



Kamala Harris (1964-)

HIGHLIGHTS

- Kamala Harris represents a bold new step in American politics as the first non-white Vice President.
- She represents a significant victory for the equality of women.

Kamala Devi Harris was born in Oakland, California, on 20 October, 1964. Her mother, Shyamala Gopalan, who died in 2009, was a research biologist who had arrived in the US from India in 1958 as a 19-year-old graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley. Her father, Donald J. Harris, is a Stanford University professor emeritus of economics, who arrived in the US from British Jamaica in 1961 for graduate study at University of California, Berkeley. Kamala graduated in law at the University of California in 1989. She made swift progress in her legal career and in 2002 became the first person of colour elected as District Attorney of San Francisco. From 2011 to 2017 she was Attorney General of the State of California, the first woman, the first African American and the first South Asian American to hold this post. In August 2020, Joe Biden announced that he had chosen Harris as his 'running mate', candidate for the office of vice-President, the first African American, the first Indian American to run for this post. The Biden-Harris ticket won the elections in November 2020 and on 20 January 2021 Kamala Harris became the first woman to hold the office of vice-President.

Victory Speech as Vice-President (2020)

TACKLING THE TOPIC

TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

Biden's choice of his 'running mate' was a bold move, breaking 'one of the most substantial barriers that exists in our country', as Harris herself stated. Harris' speech resounds with gratitude for the contribution given by so many women before her to this historic moment that marks a new, possible future for all American women. SDG 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls - addresses the many aspects of **gender inequality** in the world today, from violence against women to the gender gap that still exists in employment, income and representation in business corporations and political institutions. Kamala Harris represents another step forward as the first woman ever to become vice-President of the USA.

A TURNING POINT IN AMERICAN POLITICS. Eight years after the historic election of Barack Obama, Kamala Harris made history again marking a step forward in closing the gender gap in politics. Discuss these questions with your classmates and share your ideas.

- 1 Women represent half of the world's population. Does this mean they should represent half of nations' parliaments?
- 2 Are there any jobs or positions which should belong to one gender?
- 3 Do women have qualities and skills that men lack? Do men have qualities and skills that women lack?
- 4 Do you think women and girls enjoy real parity of opportunity in Italy?
- 5 Is there a Minister for Equal Opportunities in Italy. Do you know who she/he is?

MASTERING THE TOPIC CONCEPT MAP > pp. 452-453

I stand on their shoulders 070

WARM UP

- 1 Look at the girl in the picture and answer the questions.
 - 1 On whose shoulders is she standing?
 - 2 What advantages does this position give her?
 - 3 How does the girl feel?



The following excerpt is taken from the first public speech made by Kamala Harris, celebrating a step forward in the struggle for gender equality.

Good evening. Thank you. [...] Congressman John Lewis before his passing wrote: “Democracy is not a state, it is an act”. And what he meant was that America’s

- 5 democracy is not guaranteed. It is only as strong as our willingness to fight for it. To guard it and never take it for granted. And protecting our democracy takes struggle. It takes sacrifice. But there is joy in it. And there is progress. Because we, the people, have the power to build a better future. And when our very democracy was on the ballot¹ in this election with the very soul of America at
- 10 stake² and the world watching, you ushered in³ a new day for America.

[...] We are so grateful to Joe and Jill⁴ for welcoming our family into theirs on this incredible journey. And to the woman most responsible for my presence here today, my mother, Shyamala Gopalan Harris, who is always in our hearts. When she came here from India at the age of 19, she maybe didn’t quite imagine this moment.

- 15 But she believed so deeply in an America where a moment like this is possible, and so I am thinking about her and about the generations of women, Black women, Asian, white, Latina, Native American women, who throughout our nation’s history, have paved the way for this moment tonight, women who fought and sacrificed so much for equality and liberty and justice for all. Including the Black women who are often, too often overlooked but so
- 20 often proved they are the backbone of our democracy.

All the women who have worked to secure and protect the right to vote for over a century 100 years ago with the 19th Amendment, 55 years ago with the Voting Rights Act and now in 2020 with a new generation of women in our country who cast their ballots and continued the fight for their fundamental right to vote and be heard.

- 25 Tonight, I reflect on their struggle, their determination and the strength of their vision to see what can be, unburdened by what has been. And I stand on their shoulders. And what a testament it is to Joe’s character that he had the audacity to break one of the most substantial barriers that exists in our country and select a woman as his vice president.

- But while I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last. Because every little
- 30 girl watching tonight sees that this is a country of possibilities and to the children of our country regardless of your gender, our country has sent you a clear message: dream with ambition, lead with conviction and see yourselves in a way that others may not simply because they’ve never seen it before.

1 **ballot:** scheda elettorale

2 **stake:** in gioco

3 **ushered in:** avviato

4 **Joe and Jill:** Joe Biden e sua moglie Jill Jacobs

INTERACTIVE
ANALYSIS

COMPREHENSION

- 2 Read the passage and answer the following questions.
- 1 What does Kamala Harris declare about American democracy?
 - 2 What makes it stronger?
 - 3 What woman has had the strongest impact on Harris' life?
 - 4 What have many generations of women before her made possible?
 - 5 Why does Kamala Harris believe Joe Biden is a risk-taker?

ANALYSIS

- 3 Kamala Harris' speech contains some of the most common elements of a public speech. Find an example of:
- 1 a direct quote
 - 2 a series of short sentences one after the other
 - 3 an example of enumeration

INTERPRETATION

- 4 What are the actions people have to take to preserve democracy according to Harris?
- 5 By listing them, what is Kamala Harris trying to say about democracy?
- 6 Kamala Harris points out that women's journey towards 'equality and liberty' has been characterised by three important milestones.
- 1 Use the information contained in the text to fill the following chart:
- | | | | |
|------|---------------|-------------------|--|
| When | 100 years ago | | |
| What | | Voting Rights Act | |
- 2 What has always been at the core of women's struggles?
- 7 What parts of Kamala Harris' speech make you think women's journey towards equality is not over?
- 8 Focus on Kamala Harris' statement 'I stand on their shoulders' (line 26).
- 1 Who does 'their' refer to?
 - 2 What feelings pervade her words when she makes this statement?
- 9 Kamala Harris' speech ends with a vision for the future. Can you summarise it in your own words?

TACKLING THE TOPIC

A CALL TO ACTION

5

GENDER
EQUALITY

TAKE ACTION Work in small groups. Even if some progress has been made in the course of history, it cannot be denied that the 'journey' towards gender equality – as Kamala Harris calls it – is still going on across the world.

STEP 1 Use the Internet to identify the milestones that have characterised the journey towards gender equality in history;

STEP 2 Create a timeline and put the milestones you have identified in it;

STEP 3 Identify what steps still need to be taken to promote full gender equality in our world;

STEP 4 Choose one of the steps you have identified in Step 3 and make a plan of action in which you: explain why you have chosen it and why it is relevant to you; what you and the members of your community can do to promote it.