr., and John who was born in 1916 and was the baby of the family.

Eleanor had become an experienced matron and mother and took a stronger hand in caring for and raising her youngest children. Franklin played with the children but never disciplined them. Sara spoiled them. It was up to Eleanor to lecture them about their behavior. Later, she regretted having been so strict with them. Years later her son, James, recalled that his mother never seemed to participate in the fun in life. When the US entered into World War I, Eleanor felt a sense of impending disaster hanging over America. Franklin was responsible for mobilizing US warships and naval bases. Eleanor helped with the war effort in any way she could including volunteering with the Red Cross. Eleanor flourished doing her volunteer work—she was doing something outside the home that made her feel she was really contributing.

In his official capacity, Franklin had to tour bases in Europe. He returned very ill with double pneumonia. One afternoon as he slept, Eleanor unpacked his things and found among them a bundle of love letters written to him by Lucy Mercer.



Chapter Six: The Education of Eleanor Roosevelt

Chapter Six: The Education of Eleanor Roosevelt Summary and Analysis

Eleanor confronted her very sick husband with the letters and offered him his freedom. Sara was horrified and vowed to cut him out of his inheritance if he divorced Eleanor. In the end, Franklin ended his relationship with Lucy and the couple agreed to keep their marriage together. The marriage was never the same after that. Their relationship became more of a partnership—one of shared admiration for one another but the intimate, romantic element of it never returned.

World War I ended on November 11, 1918. Some ten million men worldwide had lost their lives and another twenty million were wounded. Franklin was charged with closing naval bases in Europe and asked Eleanor to accompany him. Everywhere they traveled they saw signs of death and destruction. Back home in the States, Eleanor was still recovering from her husband's adultery. There were tensions and flare-ups, although Franklin tried to do whatever he could to please her. It was during this period that Eleanor finally stood up to Sara and refused to let her dominate her any longer. There were some harsh words exchanged between the women. Eleanor tried to be more relaxed and have more fun to please Franklin.

Franklin left the Department of the Navy to enter national politics. He was placed on the Democratic ticket in 1920 as the vice presidential nominee. The Democrats supported membership in the League of Nations while the Republican ticket, Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge, were against it. Since the election was the first in which women could vote, Franklin asked Eleanor to campaign with him in hopes of getting the female vote. Eleanor came to know and like one of her husband's advisers, Louis Howe, who was positive that Franklin would be president someday. Howe recognized Eleanor's intelligence and abilities and often asked her opinion on policy and speeches her husband was going to make. As expected, the Democrats lost the race and Franklin joined a law firm in New York.

Eleanor wanted to be more independent and went to business school, learning shorthand and typing. She also joined the League of Women Voters where she served on the legislative committee. It was during her work with the League that she became acquainted with two dynamic women—Esther Lape and Elizabeth Read. Later, she attributed her "political awakening" to these two gifted women. In the summer of 1921, Franklin became ill after swimming one day on a visit to Campobello Island. The next day, he had a high fever, unbearable back pains and a creeping paralysis. By the next day, he couldn't stand. Doctors were called in and determined that Franklin had been stricken with polio and would be permanently paralyzed from the waist down.



Eleanor cared for her husband and the resentment she had for him began to fade. Though she was desolate over his condition, she refused to treat him like an invalid. Sara wanted Franklin to move to Hyde Park and retire, but Franklin and Eleanor refused to consider her suggestion. Sara eventually moved out of the townhouse, unable to face the prospects of Franklin's future. But Franklin and Eleanor were determined that Franklin would recover and have a productive life and career. Only one time did Eleanor totally break down, but she didn't let Franklin see her. In the end, Franklin's disease made him stronger and more understanding of the hardships that people can face. The ordeal also tested Eleanor, who emerged wiser and tougher.



Chapter Seven: Friendship and Politics

Chapter Seven: Friendship and Politics Summary and Analysis

Many years after Franklin was stricken with polio, he held the belief and hope that he would walk again. He was diligent about doing his exercises and taking therapy. Adviser Louis Howe urged Eleanor to keep Franklin's name before the public by doing some politicking herself. Eleanor was intrigued by the prospect of becoming more involved in public life. She joined the newly formed New York State Democratic Party and soon took on a leadership role. She became the editor and manager of the Women's Democratic News, a monthly newsletter, writing editorials and articles for the publication. She hated public speaking, her voice becoming high and shaky from nerves. Louis coached her and she eventually developed more than adequate speaking skills. Eleanor became a political force, in demand for speaking engagements and political debates as well as radio interviews. There were dozens of requests for her to write articles and editorials.

Although the Democratic Party gave lip service to women's involvement in politics, Eleanor soon saw that it was just a smoke screen. The only opinions and ideas that really counted were those of men. But the women's division of the party was determined to make conditions better for women, including limiting hours of the work week, ending child labor and giving women the right to organize in labor unions. Eleanor made two very good friends - Marion Dickerman and Nancy Cook - during her involvement with the party. Marion ran but lost in a race for the New York State Assembly. Franklin liked Eleanor's friends so much that he had a cottage built for them on a piece of land he owned at Val-Kill Creek near Hyde Park. Nan and Marion could live their year-round and Eleanor could visit.

Marion taught at a private school in Manhattan, the Todhunter School. Eleanor readily accepted Marion's invitation to teach there. When the school came up for sale, Marion and Eleanor bought it together. Franklin spent a good deal of time at Warm Springs, Georgia, where the soothing waters seemed to help his deteriorating leg muscles. Eleanor took over many of the responsibilities Franklin would have taken on had he not been away and incapacitated. Eleanor who had always been afraid of water, learned how to swim at age forty so she could teach her two youngest sons to swim. She took the boys camping and on hiking trips.

Despite his paralysis, the Democratic Party talked Franklin into running for Governor of New York. Even though the country was swept with a Republican wave, Franklin was able to squeak out a narrow victory over his opponent. The family had to return to Albany, but this time to the Governor's Mansion. Eleanor, who was expected to stay in the background as First Lady of the state, resigned her political positions; however, she was too passionate about teaching to give that up. Since Franklin wore leg braces up to his knees and had to use crutches, it was difficult for him to get around so he had Eleanor make many appearances with him or in his place. She also handled the

unending stream of letters he received, either responding to them personally or passing them along to the appropriate department.

Since Eleanor could not be convinced to use an official limousine for her travels and insisted on driving herself, Franklin assigned a muscular state trooper, Earl Miller, to accompany her. Miller soon became a fan and part of Eleanor's close circle of friends. Though Eleanor and Franklin shared an official life together, they spent many hours apart. He often visited Warm Springs for extended periods of time while she maintained her life in Albany as teacher, writer, lecturer, mother, and friend. In spite of their time apart, a strong bond remained between them and never broke.

In 1929, the stock market crashed and had a domino effect upon the entire country. Franklin came to national attention by the aggressive steps he took to create jobs for the many unemployed in his state. In 1930, Franklin was re-elected New York's governor by a landslide and immediately became a frontrunner for the presidential nomination in 1932. Eleanor did not like the thought of moving to Washington where she would be under constant scrutiny and would have to give up her personal pursuits. Word soon came from Chicago that Franklin had been named the Democratic Party's nominee for President. Despite her reservations, Eleanor gave the presidential campaign her all. A perceptive reporter, AP's Lorena Hickok, looked through Eleanor's charming persona and detected a deeply unhappy woman. The two women became friends and Eleanor vented her concerns and reservations about life as the country's First Lady. When Franklin won the presidency in a landslide, Eleanor faced the reality that her life had changed dramatically and forever. The era of the New Deal was on America's horizon and she and Franklin were at the helm.



Chapter Eight: A President's Wife

Chapter Eight: A President's Wife Summary and Analysis

When Franklin took office in March of 1933, the country was in its fourth year of the Great Depression. Millions of Americans were unemployed with no prospect of work. Franklin took swift steps to help the suffering country and Eleanor shocked the country by signaling that she would not be the typical First Lady. Eleanor announced that she would hold regular press conferences that would be attended exclusively by female reporters. She ran the White House elevator herself, moved furniture around and rejected the constant shadowing of the Secret Service. Eleanor also rejected chauffeured limousines in favor of a light-blue Plymouth convertible that she drove herself.

America had never seen a First Lady like Eleanor: she made unannounced visits to struggling war veterans, Appalachian coal miners and southern sharecroppers; flew all over the country gathering information for her husband and for her own speeches and writing; flew with Amelia Earhart from Washington to Baltimore in an evening gown. Eleanor became Franklin's eyes and ears because his mobility was so restricted. Eleanor wrote a daily newspaper column called "My Day", as well as other articles for newspapers and magazines. She granted frequent radio interviews and remained on the lecture circuit, polishing her speaking skills with the help of a private coach. Eleanor used the attention she drew to focus on one of her favorite issues—social injustice—becoming a powerful advocate for the down-trodden and minorities.

The first year of Franklin's presidency, Eleanor received and responded personally or through other departments to some 3,000 requests for help. Eleanor's first book, "It's Up to the Women", urged women to take part in the debates on national issues. Eleanor worked closely with Molly Dewson, head of the women's division of the DNC, and influenced the naming of several women to high positions in the federal government. She organized a program to specifically helped women who were unemployed as a result of the Depression. During FDR's first term, the term "liberal" was used by Franklin to describe his progressive program the goal of which was to grow government in order to expand the opportunities for the poor and powerless. Eleanor's view of the role of government, mirrored that of her husbands: "Imperceptibly we have come to recognize that government has a responsibility to defend the weak" (p. 108).

Eleanor convinced her husband to establish the National Youth Administration which was developed to help kids stay in school and provided technical training for those who had dropped out. Eleanor was a strong voice against racial discrimination and became a huge supporter and friend of black leaders, for which she was roundly criticized. Even her husband's advisers were concerned—her views were too radical and could hurt him politically. Franklin quietly supported his wife, allowing her to make inroads for him into black communities while he stayed above the fray. Eleanor, who had been a long-time



member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, resigned from the organization due to its racist policies. Political enemies criticized her liberal views, her "excessive" travels and non-traditional behavior. They looked at her as a busy-body who should be quiet and act like a First Lady. She responded to such criticism by declaring that she did lead her life according to someone else's values. By the time Franklin ran for his second term, Eleanor had become as popular as her husband. When she failed to appear at a campaign rally, people would shout for her. Franklin defeated Alfred Landon by the biggest margin in history—almost eleven million votes.

Chapter Nine: Partners

Chapter Nine: Partners Summary and Analysis

In his second term, Franklin depended more and more on Eleanor to be his eyes and ears. As a result, she became a better observer, a better reporter—so that she could portray everything she witnessed as accurately as possible to him. He also sought her opinion on current matters before the country and on policy issues. Eleanor would never confront Franklin with something she wanted done. Rather, she would expose him to her ideas by suggesting he read a book or by inviting a guest to dinner who represented her ideas and have him sit next to her husband at the dining room table.

While Franklin heralded in the New Age, Eleanor was its conscious. But Franklin was a politician at heart and if Eleanor was going in a direction that wouldn't stand up politically, he'd ask her to back away from it. Of course, she complied. One issues where tempers flared between them was America's involvement in the World Court, later to be called the United Nations. Franklin was staunchly against America's membership while Eleanor was passionately in favor of it. Civil rights was another issue about which Eleanor possessed more passion than Franklin.

Eleanor and Franklin both had their own personal suites in the White House. They sometimes gathered together with friends or entertained them separately within their own quarters. Eleanor stayed close her children and grandchildren, the White House often alive with the sound of children and spirited debate among her independent and opinionated grown children. At such gatherings, the children spoke up and interrupted the President and First Lady when they didn't agree with them. Eleanor happily juggled many responsibilities in the White House on a daily basis.



Chapter Ten: The War Years

Chapter Ten: The War Years Summary and Analysis

Franklin called Eleanor on the morning of September 2, 1939, to tell her that Germany had invaded Poland. Eleanor had never forgotten the images of Europe when she and Franklin visited after World War I. She hated war and now, with Franklin's news, it seemed as though America was on the brink of another brutal war. As the threat of Nazi oppression grew, she had appealed for worldwide disarmament through her lectures and columns. Although Eleanor was anti-war, she described herself as a "practical pacifist", recognizing that if conditions worsened American could not avoid war. Above all she believed in democracy and for the rights of people to choose their own form of government. Before America entered the war, Eleanor was an advocate for those seeking political asylum, although isolationists and conservatives defeated some of her efforts. Although America at first maintained a policy of neutrality, they sent aid to Britain and watched with great concern as the Nazis continued their aggression in Europe and Japan occupied China.

Franklin's second term was nearing its conclusion but because of the fragility of the entire world, was encouraged by many to seek a third term. Eleanor was opposed to a third term—she did not want to live in the White House another four years and she felt that Franklin had done his duty. But he was nominated on the first ballot at the Democratic convention. His opponent, Wendell Wilkie, warned the FDR would bring America into war. Although he publicly vowed not to send America's boys to war in Europe, Eleanor knew he really could not make such a vow with complete certainty. FDR easily defeated Wilkie and began his third term in a dangerous world. In 1941, all four of Eleanor's sons were called to active duty in the armed forces. She knew that the likelihood of war was looming and that her sons would eventually all be in the conflict.

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. The next day Franklin asked Congress for a declaration of war. He asked Eleanor to be co-director with Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia of New York City of the Office of Civilian Defense. After her husband's political enemies began to criticize Eleanor's involvement in the organization, she resigned. She did not want the criticism to make Franklin's job more difficult. Eleanor made trips to England to assess the situation and visit the troops. She visited wounded soldiers in hospitals; woke at reveille; ate with the enlisted men; rode in jeeps; and greeted troops set to go into battle. During her grueling five-week trip, she lost thirty pounds and returned so fatigued that many worried about the fifty-nine-year-old woman's health.

Eleanor lightened her touch with her husband on her favorite issues. He no longer had the strength for vigorous debate. The pressures of the war and his office were wearing on the fragile man. Eleanor had never mastered the ability to talk about the trivial, although it was something Franklin needed to ease the pressure he was under. As 1944 rolled around, there was no question that FDR would run for re-election. The doctors



advised him that he could improve his chances to withstand the pressures of another term if he would stop smoking. Eleanor did accept the reality that in the midst of war, America could not change leaders and publicly, as well as privately, supported his re-election. After FDR returned from the Conference at Yalta, many were shocked by his frail condition. He took a working vacation at Warm Springs.

On April 12, 1945, Eleanor was called back to the White House from a meeting she was attending. When she arrived, she was told that Franklin had suffered a massive cerebral hemorrhage at Warm Springs. It was Eleanor who called VP Harry Truman to the White House and told him that FDR had died and that he was the President. Though he tried to comfort her, she told him that it was he who needed support. She immediately went to Warm Springs and learned the details of his death. She also learned that Lucy Mercer Rutherford had visited that day and that they had seen each other a number of times over the past few years.

Eleanor rode on the funeral train that brought Franklin back to the White House where a simple service for him. Eleanor wore a black dress with a fleur-de-lis brooch that her husband had given her forty years before as a wedding gift. Eleanor later told a confidant that she never loved Franklin after she found out about his affair. But the friend did not believe it—Eleanor never stopped loving someone she loved.



Chapter Eleven: On Her Own

Chapter Eleven: On Her Own Summary and Analysis

After FDR's death, Eleanor was sure she would play no role on the world stage. But it was not long before she was called on—President Truman trusted her wisdom and asked her advice and respected the influence she could wield. After the war ended on August 14, 1945, Truman asked Eleanor to be one of the American delegates to the first meeting of the United Nations General Assembly to be held in London. At first she hesitated, but after the urging of her friends, she accepted. She felt that she was honoring her husband and that the UN would be his greatest legacy. She was assigned to Committee Three, which was in charge of humanitarian, educational and cultural issues—the men in the American delegation thought it was a safe place for the do-gooder to be placed. But to everyone's surprise that Committee proved to be the hot spot for the American delegation because of all the many refugees who were seeking political asylum. The Soviet Union supported the repatriation of all refugees, but the American delegation opposed it because many refugees would be sent back into dangerous political situations. Eleanor was selected to debate Andrei Vishinsky, the head of the Russian delegation and a noted legal expert. Eleanor won the debate and the General Assembly voted against forced repatriation. Eleanor became the voice for human rights. She served as a UN delegate during both of President Truman's terms. In 1946, Eleanor was elected chair of the UN's Human Rights Commission. She spearheaded a two-year effort to define the basic rights of people world wide. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approved overwhelmingly by the General Assembly. Eleanor was given a standing ovation by the entire body.

Eleanor continued her other pursuits—lecturing, broadcasting and writing. She was the host of a weekly television interview show—the first of its kind. In 1948, a poll found that Eleanor Roosevelt was the most popular person in the country—ahead of President Truman, General Eisenhower and General MacArthur. Eleanor split her time between a small apartment in New York and her cottage in Hyde Park. The large Roosevelt estate at Hyde Park had been turned over to the government. Two of her sons had property in the vicinity. Eleanor's home was always filled with her children and grandchildren. Her life was not without worry. Her children all had their share of failed marriages and faltering careers. Close friends sensed that Eleanor stayed so busy because there was an underlying melancholy that was always within her.

Eleanor remained influential in the Democratic Party and traveled as a goodwill ambassador for the State Department and later as a private citizen. She visited such diverse locales as Iran, Thailand, South America, Israel, Japan and Morocco. When in India, she spoke before a hostile crowd of young students who were protesting her visit. She answered all their questions about American policy, and while she did not sway all the students, they admired her courage for speaking with them. At age seventy-three, Eleanor finally got to visit the Soviet Union, a place she had wanted to visit for many

years. She went as a reporter for the New York Post. She even had a long visit with the Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev.

At seventy-five, Eleanor returned to teaching and premiered a new TV show called "The Prospects of Mankind". Her first guest was Dr. Martin Luther King. When John F. Kennedy became president, she was renamed as a delegate to the UN. She chaired JFK's Commission on the Status of Women. Her age and her health finally began to catch up with her. She became ill when she was writing her last book, "Tomorrow Is Now". At age seventy-eight, she was diagnosed with an untreatable blood condition. Eleanor Roosevelt died on November 7, 1962, from a severe stroke. President Kennedy and former Presidents Truman and Eisenhower attended her funeral along with Lyndon Johnson, who would later become a president.



Characters

Eleanor Roosevelt

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt was born on October 11, 1884, to Elliot and Anna Roosevelt who both were from wealthy families of New York's high society. Eleanor was, by her own description, plain and even ugly. She had a strained relationship with her mother, a beautiful and glamorous woman, who placed great emphasis on appearance. Eleanor adored her father who recognized the unique talents and charms that his daughter possessed. Tragically, both of Eleanor's parents died before she was ten years old. After their deaths, Eleanor and her brothers were raised by their maternal grandmother, Mary Hall. When Eleanor was fifteen, she was enrolled in an elite finishing school in London where her kindness, charitable nature and empathy for others began to emerge.

When Eleanor returned from London, Franklin, her fifth cousin, once removed, began courting her. The two soon fell in love and became engaged. Franklin grew bored with his law firm and decided to enter politics. Eleanor supported all his political ambitions including New York State Senator, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, a failed run as Vice President on the Democratic ticket, Governor of New York and ultimately as President. Eleanor became intimately involved in the problems that faced the nation and the world and emerged as a strong and unrelenting voice for the underprivileged, the poor and weak and the minorities. She is one of the most beloved people in American history. After FDR's death, she was named one of the first delegates to the UN. Her work there on behalf of the world's millions of refugees inspired President Harry Truman to refer to her as the First Lady of the World.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt were fifth cousins, once removed. The two first became acquainted at a Christmas party when Eleanor was just fourteen and Franklin sixteen. After Eleanor returned from a three-year term at an exclusive finishing school in London, the two became reacquainted and began seeing one another. Franklin proposed to Eleanor on a long-walk they took at a Harvard-Yale football game. After marrying, Eleanor was under the domination of Franklin's mercurial mother, Sara, who was protective of her son and wanted to keep him close to her.

Franklin graduated from Harvard Law School and joined a New York law firm. When he became bored with legal work, Franklin decided to try his hand at politics. He first ran as a Democrat in the New York state senate race in a very Republican area in New York and was not expected to win. But he surprised everyone and won the election. Under President Wilson, Franklin was named Assistant Secretary of the Navy during World War I. Franklin was next tapped to join the 1920 Democratic ticket as its vice presidential nominee. The ticket lost to Warren G. Harding, but it brought national attention to Franklin. He was stricken with polio, which paralyzed him from the waist



down for the rest of his life. Despite his disability, the New York Democratic nominated him to run for Governor in 1929, a contest which he barely won. He became a popular governor for his aggressive actions to help unemployed New Yorkers find work.

Franklin became the 32nd President of the United States in 1933 during one of the most tumultuous eras in America. Facing challenges from both the Great Depression and Nazi aggression, Franklin's leadership and policies led him to re-election three times. The stress of the office and his fragile health overwhelmed him during his fourth term. Franklin died of a cerebral hemorrhage while on a working vacation at Warm Springs.

Anna Roosevelt

Anna Roosevelt was Eleanor's glamorous mother. Her beauty was legendary. She placed so much emphasis on beauty and appearance that Eleanor suffered emotionally knowing that she did live up to her mother's standards. Anna died at twenty-nine years of age from diphtheria.

Elliot Roosevelt

Elliot Roosevelt recognized the charm, intelligence and talents of his daughter, Eleanor, and she idolized him. Unfortunately, he died before Eleanor was ten. He was an alcoholic and addicted to pain killers. He died from a bad fall during a drunken binge.

Mary Hall

After Eleanor and her brothers lost both parents, they were raised by their maternal mother, Mary Hall. Mary decided she would be strict in their upbringing, having failed miserably with her own children.

Marie Souvestre

Marie Souvestre was the headmistress of the exclusive finishing school that Eleanor attended in London. She was one of the first people to see that Eleanor was a very special person. Eleanor credits Souvestre with being one of the greatest influences of her life.

Sara Roosevelt

Sara Roosevelt was Franklin's mother. She was very dependent upon him after her husband died. Although she liked Eleanor, she asked the couple to keep their engagement a secret for a year to determine if they really loved each other. Sara dominated Eleanor for many years until Eleanor had enough and began to stand up for herself.



Theodore Roosevelt

President Theodore Roosevelt was Eleanor's uncle and Franklin's cousin. He was Vice President when President McKinley was assassinated. He gave Eleanor away at her wedding.

Lucy Mercer

Lucy Mercer was Eleanor's social secretary. Eleanor was stunned and hurt when she learned that Lucy and Franklin were exchanging love letters. Franklin broke off the relationship, but after he died, Eleanor learned that they had continued to see each other on occasion.

Harry Truman

Harry Truman was FDR's Vice President when he died in his fourth term. Truman then became President and one of his first acts was to name Eleanor among the first group of delegates to the newly formed United Nations. President Truman referred to Eleanor as the First Lady of the World.



Objects/Places

New York City

Eleanor Roosevelt's parents were both from wealthy, families from New York City's high society. Eleanor was born in New York and lived there during various times in her life, including as a child when she lived with her grandmother in Manhattan after she'd lost her parents.

Oak Terrace

Mary Hall, Eleanor Roosevelt's maternal grandmother, had a country estate in Oak Terrace. Eleanor recalled having picnics, taking hikes and boat rides with her aunts and uncles during her stays on the estate.

Albany

Eleanor and Franklin lived in Albany, the capital of New York state, when Franklin was a state senator and again when he was the Governor.

London

Eleanor attended Allenswood, an elite girls' finishing school in London. She was enrolled at age fifteen and graduated when she was eighteen.

Washington, D. C.

Eleanor and Franklin lived in Washington, D. C., the first time when President Wilson named him Assistant Secretary of the Navy. They lived in Washington, D. C., again when he was first elected President of the United States in 1932 until he died in office during his fourth term.

Campobello

Sara Roosevelt had a summer retreat on Campobello Island. The island, which had resort style hotels, was a favorite vacation spot for the very wealthy.

Val-Kill Cottage

Val-Kill Cottage, located in Hyde Park, was the favorite residence of Eleanor Roosevelt. It is the only national historic site that is dedicated to Eleanor Roosevelt.



Warm Springs

Warm Springs, Georgia, was where Franklin would go for therapy for his paralysis. Franklin felt relief from the mineral-rich waters of the Springs. As President, Warm Springs was his private get-away where he took working vacations.

Hyde Park

Sara Roosevelt had a summer home in Hyde Park, New York. After her passing, Franklin split the property into a number of plots for her children and for other relatives and friends.

United Nations

Eleanor was a strong advocate of the World Court, later to be renamed the United Nations. Part of Roosevelt's legacy was his establishment of the UN. After FDR's death, President Truman named Eleanor one of the first US delegates to the UN.



Themes

Emotional Abuse

When Anna Roosevelt had a group of friends over and she referred to her young daughter, Eleanor, as "Granny", the sting of that characterization and humiliation lingered for many years. Her mother did not understand why a young child would not be happy and playful. But as Eleanor commented herself, years later, "She often called me that for I was a solemn child, without beauty and painfully shy" (p. 1). Since Eleanor's mother was concerned with beauty and appearance, her narrow vision of the world did not encompass anything or anyone that she considered unattractive or too serious. Eleanor always felt a distance from her mother. She commented that during "Mother's Hours", she felt the room was divided, with her on one side by herself and her mother and her brothers on the other side. Anna would make comments inferring that if Eleanor couldn't have beauty, she would make sure that she had manners. A child has a difficult time understanding who she is and becoming comfortable with her own identity, even when her parents are supportive, much less when belittle the child. Although Anna may not have understood that her words would damage her daughter, the effects of her obvious uncomfortableness with her tall and awkward daughter stayed with Eleanor the rest of her life.

Fortunately, others recognized Eleanor's many other charms, talents and abilities; however, nothing could take away the harm done by a mother—the person that nature designates as the protector of her young—who finds her child in any way unacceptable. Such behavior falls in the category of emotional abuse and is just as damaging to a child as any other kind of abuse.

Sense of Duty

The story of Eleanor Roosevelt illustrates a person who thrives when the daily is filled or even overfilled with duties and responsibilities. Eleanor seemed to flourish when her day, beginning shortly after dawn with exercise and a long walk, ended only when night had fallen. Eleanor had a difficult and tragic childhood. She was the daughter of a wealthy and pampered woman who was lauded for her beauty and grace. It was obvious early on that Eleanor did not possess the attractiveness that was so cherished and important to her mother. She sensed a remoteness from her mother and attributed it to her above average height, gawkiness and generally plain—Eleanor herself said ugly—features.

Elliot, her father, who was attractive himself, saw another dimension to his daughter which her mother failed to recognize. Early on, he saw her charm, intelligence and strength of character. Her father adored his daughter and praised her for her accomplishments. The underlying message that Eleanor received from her mother was that she was a failure as a female in the traditional sense. What she learned from her



father's was that her acceptability rested in her accomplishments. Those childhood lessons from her parents stayed rooted in her thoughts and compelled her to follow the only path on which she could achieve success. The traditional female path of being a charming and beautiful debutante was, for Eleanor, one on which she could not embark. Eleanor learned early that by taking on responsibilities and through her achievements, she could find her niche and be successful.

When Eleanor was catapulted onto the national stage due to her husband's successes, she did not know how to behave like the traditional First Lady. Rather, she took on responsibilities and duties that kept her busy from morning until night. As she learned early in life, she was only acceptable when she was achieving. By keeping her schedule filled at an impossible level, she was able to hone her skills, learn, become more valuable and virtually hide behind that schedule - all this so she could achieve acceptability. Her adult children often commented, when recalling their lives growing up, that Eleanor always seemed remote from the fun that the family had together. Franklin, under the stress of impossible responsibility, often just wanted light conversation after a long day. But for Eleanor, it was near impossible for her to be light and anything other than serious and duty-bound.

Breaking Tradition

Eleanor Roosevelt began life as a shy, retiring child. As she matured, she felt uncomfortable with her height—she was almost six feet tall—and her general appearance. She had a difficult relationship with her mother who didn't do much to hide her disappointment in Eleanor's lack of physical attributes. With that premise, it was a surprise that Eleanor eventually emerged as a very strong-willed and independent person. As the First Lady of New York when Franklin was the state's Governor, Eleanor absolutely refused to be chauffeured around and insisted on driving herself. The Governor's security staff was concerned with her safety but failed to convince her that she needed protection. Instead, they gave her a gun. She commented that while she wasn't an expert shot, she could shoot if she had to.

After Franklin was stricken with polio and became partially paralyzed, Eleanor represented him officially around the state. Some critics thought she was a meddling busybody, but she let those criticisms slide off her back. When Franklin became President, the country had never seen a First Lady like Eleanor before. Eleanor helped the movers move furniture around in the White House; held never-before-seen First Lady press conferences; insisted on driving her own car on her excursions around the capital; wrote a daily newspaper column; was in demand on the lecture circuit; and, she spoke out openly about injustice and the strife of the downtrodden.

Eleanor Roosevelt set an example for women to become involved in issues facing their families and the nation long before the notion was in vogue or anyone had heard of "women's lib". She broke with tradition because she wanted to contribute more to her country than merely hosting dignitaries and appearing at women's luncheons. Eleanor became heavily involved on the political front and became a strong advocate for the



poor and powerless. Since Franklin's mobility was greatly limited, Eleanor became his eyes and ears—assessing issues and making strong recommendations to her husband on his policies. Had she limited herself to the traditional role of First Lady, the country would have been on the losing end.

Style

Perspective

Eleanor Roosevelt, *A Life of Discovery* by Russell Freedman is written in the third person narrative. Freedman's background as a reporter and editor for the Associated Press provides assurance that this work was thoroughly researched for historical accuracy. Freedman is a prolific writer, having authored forty-plus non-fiction books. Much of his writing has focused on other historic events and figures including "Franklin Delano Roosevelt", a book on the Wright Brothers, and "Lincoln: A Photobiography", which was named the 1988 Newberry Medal Book. An element of Freedman's style is to support his reporting photographically. His work on Eleanor Roosevelt is no exception. The scores of photographs that are included in this work allow the reader a window into the life and times of Eleanor Roosevelt and thereby provide another perspective to this work.

Although Eleanor Roosevelt was certainly a beloved figure in American history and culture, Freedman's account of her life and career sheds virtually no light on aspects of her activities or characteristics that were criticized or perceived to be negative. This autobiographical account of her life is missing the depth of an account that would have delved further into those elements of Eleanor Roosevelt's personal life and career. In that sense, there is a degree of partiality in the portrayal of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in Freedman's work.

Tone

Eleanor Roosevelt, *A Life of Discovery* by Russell Freedman is written with great detail and clarity. It is easy to recognize the respect and adoration that the author held for Eleanor Roosevelt. Her life story is portrayed in a very positive manner. The many tragedies and heartaches that Eleanor endured during her life are included in the book; however, they are not dwelt upon and, in fact, some are mentioned only in passing.

The account of Eleanor and Franklin's relationship is told in a very respectful manner. Eleanor was stunned and hurt when she discovered that Franklin had received love letters from Eleanor's social secretary, Lucy Mercer. The book does not delve into how involved Franklin was with Lucy and doesn't devote space to blaming him, besmirching his character or theorizing why he may have been tempted to be untrue. Rather, the book mentions the episode, that it hurt Eleanor, that Franklin was sorry and how, in the end, they were able to carry on, save their marriage and ultimately become even stronger partners.

The author gently infers that Eleanor's life-long struggle with her self-image and confidence stemmed from her mother's mistreatment of her. Eleanor was the first to admit that she was not a beautiful woman and must have felt that she had disappointed



her mother, whose beauty was legendary. For example, her mother ridiculed her by calling her "Granny" in front of other people. The hurt from incidents such as those lingered with Eleanor for many years.

Structure

Eleanor Roosevelt, *A Life of Discovery* by Russell Freedman is separated into eleven numbered and named chapters. The book is structured in fundamentally a chronological order, other than the first chapter which provides a brief synopsis of Eleanor Roosevelt as First Lady of the nation. The second chapter is an account of Eleanor's childhood and the tragedies that she lived through in her young life. The third and fourth chapters take the reader through her time in a London finishing school, Franklin's courtship of Eleanor and their subsequent engagement.

The fifth and sixth chapters describe the couple's early political experiences, Franklin's infidelity and his paralysis after contracting polio. The seventh chapter covers Eleanor's political awakening and her new found strength and independence as well as Franklin's election to Governor of New York and how it impacted her. Chapters eight and nine provide insight into FDR's presidency, the unique approach that Eleanor took to the role of First Lady and how Eleanor became Franklin's "eyes and ears" due, in large part, to his immobility. Chapter ten covers the war years and Franklin's death. The last chapter, chapter eleven, describes Eleanor's life after FDR's death.

There are scores of photographs that accompany the chapters. Following the last chapter is a section titled "Eleanor Roosevelt Photo Album", which contains more photos of Eleanor in both her public and private life. The next section, "A Visit to Val-Kill", contains a detailed description and photos of Eleanor's favorite residence. There is a section entitled "Books About and by Eleanor Roosevelt". There is an "Acknowledgments and Picture Credits" section as well as an Index.



Quotes

"By her own account, she had been an 'ugly duckling' whose mother told her, 'You have no looks, so see to it that you have manners.'"

Chap. 1, p. 2

"Looking back it strikes me that my childhood and my early youth were one long battle against. Fear."

Chap. 2, p. 5

"I felt that I was starting a new life, free from all my former sins and traditions... this was the first time in my life that all my fears left me. If I lived up to the rules and told the truth, there was nothing to fear."

Chap. 3, p. 23

"At nineteen, Eleanor described herself as 'a curious mixture of extreme innocence and unworldliness with a great deal of knowledge of some of the less agreeable sides of life.'"

Chap. 3, p. 34

"I [saw] for the first time where women stood when it came to a national convention,' she wrote later. 'They stood outside the door of all important meetings and waited.'"

Chap. 7, p. 79

"'There isn't going to be any First Lady,' she told the reporter. 'There is just going to be plain, ordinary Mrs. Roosevelt. And that's all... I've liked teaching more than anything else I've ever done, but that's got to go.'"

Chap. 7, p. 95

"I never wanted to be a president's wife, and I don't want it now... Now I shall have to work out my own salvation."

Chap. 8, p. 97

"During 1930s, liberalism came to mean using government action to expand the choices available to the poor and the powerless."

Chap. 8, p. 106

"No one ever lives up to the best in themselves all the time and nearly all of us love people because of their weaknesses rather than because of their strengths."

Chap. 9, p. 122

"I imagine every mother felt as I did when I said good-bye to [my sons] during the war. I had a feeling that I might be saying good-bye for the last time."

Chap. 10, p. 127

"As time went on, the fact that I kept myself well occupied made my loneliness less acute. My philosophy has been that if you have work to do and do it to the best of your



ability you will not have much time to think about yourself."
Chap. 11, p. 154

"I have never been bored, never found the days long enough for the range of activities which which I wanted to fill them. And, having learned to stare down fear, I long ago reached the point where there is no living person whom I fear, and few challenges that I am not willing to face."
Chap. 11, p. 168



Topics for Discussion

Why did Eleanor have feelings of inferiority? What was her relationship like with her mother? Her father? What parent did she feel the closest to and why?

What problems did Eleanor's father, Elliot, have? How old was Eleanor when both her parents died? What did Eleanor's mother die of? What caused Elliot's death?

How was Eleanor related to Theodore Roosevelt? How was Franklin related to Eleanor and Theodore? Who walked Eleanor down the aisle?

What was Sara Roosevelt's reaction when Eleanor and Franklin became engaged? Why did Sara cling to Franklin? What kind of relationship did Sara have with Eleanor?

What disease was Franklin stricken with? What permanent damage did the disease do to Franklin? How did he cope with it? How did Eleanor help him?

Why did Franklin consider Eleanor his "eyes and ears?" Why was Eleanor a very different First Lady than the country had ever seen? What types of responsibilities did she take on?

What event caused Eleanor to be very disappointed in her husband? What type of relationship did Eleanor and Franklin have when he became president? How did Eleanor feel about living in the White House? What did she have to give up when she became First Lady?