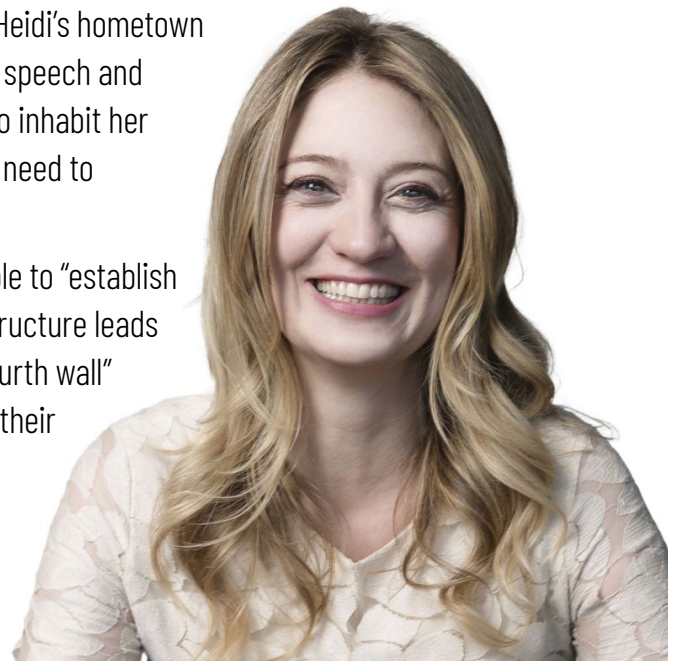




Playwright Heidi Schreck Invites you into the Conversation.

What the Constitution Means to Me is a memoir play that actor-playwright Heidi Schreck wrote in 2017 to perform herself. As a teenager she had 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 starts in a hall in Heidi's hometown of Wenatchee, Washington, where she attempts to recreate her winning speech and understand what made her love the Constitution so much. Heidi starts to inhabit her teenage self and gives her stump speech, but eventually her adult self's need to comment and explain breaks through.

In the published script, Heidi encourages other actors performing the role to "establish a genuine and spontaneous connection with the audience." This open structure leads into a second part of the play which is a live debate. At this point the "fourth wall" between the actors and audience breaks down and the actors become their real selves in the present time. Heidi encourages performers to "allow whatever might be happening in the country that day to affect their performance." After the live debate, each audience is asked to vote on whether or not we should abolish the constitution and start again.



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 [quoted in *Vulture Magazine*, March 5, 2019].

A video interview with Heidi Schreck can be found at: wamtheatre.com/production-programming/

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The Constitution

We the People of the United States

The Constitution of the United States was enacted in 1789 as the supreme law of the United States of America. Originally comprising seven articles, it delineates the national frame and constraints of government. The Constitution's first three articles embody the doctrine of the separation of powers, whereby the federal government is divided into three branches: the legislative (the congress), the executive (the president), and the judicial (the federal courts). Articles 4-6 describe the rights and responsibilities of state governments in relation to the federal government, and the shared process for constitutional amendment. Article 7 establishes the procedure that was used by the original 13 states to ratify it.

The United States Constitution is the oldest and longest-standing written and codified national constitution in force in the world today. Since the constitution was ratified in 1789, it has been amended 27 times. The first ten amendments, known collectively as the Bill of Rights, offer specific protections of liberty and justice and place restrictions on the powers of government within the US States. The majority of the 17 later amendments expand individual civil rights protection. The last time the constitution was amended was in 1992 and there are currently six unratified amendments (including the Equal Rights Amendment that would prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender).

“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.”

Crucible def.

- (1) a ceramic or metal container in which metals or other substances may be melted or subjected to very high temperatures, or, as Heidi states it: “a witches cauldron”!
- (2) a situation of severe trial, or in which different elements interact, leading to the creation of something new, or as Heidi states it: “a severe test of patience or belief.”

QUESTION: One of Heidi's competitors describes the Constitution not as a crucible, but as a patchwork quilt. Which of these do you feel is the most compelling analogy? What image(s) would you use to describe the US Constitution?



of the United States of America.

*ted States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice,
to the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves*

The Ninth Amendment (Ratified and certified in 1791)

states that the list of rights enumerated in the Constitution is not exhaustive, and that the people retain all rights not enumerated. In other words, the rights of the people are not limited to just the rights listed in the Constitution. 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.

The Fourteenth Amendment was ratified and certified in

1868, after the Civil War, to protect the citizenship rights of formerly enslaved people by declaring that all persons born or naturalized in the United States are citizens. The Fourteenth Amendment addresses many aspects of citizenship and the rights of citizens. The most commonly used — and frequently litigated — phrase in the amendment is “equal protection of the laws”, which figures prominently in a wide variety of landmark cases, including *Brown v. Board of Education* (racial discrimination), *Roe v. Wade* (reproductive rights), *Bush v. Gore* (election recounts), *Reed v. Reed* (gender discrimination), and *University of California v. Bakke* (racial quotas in education).

Positive Rights versus Negative Rights

A Positive Right requires others to provide a service or act in a certain way towards you.

For example: right to information, right to employment, right to housing, right to social security, consumer rights, right to health care.

A Negative Right ensures the individual's natural freedom to act while not requiring anyone to act on behalf of another.

For example: right to freedom, right to live with dignity, rights against torture, rights related to justice, rights against exploitation.

*The United States Constitution
is primarily a negative rights
constitution.*

Activity

*Choose one of the amendments
to the US Constitution and
think of a way that it has
affected your life or the lives
of your family members.*

*Do you feel included in
and protected by the
amendment or not?*

*Write a story or monologue
explaining this connection.*

WHAT IS DEBATE?

A debate is an organized argument or contest of ideas in which the participants discuss a topic from two opposing sides. Those who agree with this statement or idea are the “pro” side. Those who do not agree with this statement or idea are the “con” side. Each side will show, in an organized and clever way, why they believe to have the right answers. They will use examples and evidence to support their ideas while working towards a conclusion. The aim of a debate is to convince the opposition that you are right. When the two sides agree on the subject, or when one side’s arguments are more convincing than the other side, that is when the debate comes to a close. In a formal debate, a mediator (who has remained neutral) will decide on the winner.

According to the former US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (speaking at the National Association of Urban Debate League in 2012): “competitive debate is not just one of the ‘great equalizers’ for minority achievement and educational opportunity, but also a best practice to produce dynamic Americans proficient in the 4 “Cs” of 21st century skills—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity—and also a 5th, civic awareness.” [from the American Debate League website]

POST SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **How has this play made you think differently about the constitution or your rights in this country? Was there any information you were given that surprised you?**
- **This play breaks the fourth wall between actors and audience. Were there any parts of the production when you felt particularly included or that Heidi was speaking directly to you? What effect did this have?**
- **How did the entrance of the young debater change the story? How did the generation gap between the two women debating affect how you received their arguments?**
- **After reflection, do you think the constitution should be abolished? Why or why not?**

What the Constitution Means to Me contains mentions of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and discussions of abortion and its stigmatization.

Here in Berkshire County, the Elizabeth Freeman Center offers free and confidential counseling, shelter, legal advocacy, safety planning, and teen dating violence prevention education.

Their toll-free, 24/7 hotline number is: 1-866-401-2425

Activity

With a partner or group select a topic for debate and split into two sides: proposition (pro) and opposition (con). Take time to research and organize your argument. Flip a coin to decide who goes first. Each side presents their argument; then each side responds to their opponent’s points; and, finally, each side presents closing remarks.

Arguments are assessed on: Focus (were they clearly stated and supported by details), Content (well-developed details 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), and Respect (given to the other speakers).

SELECTED RESOURCES

What The Constitution Means to Me by Heidi Schreck, published script by Theatre Communications Group (2020)

constitutioncenter.org - Located in Philadelphia, the National Constitution Center is the country’s leading platform for Constitution education and debate.

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.

oyez.org - a law project that makes audio recordings of Supreme Court cases accessible to the public for free. This play includes 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.

This study guide is informed by resources from previous productions and other publicly available sources.

More about WAM Theatre can be found at: wamtheatre.com

More about Berkshire Theatre Group can be found at: berkshiretheatregroup.org

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