



WHAT THE CONSTITUTION MEANS TO ME

By Heidi Schreck



STUDY GUIDE

theREP and Collaborative School of the Arts are a part of Proctors Collaborative 2023-24 Season



FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT;

Visit school.proctors.org or contact group sales at (518) 382-3884 x 139 groupsales@proctors.org

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CAPITAL REPERTORY THEATRE | 2023-2024 STUDENT MATINEES

What the Constitution Means to Me
by Heidi Schreck
October 4, 2023

Million Dollar Quartet Christmas
Book by Colin Escott
December 13 and 20, 2023

Sweat
by Lynn Nottage
March 27, 2024

WORLD PREMIERE

Three Mothers
by Ajene D. Washington
May 2 and 9, 2024

ON-THE-GO! IN-SCHOOL TOURS

Shakespeare: The Remix
by Aaron Jafferis & Gihieh Lee
October 23-November 18, 2023

Henry Johnson: The Lost Hero
by Rachel Lynett
Dramaturgy by Eunice Ferreria
February 5-March 8, 2024

ADDITIONAL EVENTS

NEXT ACT! New Play Summit 13
Spring 2024

Summer Stage Young Acting Company performances
Summer 2024

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groupsales@proctors.org.the guide.



FALL 2023

Dear Educator:

Welcome to the Capital Repertory Theatre!

We are thrilled that you are attending a student matinee performance of “What the Constitution Means to Me,” one of theREP’s MainStage productions for the 2023-24 season, and hope that you will find this guide to be a useful tool in your classroom.

You have permission to reproduce materials within this guide for use in your classroom. It is designed to introduce the cultural and historical context of the play, as well as provide resources and ideas for incorporating the theatre experience into your curriculum. Productions by theREP are likely to generate questions, thoughts and opinions amongst your students.

The arts provide young imaginations with stimulation, points of reference and intellectual resources for the mind and spirit; it is theREP’s goal to make live theatre attendance possible for all students in the Capital Region. Tens of thousands of local students have attended student matinees and On-The-Go! performances throughout our history. We hope to continue to grow and serve the needs of the Capital Region education community for decades to come.

Your success stories help us to keep the program funded, so please let us know how you are using theatre in the classroom. We love to receive copies of lesson plans, student work related to our productions and your letters. These are important testimonials to the value of the arts in education.

We look forward to hearing from you!

With deepest gratitude,

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**This study guide was created by WAM Theatre and has been provided for theREP’s production as a part of the contractual agreement made with WAM. It was created for educational purposes only, theREP does not sell or make any money from*



ABOUT US



Capital Repertory Theatre (theREP) is a non-profit professional-producing theatre. In its decades-long history, theREP has produced more than 8,000 performances for the people of the Capital Region.

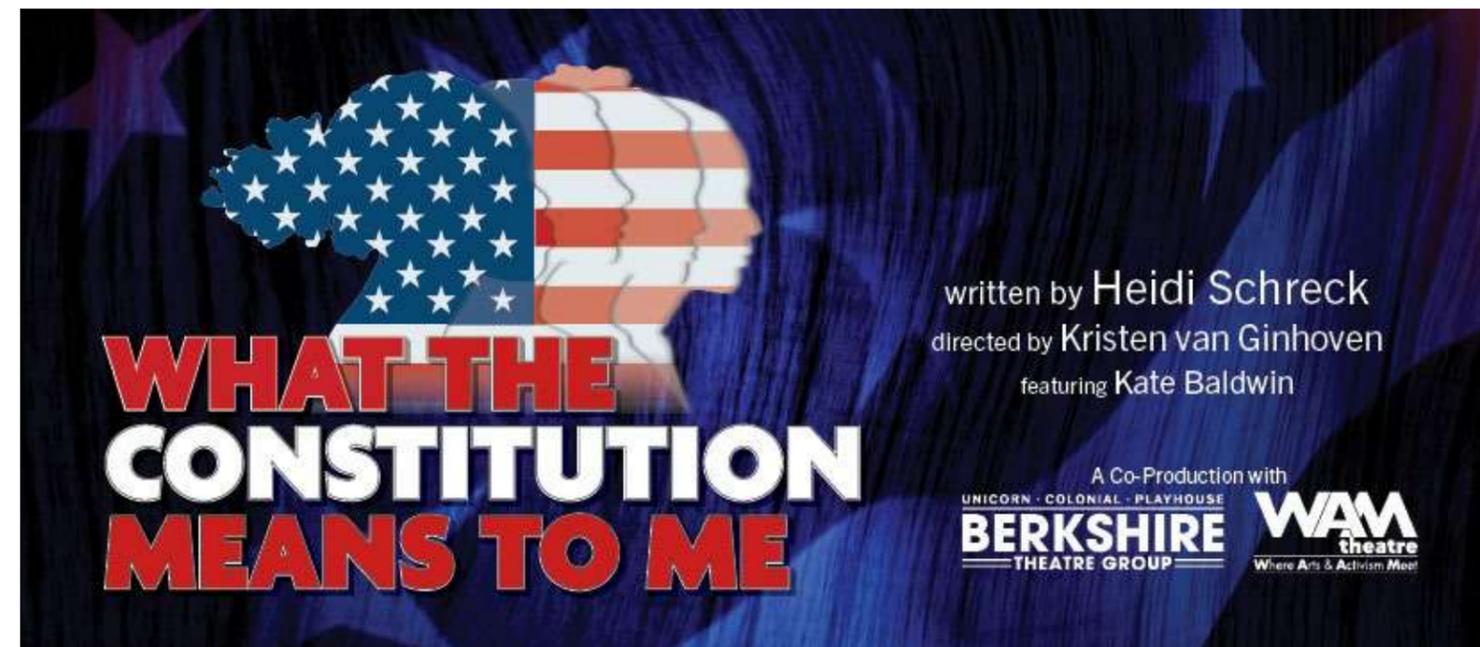
A member of LORT (League of Resident Theatres), theREP strives to bring quality work that explores the essence of the human condition through the stories of people, events and phenomena that shape our contemporary lives. Theatre, at its best, entertains, cajoles and inspires by engaging the heart and mind through its most powerful ally—the imagination.

There are two basic types of theatre companies: producing and presenting. theREP is a producing theatre. The theatre hires a director and designers for the set, costumes, lights and sound. The theatre's artistic director and the director select appropriate actors for all the roles in the play. Then they all come to Albany, where the play is built and rehearsed. The resident staff of the theatre works with visiting artists to put the production together.

In addition to the main theatre space, theREP has a studio theatre that acts as a rehearsal hall and secondary venue for performances (such as several Black Theatre Troupe of Upstate NY's recent productions), a costume shop where costumes are constructed and cared for, a prop shop where props are made, offices where the administrative staff works and housing facilities for out-of-town actors. theREP's sets are constructed in a scene shop that is also a part of the Proctors Collaborative and located in Rotterdam, NY.

In contrast to a producing theatre, presenting theatres (sometimes called “roadhouses”) like Proctors in Schenectady (also a part of Proctors Collaborative) host shows that have been designed, built and rehearsed elsewhere. Touring productions are booked into presenting theatres. Shows that are booked into presenting houses will tour regionally, nationally or even internationally over an extended period. What you will see at theREP or with our On-The-Go! tours are unique to theREP where it was built. No one from anywhere else will see this production just as you see it!

Capital Repertory Theatre is a part of Proctors Collaborative, which also includes Proctors, Universal Preservation Hall (UPH), the Collaborative School of the Arts and the Collaborative Scene Shop.



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/

This study guide is made possible by the generous support of our funders including:



The Constitution of the United States of America.

We the People

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 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).

“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?



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

Study Guide compiled by Talya Kingston.

Graphic design by T Square Design Studio tsquare.design

theREP★

/// MISSION IN ACTION! ///

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH are key components of theREP’s mission, “to create an authentic link to the community we serve.” Through a wide range of programs, theREP strives “to provide the Capital Region with theatre programming which inspires a greater understanding of the human condition” and helps “to develop future audiences by instilling the notion that theatre is a vital part of the cultural life of all vibrant cities.”

PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS

Student Matinees (Classics on Stage): Performances of most of the theatre’s professional productions are scheduled during the school day with dramatically discounted prices for area students to allow for greater accessibility.

On-The-Go! In-School Tour: Specially adapted professional productions designed to play to students on-site in schools. theREP’s On-The-Go program reaches close to 10,000+ students every year.

Young Playwright Contest: Providing students ages 13-19 with the opportunity to submit their work to be produced on theREP’s stage. In addition, the winning playwrights are given a mentorship—prior to the production of the play—with a professional theatre playwright (and or director).

Summer Stage Young Acting Company: Providing young actors the opportunity to work together, with leading professionals in the field, on a production that will take place at theREP. Company members hone their acting skills while rehearsing and then performing the Young Playwright Contest-winning plays.

CAST (Cultivating Arts & Students Together): Providing students with the opportunity to volunteer at the theatre and earn community service credits at the same time. Teens get an in-depth learning experience that satisfies their passion to be a part of the arts while fulfilling their community service needs.

Artists-in-Residency Programs: theREP works in conjunction with school educators to bring highly trained teaching artists to work in extended residency within the classroom. Opportunities to embed the theatrical experience into the curriculum are available.

Career Development: theREP is dedicated to helping build the next generation of theatre professionals with programs like the Professional Apprenticeship Program which provides year-long or summer-long paid apprenticeships (as an assistant stage manager and or crew member) and Internship Program that provides college students internships in many disciplines of theatre. These programs are specifically for young people beginning a career in the performing arts.

2023-2024 SEASON EDUCATION SPONSORS



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the Arts**

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Charitable Trust**



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