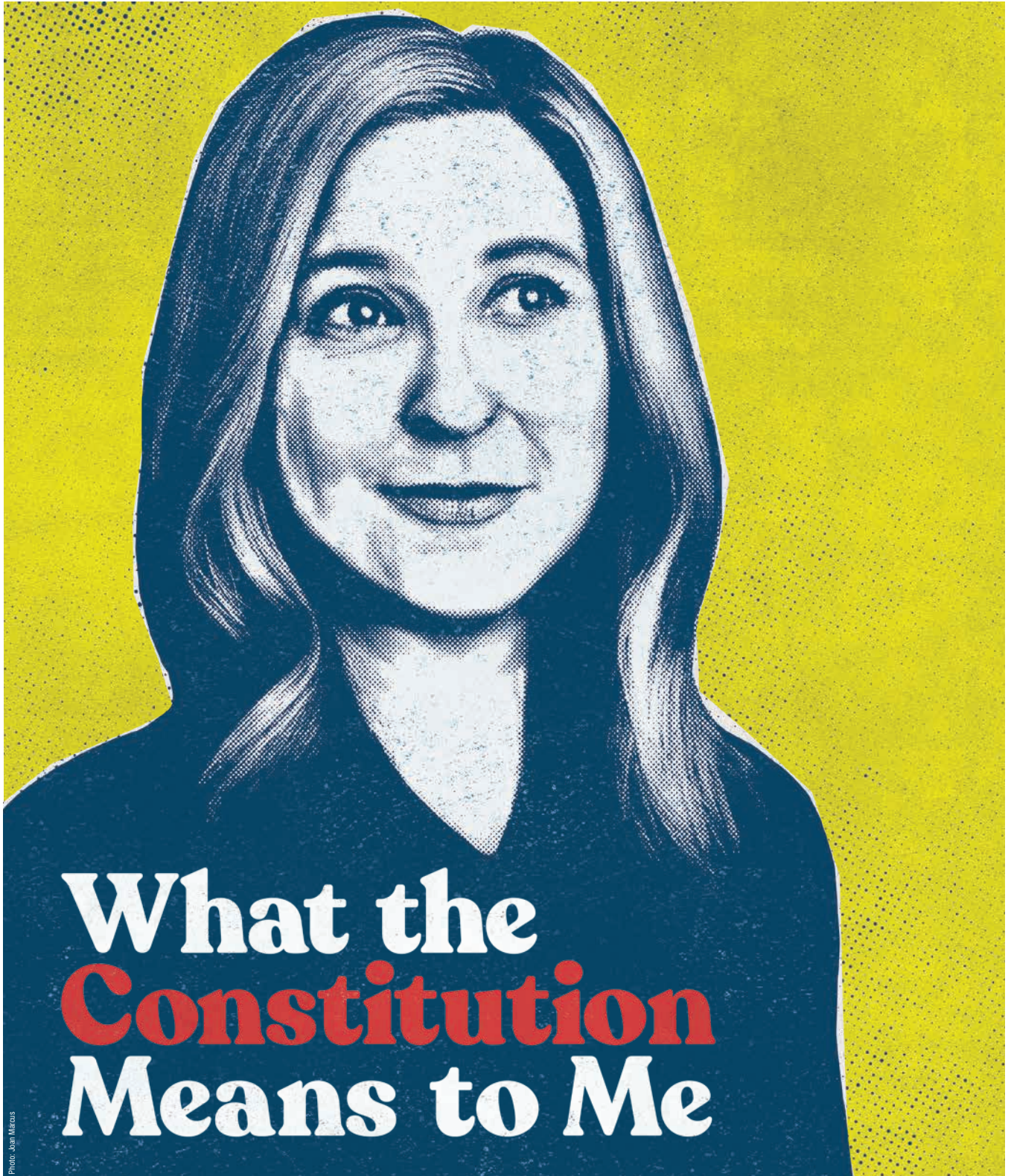




GUTHRIE
THEATER

Play Guide

2021-2022 SEASON



**What the
Constitution
Means to Me**

Photo: Jan Warras

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What the Constitution Means to Me

a play by **HEIDI SCHRECK**

directed by **OLIVER BUTLER**

September 30 - October 24, 2021

McGuire Proscenium Stage

THE PLAY

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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

Guthrie Theater Play Guide

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Actor Cassie Beck,
who plays Heidi on
the national tour

PHOTO: JOAN MARCUS

“The Constitution is a living document. That is what is so beautiful about it. It is a living, warm-blooded, steamy document. It is not a patchwork quilt. It is hot and sweaty. It is a crucible.”

– Heidi in *What the Constitution Means to Me*

About This Guide

This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show’s history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read up on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you’re a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We’re glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of this extraordinary story.

NOTE: Sections of this play guide may evolve throughout the run of the show, so check back often for additional content.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Thanks for your interest in *What the Constitution Means to Me*. Please direct literary inquiries to Resident Dramaturg Carla Steen at carlas@guthrietheater.org and education inquiries to Education Manager Lauren Anderson at laurena@guthrietheater.org.



PHOTO: HEIDI SCHRECK AND CASSIE BECK (JOAN MARCUS)

Synopsis

What the Constitution Means to Me is a memoir play by actor-playwright Heidi Schreck, who, as a teenager, earned money for college by giving speeches and engaging in debates about the U.S. Constitution in American Legion halls across the country.

The play begins in a hall in Wenatchee, Washington, with Heidi telling the audience that now, as an adult, she wonders why at age 15 she loved the Constitution. So she's determined to recreate — from memory — the speech she used to give with the assistance of an everyman Legionnaire. Heidi starts to inhabit her teenage self and gives her stump speech, but eventually her 40-something self's need to comment and explain breaks through. Although it was difficult to get personal with her anecdotes and connections to the Constitution as a teen, adult Heidi digs deep to reveal how she and generations of women in her family have been personally affected by the rights and protections offered — or not offered — by the Constitution. Heidi's frank revelations and funny sidebars are warm and engaging as she takes the audience through the significance of the Ninth and Fourteenth Amendments.

In the second part of the play, elements of which are extemporaneous, Heidi takes on a high school debater over the question of whether the Constitution should be retained or abolished, with a member of the audience chosen to judge the winner. The play ends with Heidi and the debater answering questions submitted by the previous audience.

SETTING

An American Legion hall in Wenatchee, Washington

CHARACTERS

Heidi, a 40-something woman contemplating America's founding document

Legionnaire, a proud member of the Leyden-Chiles-Wickersham American Legion Post 10 in Wenatchee, Washington

Debater, a high school student who debates the merits of the Constitution with Heidi

The play includes historical audio recordings from several Supreme Court cases that feature the following voices: Justice Potter Stewart, William I. Emerson, Justice Earl Warren, Justice Antonin Scalia, John C. Eastman, Justice Stephen Breyer and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

What the Constitution Means to Me was written in 2017, premiered off-Broadway at New York Theatre Workshop in 2018 and transferred to Broadway in spring 2019. Schreck's stage performance was captured for film and began streaming on Amazon Prime Video in October 2020 ahead of the U.S. presidential election. *What the Constitution Means to Me* was a finalist for the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and received a Tony Award nomination for Best Play in 2019. [G](#)

Responses to *What the Constitution Means to Me*

Honestly, it's one of the most exciting things I've ever seen, which explains my going back a second time. But I think the third time I went back, I realized that I was getting something out of it beyond the absolutely magnificent writing and the extraordinary production.

It's such a terrible time right now — it's frightening in ways that are really without parallel for anyone who's conscious and, well, not a Republican. And you know, I've always been a little skeptical of the notion that there's something sort of shamanistic or medicinal or restorative about theater in a kind of mysterious way, but I really felt that *What the Constitution Means to Me* was that. And every time I went back, I left feeling more hope about the survival of our democracy. Great art always does that to a certain extent — in the same way that a really terrible play can make you want to jump off a bridge.

Tony Kushner

"What *What the Constitution Means to Me* Means to Them": Tony Kushner has a favorite new play. Heidi Schreck wrote it. They have a lot to talk about," by Sara Holden, *Vulture*, March 5, 2019



PHOTO: TONY KUSHNER (JOAN MARCUS)

Los Angeles Times

At a time when the Constitution is being assailed by those who have sworn an oath to defend it, this buoyant and often-stirring civics lesson is the theatrical curriculum Americans desperately need now. As much a play as a performance piece, *What the Constitution Means to Me* reveals with courageous poignancy the way our nation's founding legal document intersects with the choices, opportunities, relationships and destinies of those who have had to fight for their foothold in our imperfect democracy.

Charles McNulty

"*What the Constitution Means to Me* amended for Los Angeles, retains its power," *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 2020

The New York Times

[*What the Constitution Means to Me*] is a tragedy told as a comedy, a work of inspired protest, a slyly crafted piece of persuasion and a tangible contribution to the change it seeks. It's not just the best play to open on Broadway so far this season, but also the most important. ... *What the Constitution Means to Me* is one of the things we always say we want theater to be: an act of civic engagement. It restarts an argument many of us forgot we even needed to have.

Jesse Green

"Can a Play Make the Constitution Great Again," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2019

TimeOut

There's a sense of rightness — a final puzzle piece fitting into place, a key clicking into a lock — about Heidi Schreck's quasi-solo play *What the Constitution Means to Me* moving to Broadway. It has always been about rhetoric and amplifying women's voices; it's the rare indie theater piece that doesn't require intimacy. Does theater matter? Is it necessary? Sometimes our razzle-dazzled hearts aren't sure. But here is something that every citizen must see: It's theater in the old sense, the Greek sense, a place where civic society can come together and do its thinking and fixing and planning.

Helen Shaw

"*What the Constitution Means to Me*: Theater Review," *Time Out New York*, March 31, 2019

Chicago Tribune

Schreck is arguing that who the framers [of the Constitution] were, and the nature of their prejudices, is indivisible from what they wrote, whom they chose to protect and whom they did not. *Constitution* is not the kind of show with which the late Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia would have agreed (although, given his love of debate, I think he would still [have] liked it). It is, at its core, an argument against any originalist interpretation of the great document and a cry for a fresh interpretation, at the very least, if not additional amendments or a whole new Constitution altogether.

Chris Jones

"Review: *What the Constitution Means to Me* is now in Chicago," *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 2020

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

Few new works for the stage are as instantly, trenchantly timely as ... *What the Constitution Means to Me*. ... It's a play of ideas for which people are not just hungry but starved. What makes it so edifying is that this isn't the kind of political theater that merely reaffirms the views of a liberal audience. It challenges us to step back and look at the bigger picture, to dwell not just on losses but also gains. And while it certainly contains elements that encourage us to engage with whatever tools we have in the struggle to keep our precarious rights and freedoms from moving backwards, its effectiveness is the result not of a call to action so much as the simple, inherently generous act of storytelling.

David Rooney

"*What the Constitution Means to Me*: Theater Review," *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 31, 2019

THE NEW YORKER

In this dire moment of cultural fragmentation, Schreck is offering an oasis of connection, a place where humanity and learning are being celebrated and protected. She is able to pull this off, in part, because the world she presents is not one of positions and stances, but of curiosity and openness. Schreck makes real the concepts that on paper seem laughable: that we each have agency to participate in the national dialogue in healthy, productive ways; that underneath the blighted soil of today's awfulness is a more dignified and still-accessible reality. Perhaps most incredibly of all, the show offers evidence that there are still reasons to have faith in the future of America. It's a gift as improbable as it is welcome. For 90 blessed minutes, the world seems sane again. [G](#)

Howard Fishman

"Heidi Schreck's Play About the U.S. Constitution Offers an Oasis of Sanity," *The New Yorker*, October 11, 2018



PHOTO: SCENIC DESIGN BY RACHEL HAUCK (@CONSTITUTIONBWW)

Notes on the Scenic Design

Only three credited actors are onstage for any given performance of *What the Constitution Means to Me*, Heidi Schreck’s searching oratory/memoir. ... But the space can feel crowded — not only by the personal stories and civic history Ms. Schreck’s play invokes, but by a gallery of faces, four rows tall and several columns across, that stare unvaryingly down at her, and us, throughout.

[Scenic Designer] Rachel Hauck’s diorama-like set, a heightened evocation of one of the American Legion halls in which a teenage Ms. Schreck once delivered prizewinning encomiums to the United States Constitution, includes many carefully selected details: a few carrot-colored banquet chairs; a flag with the insignia of the Legion post in Ms. Schreck’s hometown, Wenatchee, Washington; a thin, functional carpet in a dingy shade of maroon.


But it is the wraparound wall of 163 photos depicting American Legion members — veterans from every U.S. conflict from World War I to our current war in Afghanistan — that provides the image audiences are most likely to remember. ...

“I walked in and had a visceral reaction of terror,” Ms. Schreck confessed recently. “I was like, ‘You have to take some of them down. It’s too much. It’s too many. I feel claustrophobic in here.’”

In retrospect, said Ms. Hauck, “I admit I made her a pretty merciless environment. I think it’s the meanest set I’ve ever designed.”

It emerged from the designer’s “gut response,” she said, to Ms. Schreck’s play, which even in its earliest drafts set out to interweave the fraught legacy of the nation’s founding document with the stories of the women in Ms. Schreck’s family, including herself. The set, Ms. Hauck concluded, “is as intense as the stories she tells.” ...

Oddly enough, [Schreck] also feels “more connected to the men than I did when I first stepped onto the set.” Citing Judith Herman’s book *Trauma and Recovery*, Ms. Schreck has come to see analogies between the post-traumatic stress inflicted by combat and by sexual assault, both “born out of a violent, patriarchal culture.”

In other words, she now thinks of the faces on the wall much as she does of the white men who wrote the Constitution, with all its promises and its compromises, and who have run the American government for most of its history. She sees them “sometimes as oppressors, sometimes as allies.” 

Rob Weinert-Kendt

“A Set as ‘Intense’ as the Stories the *Constitution* Tells,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2019



PHOTO: HEIDI SCHRECK (TESS MAYER FOR THE INTERVAL)

About Heidi Schreck

Heidi Schreck is a writer and performer originally from Wenatchee, Washington, who now resides in Brooklyn, New York. *What the Constitution Means to Me* was named a Pulitzer Prize finalist and won the Obie Award and New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best American Play. She also received two Tony Award nominations for *What the Constitution Means to Me* (Best Play and Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Play) and the 2019 Benjamin Hadley Danks Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Her play *Grand Concourse*, which debuted at Playwrights Horizons and Steppenwolf Theatre in 2014 and 2015, won the Stacey Mindich Lilly Award in 2015 and was a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. Screenwriting credits include "I Love Dick," "Billions" and "Nurse Jackie." As an actor, Schreck has performed in numerous theaters around the country, including Playwrights Horizons, The Public Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, Clubbed Thumb and Berkeley Rep.

Schreck has also taught playwriting and screenwriting at New York University, Columbia University, Kenyon College and Primary Stages. She is the recipient of three Obie Awards, a Drama Desk Award, a Theatre World Award, the Horton Foote Playwriting Award and the Hull-Warriner Award from the Dramatists Guild.

A filmed version of *What the Constitution Means to Me*, starring Schreck, premiered in October 2020 exclusively on Amazon Prime Video and was nominated for a Critics Choice Award, Producers Guild Award and Dramatists Guild Award. [G](#)

In Her Own Words



Schreck began working on [*What the Constitution Means to Me*] in 2007, when she was living in Brooklyn, and performed a brief monologue at P.S. 122, an alternative-theater space in Manhattan's East Village, about her teenage debating experiences.

"I really started from the tiny spark that so many plays start from," she told me in an interview this past September, shortly after the play closed on Broadway and was beginning a run at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. "I certainly didn't have a grand idea."

Encouraged by the response to her initial effort, she set about expanding the piece. It was when she posed herself the challenge that her 15-year-old self was given during those contests — find a personal connection between her life and the Constitution — that the work grew into a kind of feminist deconstruction of the nation's founding document. ...


What the Constitution Means "sort of took its own shape," she said. "I felt as if the play led me." Schreck, who was briefly on a prelaw track in college before English and theater swept her away, turned herself into something of a constitutional expert, taking a deep dive into the mindset of the men who wrote the

Constitution, who was left out of it and how it has been shaped over time. In the play, she talks quite a bit about the Ninth Amendment, which says simply, "The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people." Or, as she puts it onstage, the Constitution doesn't guarantee you the right to brush your teeth, but that doesn't mean you don't have that right. (The Ninth Amendment has helped secure, for instance, the right to use birth control.)

She enlarges, too, on the concept of negative rights versus positive rights — things that the government is expressly forbidden to infringe upon versus things that are proactively guaranteed. She studied up on the constitutions of other nations that have a greater emphasis on positive rights than does the U.S. Constitution. South Africa, for instance, guarantees the right to human dignity and to a healthy environment.

Heidi Schreck, in an interview with Neil Genzlinger

"Heidi Schreck's Riveting Play Deconstructs the U.S. Constitution," *Smithsonian Magazine*, as part of the Smithsonian's Ingenuity Awards, December 2019

People only vote to abolish [the Constitution] 20 percent of the time. We keep a little tally backstage. But around the Kavanaugh hearings — that was when we got the most abolishers, actually, and I think it was because ... well, because it was being shoved right in our faces, the fact that things are not working structurally. The idea of this document being created by white men for white men was so vivid in those days, and I think there was a willingness in people to say, "Yeah, let's chuck it and start over." And that was exciting for me. I personally love it when people vote to abolish. It makes my play feel so much more radical! Somebody actually said to me, "Your play's really radical when people abolish the Constitution, and it feels less radical when they don't. So don't you want to try to control that in some way?" And I was like, "The whole point of the play is that I don't control it." It's a civic act. We decide as a community how to move forward. So I don't get to decide whether it's more or less radical at the end. 

Heidi Schreck

"What *What the Constitution Means to Me* Means to Them": Tony Kushner has a favorite new play. Heidi Schreck wrote it. They have a lot to talk about," by Sara Holden, *Vulture*, March 5, 2019



The Constitution of the United States of America

By Carla Steen
Resident Dramaturg

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” – Preamble to the Constitution

During the summer of 1787, four years after the end of the Revolutionary War, 55 men gathered in what is now called Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Their task, as seen in retrospect, was to craft a constitution to define the powers, duties and laws of the U.S. federal government and guarantee certain rights to its people. Since 1781, the law of the land had been defined by the Articles of Confederation, and the Philadelphia convention was initially sanctioned by the Continental Congress to revise the Articles. Some delegates went into the Philadelphia meeting with grander ideas than others about what their work could achieve, and it wasn't long before the group realized they needed — and were in fact working to create — an entirely new document.

The issues debated and argued into the wee hours for weeks on end are now legendary, and their legacies are still present today: slavery, states' rights and proportional versus equal representation to a federal government by states of varying sizes. Not every state sent delegates (ahem, Rhode Island, called “Rogue Island” in Boston), and not every delegate was there for the entirety of the convention's four months. But as imperfect and full of compromise as the result of that summer's work was, the Constitution of the United States of America was a remarkable document that greatly improved on the Articles.

The Constitution was signed by 39 of the delegates, it was ratified by the required nine states in June 1788 and the new government began operations in March 1789. The Constitution itself provides for the circumstances under which it can be amended. An amendment may be proposed by Congress and submitted to the states if it is approved by two-thirds of both houses of Congress. Or, if two-thirds of state legislatures propose a convention to amend the Constitution, Congress must call that convention. Either way, an approved amendment needs to be ratified by three-fourths of state legislatures to take effect.

The first 10 amendments, called the Bill of Rights, were proposed by Congress in September 1789 and certified in December 1791. The Constitution has been amended 27 times; the most recent amendment was ratified in May 1992. (Fun fact: The Twenty-Seventh Amendment about congressional pay was originally among those proposed to be part of the Bill of Rights, but it didn't receive enough support to be ratified in 1791. Before the 20th century, there was no time limit placed on the ratification of amendments.)

Heidi Schreck's *What the Constitution Means to Me* focuses particularly on the Ninth Amendment, part of the Bill of Rights, and the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified after the Civil War.

NINTH AMENDMENT: NON-ENUMERATED RIGHTS RETAINED BY PEOPLE

Ratified and certified in 1791

NINTH AMENDMENT

“The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.”

The Ninth Amendment was essentially a compromise between those who supported a Bill of Rights and those who felt it was unnecessary. Supporters of a Bill of Rights wanted to ensure that certain individual rights received constitutional protection, limiting the federal government’s power over those rights. Opponents of a Bill of Rights said it would be impossible to list all rights and that delineating only some rights would suggest that any rights not expressly noted were not protected. Thus, the text of the Ninth Amendment makes clear this latter point: Just because rights are not enumerated explicitly in the Constitution does not mean they are denied to the people.

“[T]he Ninth Amendment shows a belief of the Constitution’s authors that fundamental rights exist that are not expressly enumerated in the first eight amendments and an intent that the list of rights included there not be deemed exhaustive.”

Justice Arthur Goldberg

sharing his opinion regarding *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 1965

The Ninth Amendment hasn’t often been the basis for Supreme Court decisions, but when it has, it often centers on issues of privacy, such as marital privacy and contraception in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965). The Ninth Amendment has also been criticized for being so vague that it is unhelpful in identifying and affirming which rights should be included in its protection.

For more information, read:

“Common Interpretation: The Ninth Amendment” by Randy E. Barnett and Louis Michael Seidman for the National Constitution Center. www.constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/interpretation/amendment-ix/interps/131

FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT (SECTION 1): CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS, EQUAL PROTECTION

Ratified and certified in 1868

FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT (SECTION 1)

“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

The primary purpose of the Fourteenth Amendment was to protect the citizenship rights of formerly enslaved people. One of three amendments that were passed in the wake of the Civil War, the Fourteenth Amendment has five sections, and the first section is of interest to Schreck. Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment defines who is a citizen of the U.S. and protects the equal rights and privileges of citizens and their right to due process. The most significant and immediate effect of this amendment was to overturn the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857 that declared freed slaves born within a state or nation were not entitled to citizenship. This Fourteenth Amendment ensured and protected citizenship and its rights to all former slaves in the U.S. by declaring that all persons born or naturalized in the U.S. are citizens.

The Fourteenth Amendment is one of the most frequently cited amendments in litigation and has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to affirm the citizenship of any child born in the U.S., regardless of the citizenship status of their parents; that citizens cannot be artificial people and a corporate body is not a citizen; that separate is not equal under the equal protection clause; to affirm a woman’s right to an abortion; and to affirm the right to same-sex marriage. 

For more information, read:

“Common Interpretation: The Citizenship Clause” by Akhil Reed Amar and John C. Harrison for the National Constitution Center. www.constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/interpretation/amendment-xiv/clauses/700

“Common Interpretation: The Equal Protection Clause” by Brian T. Fitzpatrick and Theodore M. Shaw for the National Constitution Center. www.constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/interpretation/amendment-xiv/clauses/702

Glossary of Terms



American Legion (*proper noun*) — An organization founded in 1919 that is composed of ex-servicemen from the U.S. Armed Forces who saw active duty during wartime. The Legion assists and lobbies politically for veterans in addition to sponsoring various youth programs.

associative logic (*noun*) — A method of thinking in which a person draws connections between topics that seem unrelated or distantly related.

changeling (*noun*) — A fairy child whom fairies secretly leave in the place of a human child they have abducted. From European folklore.

clause (*noun*) — A separate, distinct section of a legal document, such as a will, contract or treaty.

extemporaneous (*adjective*) — Spoken or performed with little or no advance preparation.

Hammurabi (*proper noun*) — An ancient king of Babylonia (in present-day Iraq). He established a law code that implemented severe physical punishments and harsher laws for poor citizens and women. The saying “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” comes from Hammurabi’s laws.

jurisdiction (*noun*) — The extent of authority or control that a governing body or official has. For example, someone’s jurisdiction may be limited to certain topics or geographical areas.

Legion Hall (*proper noun*) — A meeting place for members of the American Legion, specific to a town or other small geographical location. Legion Halls often host events for their members, youth and the wider community.

Magna Carta (*proper noun*) — A legal document drafted by English noblemen in 1215. This document, which they forced King John to sign, established the right of the noblemen to swift trials and protected them from illegal imprisonment. The Constitution as a whole, and specifically the Fifth Amendment, was inspired by the Magna Carta and its role in establishing rights for English citizens.


melancholia (*noun*) — An outdated term for a mental health condition. Symptoms were said to be severe depression and an irrational sense of fear or foreboding.

milliner (*noun*) — A person who designs, makes or sells hats for women.

naturalistic (*adjective*) — In art, when something is an accurate, detailed and unbiased re-creation of life. Naturalistic art does not have supernatural or unrealistic elements and strives to depict objective reality, not the opinions of the artist.

pager (*noun*) — A small, portable device that can receive text or voice messages. Some pagers can also reply to or send messages. Pagers were commonly carried before mobile phones became widespread, and they are still used today by people working in emergency services or public safety.

penumbra (*noun*) — A shadowy, indefinite or incompletely illuminated area.

trenchant (*adjective*) — Incisive, keen or cutting. Sharp, direct and to the point. 

Theme Snapshot: Rights and the U.S. Constitution

What the Constitution Means to Me explores the strengths and limitations of the U.S. Constitution. The Constitution was written to protect the rights of landowning white men in the U.S, and over time, it has been amended to extend more of those rights to more people in the country. The U.S. has succeeded in extending equal rights to people in some ways, but it has also failed.

People who have not been protected by the Constitution, or who have been discriminated against by the U.S. government, have had to ask: How can I fight to be treated fairly? Can a government that has discriminated against people become more just? We continue to ask similar questions about ourselves and our role in our democracy.

- Are rights given to people by governments, or do all people inherently have rights?
- Should the Constitution attempt to recognize all of those rights?

The play asks us to consider whether we should change the Constitution moving forward, and, if so, how we should do it.

- Should we keep the Constitution as the basis of our government or try to write a new and fairer document for today's society?
- If we keep the Constitution, how should we continue to change it?
- How can we achieve a more participatory and fairer representative of democracy?

Throughout the play, Heidi investigates how her life and the lives of her family members have been impacted by the Constitution. She examines how her access to reproductive health care, including birth control and abortion, influenced her career and adulthood. Today, people all over the country can access reproductive health procedures and use various forms of contraception, but not everyone who needs or wants this health care can obtain it. For many, the ability to see doctors, have medical procedures or use different kinds of birth control is limited by a lack of health insurance, lack of available doctors or other reasons. Laws and policies governing reproductive

health care continue to change, and these changes have influenced Heidi's relationships with other women in her family.

- How does the ability (or inability) to obtain reproductive health care affect the life decisions of people who can get pregnant?
- How might a person's identities and life circumstances (such as race, economic background, ability status, sexuality, gender identity and geographical location) affect the reproductive health care options available to them?
- How have generational differences played a role in conversations you've had or witnessed with family members about reproductive health care?

The domestic abuse of women by men who are their partners, family members or otherwise important people in their lives has also played a role in Heidi's life and family history. Domestic violence primarily affects women, and she connects it to other ways women have historically been devalued in the U.S. Domestic violence often remains hidden, and even when it is reported, it can be difficult for women and their families to find safety from an abuser. In *What the Constitution Means to Me*, Heidi explains how the Constitution has failed to protect victims of domestic violence.

- How are women who are victims of domestic violence treated differently by law enforcement, social services and society based on their identities and life circumstances?
- How are the ways we think about, discuss and react to domestic violence different from the ways we think about, discuss and react to other kinds of violence?
- How can we ensure the rights of women who are victims of domestic violence are protected?

Excerpt published with permission from New York Theatre Workshop's *The Brief* Study Guide for its production of *What the Constitution Means to Me* (originally published September 2018). Edited for style.

For Further Engagement and Discussion

Pre-Show Activities

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

With a partner or group, reflect on what you have learned previously about the U.S. Constitution. Discuss and share what you can remember about the founding document. Try to hit different points in your discussion, such as:

- Why was the Constitution written?
- Who was involved in its creation?
- When and where was it written?
- What are some of the key amendments?
- How did it change our country? Were its initial goals accomplished?

SPEECH AND DEBATE

1. With a partner or group, select a topic for debate (Example: Should school uniforms be banned?) and decide who will be arguing for and against the topic:
 - Partner One/Group One will advocate **for** school uniforms (Proposition).
 - Partner Two/Group Two will advocate **against** school uniforms (Opposition).
2. Research your topic. Focus your research on collecting facts and building arguments that support your viewpoint and claim.
3. Finally, present a persuasive argument. Each partner or group will alternate, presenting their points in a parliamentary style debate:
 - Flip a coin to decide whether the Proposition or Opposition will go first.
 - Each side presents their argument.
 - Each side responds to their opponent's points.
 - Each side presents their closing remarks, starting with the Opposition and followed by the Proposition.
4. Use the following rubric to assess each partner or group:
 - **FOCUS:** Arguments are clearly stated and supported by details.
 - **CONTENT:** Well-developed details are provided using primary evidence and originality.
 - **ORGANIZATION:** Appropriate starter phrases are used, such as "According to the author of" or "My opponent may say."
 - **STYLE:** Expression is clear, concise and formal.
 - **CONVENTIONS:** Speech is delivered with appropriate volume and clarity.
 - **RESPECT:** Respect is given to other speakers.

Post-Show Activities

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Return to the discussion you had with your partner or group during the pre-show activities:

- Which elements of the Constitution were you able to remember?
- What surprised you?
- Having reflected further, do you think the Constitution should be abolished? Why or why not?

THEATRICALIZING THE PERSONAL

1. Pick a constitutional amendment.
2. Research how that amendment might affect the life of a student today.
3. Consider how it is similar to or different from the goals of the amendment when it was ratified.
4. Write a monologue from the perspective of a student, imagining how they might feel about this amendment's influence on their life.
5. Present your monologue to your classmates.

For Further Reading and Understanding

BOOKS

- What the Constitution Means to Me* by Heidi Schreck, acting edition, published by Concord Theatricals.
- What the Constitution Means to Me* by Heidi Schreck, published by Theatre Communications Group.
- Grand Concourse* by Heidi Schreck, acting edition, published by Concord Theatricals.
- Creature* by Heidi Schreck, acting edition, published by Concord Theatricals.
- The Consultant* by Heidi Schreck, acting edition, published by Concord Theatricals.
- Miracle at Philadelphia: The Story of the Constitutional Convention, May to September 1787* by Catherine Drinker Bowen, published by Little, Brown and Company, 1966.

ARTICLES

- Genzlinger, Neil, "Heidi Schreck's Riveting Play Deconstructs the U.S. Constitution," *Smithsonian Magazine*, as part of the Smithsonian's Ingenuity Awards, December 2019.
www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/heidi-schreck-riveting-play-deconstructs-us-constitution-180973500/
- Holden, Sara, "What *What the Constitution Means to Me* Means to Them": Tony Kushner has a favorite new play. Heidi Schreck wrote it. They have a lot to talk about," *Vulture*, March 5, 2019.
www.vulture.com/2019/03/heidi-schreck-tony-kushner-what-the-constitution-means-to-me.html
- Weinert-Kendt, Rob, "A Set as 'Intense' as the Stories the *Constitution* Tells," *The New York Times*, April 24, 2019.
www.nytimes.com/2019/04/24/theater/what-the-constitution-means-to-me-set.html

VIDEOS

- "What the Constitution Means to Me," a filmed version of the play on Amazon Prime Video, October 15, 2020.
www.amazon.com/What-Constitution-Means-Me/dp/B08KRB3FQ4
- "Heidi Schreck on *What the Constitution Means to Me*," PBS, May 10, 2019.
www.pbs.org/video/heidi-schreck-what-constitution-means-me-osptfk/

RADIO

- "Heidi Schreck: Kids Read the Constitution," as heard on *Ask Me Another*, National Public Radio, October 23, 2020.
www.npr.org/2020/10/23/926633594/heidi-schreck-kids-read-the-constitution

ESSAYS

- "Twin Cities law professors on the US Constitution: about this series," *Pioneer Press*, September 20, 2021.
A series of explanatory columns from a collaboration between the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, professors at Mitchell Hamline School of Law and students in St. Paul Public Schools.
www.twincities.com/2021/09/19/twin-cities-law-professors-on-the-us-constitution-about-this-series/
- "We the People," *The New York Times*, August 4, 2021.
www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/08/04/opinion/us-constitution-amendments.html

STUDY GUIDE

- New York Theatre Workshop's *The Brief*, for its production of *What the Constitution Means to Me*, September 2018.
<https://view.publitas.com/new-york-theatre-workshop/what-the-constitution-means-to-me-study-guide/>

WEBSITES

- www.constitutioncenter.org
Located in Philadelphia, the National Constitution Center is the country's leading platform for Constitution education and debate.
- www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/curriculum/what-constitution-means-me
A curated history of the Constitution by The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History based on historical moments discussed in the play.
- www.constitutionfacts.com
Online hub for all things related to the Constitution, including full texts, quizzes and more.
- www.constitution.congress.gov
A government-sanctioned record of interpretation of the Constitution regularly updated and written in "plain English." Useful for all audiences, it is maintained by the Library of Congress and Congressional Research Service.
- www.oconnorinstitute.org/constitution-series
A free online public forum and webcast series about the Constitution curated by the Sandra Day O'Connor Institute for American Democracy.
- www.constitutionbroadway.com
Official website of the national tour of *What the Constitution Means to Me*.