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# EDUCATOR RESOURCES

**“Since I was 15, I’ve been fascinated by how one, tiny little sentence in a 250-year-old document could affect my life so profoundly.”**

—Heidi Schreck



## What the Constitution Means to Me

A Play by  
**Heidi Schreck**

Directed by  
**Oliver Butler**

Starring  
**Maria Dizzia**

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**“The Constitution  
can be thought of  
as a boiling pot  
in which we are  
thrown together  
in sizzling and  
steamy conflict to  
find out what it is  
we truly believe.”**

—Heidi, *What the Constitution Means to Me*

# COMPREHENSION

This section includes background information about the setting and subject matter of the play. This information can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.



## SYNOPSIS

**“Since I was 15, I’ve been fascinated by how one, tiny little sentence in a 250-year-old document could affect my life so profoundly.”**

—Heidi Schreck

*What the Constitution Means to Me* begins with Heidi Schreck’s lighthearted and amusing tales about competing in the American Legion Oratorical Contest as a teenager. The contest required her to give a prepared speech about the Constitution and then speak extemporaneously about a randomly chosen amendment. She traveled around the country competing for cash prizes and earned enough money to pay for college.

As an adult, Schreck had the opportunity to once again reflect on the Constitution. She came to understand how deeply this document intersected with her personal life and with the lives of family members who came before her, especially women and immigrants. She sheds light on the fact that the Constitution isn’t just a document to be studied in history class; this cornerstone of American democracy directly affects our everyday lives in meaningful ways.

- **What do you know about the Constitution of the United States?**
- **How has the Constitution affected your life?**
- **If you lived during a different era in the United States, would the Constitution have affected you in the same way?**

**ABOUT THE SHOW**

**“It 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.”**

—Jesse Green, *The New York Times*

*What the Constitution Means to Me* had humble beginnings. It started as a 10-minute piece that Schreck wrote and performed for an avant-garde variety night at P.S. 122, a legendary performance venue in New York City’s East Village. Her inspiration came from the American Legion Oratorical Contest she had participated in as a teenager. In the speeches she prepared for those competitions, she was required to relate the Constitution to her personal life. In an interview for *The New Yorker* with Michael Schulman, Schreck describes the initial inspiration for her play as wondering: “What if I did that as an adult woman? What would it actually mean to do one of these contests in a way that wasn’t just about selling the idea of America or buying into American exceptionalism or just trying to win?”

Her fusion of personal memoir and civics lesson resonated with the audience. Schreck received invitations to expand, revise, and perform her work. She folded in topics such as women’s rights, immigration, and domestic abuse. As it evolved into a full-length play, the piece was produced by several theatre companies, including Clubbed Thumb in the East Village, New York Theatre Workshop, and Berkeley Rep. This process culminated a Broadway opening at the Helen Hayes Theater in March 2019.

Throughout the development process of the play, Schreck was very thorough with her research. She consulted with Constitutional scholar William Araiza

on a regular basis to verify facts contained in the script.

*What the Constitution Means to Me* has received many accolades including Tony, Drama League, and Outer Critics Circle Award nominations for Schreck as a writer and performer. She won an Obie Award for Best New American Play and a New York Drama Critics Circle award for Best American Play. Schreck was also a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Now, beginning with the engagement at the Taper, a new actor is taking over the leading role originated by Schreck—her friend, Tony Award nominee and *Orange Is the New Black* actor Maria Dizzia. “I have loved and admired Maria for many years and I consider it a huge gift to have an actor of her tremendous talent giving new life to this play,” Schreck said. “I’m thrilled to be bringing *Constitution* to audiences across the country with this brilliant and generous artist at the helm.”

The play is performed in two parts. Part I is entitled “The Contest,” where Schreck tells the story of her early days in the American Legion Oratorical Contest. She also performs a prepared piece about the Constitution. Part II is “The Debate,” where Schreck and a teenage orator (played in alternating performances by Broadway performer Rosdely Ciprian and local debater Jocelyn Shek), participate in a truly extemporaneous debate about the Constitution.

**HEIDI SCHRECK, PLAYWRIGHT**

**“When I was in high school, I would travel the country giving speeches about the Constitution at American Legion halls for prize money. This was a scheme invented by my mom who was a debate coach to help me pay for college; I was actually able to pay for my entire college education this way.”**

—Heidi, *What the Constitution Means to Me*

Schreck was raised in the small town of Wenatchee, Washington. Both her parents were teachers. Her father taught history (and was a Republican), and her mother was a speech and debate coach and drama teacher (and a Democrat). Her mother also had a children’s theatre company called the Short Shakespeareans. From ages 6–12, Schreck played almost all of Shakespeare’s leading ladies.

In high school, Schreck began competing as a contestant in the American Legion Oratorical Contest. She has described her teenage self as “an outgoing nerd—into ballet, self-tanning, Duran Duran, and boys.”

She eventually went on to attend the University of Oregon. After graduation, Schreck moved to Siberia for a year to teach English. She then spent another year working as a reporter for the *St. Petersburg Times*.

Upon her return to the US, Schreck joined Printer’s Devil Theater in Seattle. They produced classic plays with a grunge-rock approach: *Hedda Gabler* in an airplane hangar, *The Seagull* in an old ferry boat, and *El Cid* as a rock opera in a restaurant kitchen.



(Top-bottom) Schreck getting the winner’s pin at the American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest in Sacramento in 1989. Schreck and Mike Iveson in *What the Constitution Means to Me* at New York Theatre Workshop. Photo Credit: Sara Krulwich/The New York Times.

**HEIDI SCHRECK, PLAYWRIGHT**

**“[Schreck] often plays sunny characters with something steelier underneath. In person, she’s like that, too: Charisma in the front, intellectual rigor in the back, and [what director Leigh Silverman calls] ‘this kind of dark intense third rail of emotion’ vibrating underneath.”**

—Alexis Soloski, *The New York Times*

Schreck met her husband, director Kip Fagan, at Printer’s Devil. When Fagan received a directing fellowship in New York, the couple moved to Brooklyn, where Schreck worked as an actor, tested the waters of playwriting, and landed a few television writing gigs. In 2014, during a difficult time in her personal life, she began writing the piece that became *What the Constitution Means to Me*.

As she conducted research for the show, she listened to oral arguments from the Supreme Court. Schreck began drawing connections from her personal life and family history to particular cases. Her own reproductive freedom and her great-great-grandmother’s “melancholia” were reflected in *Roe v. Wade*. Her mother’s abusive childhood had elements similar to those in *Castle Rock v. Gonzales*, which addressed domestic violence. Schreck began to cultivate gratitude for the era that she lived in, realizing that the women who came before her were expected to be silent about their difficulties and had no real protection under the law. Her vision for the play began to take shape, because she now knew what her show would be about.



Heidi Schreck, the writer and star of *What the Constitution Means to Me*, at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. Photo Credit: Ryan Collard for The New York Times

**OLIVER BUTLER, DIRECTOR**

**“I love watching it—even the struggle that Heidi goes through in telling it—because it’s uncomfortable, even painful, to struggle with this impossible question: ‘What are rights?’”**

—Oliver Butler

Oliver Butler is the director of *What the Constitution Means to Me*. Currently, he is a founder and co-Artistic Director of The Debate Society, an Obie Award-winning Brooklyn-based theatre company that produces new plays.

Butler grew up in a theatrical family. During his formative years, he watched and listened to many plays from the wings and the house. He was constantly surrounded by people who worked in the theatre. However, Butler did not initially plan on making a career in the theatre. He began college majoring in French and political science. One summer, his mother suggested he work as an apprentice at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts. During his time there, he decided to become a director, and on returning to the University of Connecticut he designed his own directing program.

Butler has collaborated with many acclaimed playwrights and worked at prominent Off-Broadway and regional theatres, including the Geffen here in L.A. In a *Playbill* interview, Butler described his first conversations with Schreck:

When she approached me with this project she just described the basic things about it, and she talked about...the fact that her great-great-grandmother came to this country as a mail-order bride from Germany. And she talked about this incredible story of the different generations of women in her family in America, and how the Constitution did and did not provide rights to them, leading to Heidi being one of the first women on one side of her family to grow up in a home free from domestic violence. She very simply tells the story of how the Constitution relates to her body and to the women in her family. She told me these elemental things.

Butler could immediately see “the exciting possibilities of a story, with its speech and debate competition, that takes something that can be dry like the Constitution and humanizes it.”

His work on *What the Constitution Means to Me* earned him nominations for Tony, Lucille Lortel, Drama League, Outer Critics Circle, and Drama Desk Awards.



**THE CONSTITUTION**

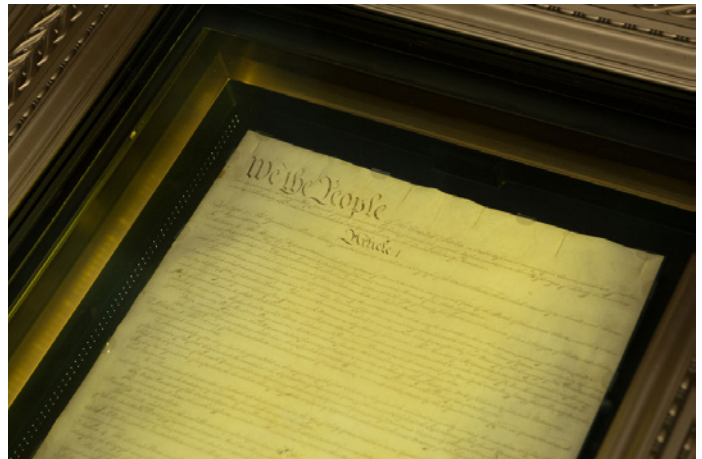
**“We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for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

—Preamble to the United States Constitution

[The United States Constitution](#), created by the country’s early leaders, defines the government of the United States. However, the country was not always governed by today’s Constitution.

In the years immediately following the American Revolution, the United States used the Articles of Confederation, established in 1781, as its working constitution. The Articles created a “league of friendship” between the 13 original states. It gave the states great power, leaving the central government very weak. Many of the country’s leaders found this to be problematic, because this dynamic caused great political and economic challenges. The central government could not regulate commerce, collect taxes, effectively support a war, or settle differences between the states. In 1787, a Constitutional Convention was called by US leaders in Philadelphia order to create a “more perfect Union.”

The Constitution created there provided a model of government that relied upon a series of checks and balances between three co-equal branches: legislative, judicial, and executive. It expanded the federal government by giving it the power to coin



**Constitution of the United States in its encasement in the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom from the National Archives website.**

money, regulate commerce, declare war, raise and maintain armed forces, and establish a post office. The founders carefully blended the powers of state and national governments in order to guard against tyranny, allow for more citizen participation, and provide a process for creating new policies and programs. The US Constitution became the official framework of government for the United States when it was ratified on June 21, 1788.

**THE CONSTITUTION**

**“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. Do you know what a Crucible is? It is a... pot in which you put many different ingredients and boil them together until they transform into something else. Something that is sometimes magic.”**

—Heidi, *What the Constitution Means to Me*



Constitution of the United States in its encasement in the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom from the National Archives website.

The National Archives [website](#) describes the creation of the Constitution in this way:

The Constitution acted like a colossal merger, uniting a group of states with different interests, laws, and cultures. Under America’s first national government, the Articles of Confederation, the states acted together only for specific purposes. The Constitution united its citizens as members of a whole, vesting the power of the union in the people. Without it, the American experiment might have ended as quickly as it had begun.

The National Endowment for the Humanities offers a variety of lessons about the United States Constitution on its website, [Edsitement! The Best of the Humanities on the Web](#).

**THE CONSTITUTION**

Today, some scholars believe that the Constitution was influenced by a system of government created by indigenous people of North America. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy, or the Iroquois Confederacy, was originally comprised of five Native American nations across upper New York state: the Mohawk (“People of the Flint”), Oneida (“People of the Standing Stone”), Onondaga (People of the Hills), Cayuga (People of the Great Swamp), and Seneca (People of the Great Hill).

Haudenosaunee means “people who build a house.” This alliance has been described as one of the world’s oldest participatory democracies. The National Museum of the American Indian explains its contributions to the formation of the United States government and its influence on the Founding Fathers:

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy was founded on the Great Law of Peace. This law declares a basic respect for the rights of all people. The Haudenosaunee shared this belief with Benjamin Franklin, who was very interested in the structure of the Confederacy. Franklin wrote, “It would be strange if [the Haudenosaunee] could execute a union that persisted ages and appears indissoluble; yet a like union is impractical for twelve colonies to whom it is more necessary and advantageous.” Greatly influenced by the symbols of the Great Law of Peace, the Founding Fathers adopted the representation of a bundle of 13 arrows to indicate the newly formed unified government. In 1987, the US Senate formally acknowledged, in a special resolution, the influence of the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace on the US Constitution.

Benjamin Franklin was also inspired to print the words of Canassatego, leader of the Onondaga people, who gave a speech advising the 13 colonies to unify:

“We heartily recommend Union and a good Agreement between you our Brethren,” Canassatego had said. “Never disagree, but preserve a strict Friendship for one another, and thereby you, as well as we, will become the stronger. Our wise Forefathers established Union and Amity between the Five Nations; this has made us formidable; this has given us great Weight and Authority with our neighboring Nations. We are a powerful Confederacy; and, by your observing the same Methods our wise Forefathers have taken, you will acquire fresh Strength and Power; therefore whatever befalls you, never fall out one with another.”

The Museum of the American Indian offers [educational resources](#) on the Haudenosaunee.

**THE CONSTITUTION**

<b>IROQUOIS CONFEDERACY AND THE GREAT LAW OF PEACE</b>	<b>UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION</b>
<p>Restricts members from holding more than one office in the Confederacy</p>	<p>Article I, Section 6, Clause 2, also known as the Ineligibility Clause or the Emoluments Clause bars members of serving members of Congress from holding offices established by the federal government, while also barring members of the executive branch or judicial branch from serving in the U.S. House or Senate.</p>
<p>Outlines processes to remove leaders within the Confederacy</p>	<p>Article II, Section 4 reads “The President, Vice President and all civil Officers of the United States shall be removed from Office on Impeachment for, and the conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other High Crimes and Misdemeanors.”</p>
<p>Designates two branches of legislature with procedures for passing laws</p>	<p>Article I, Section 1, or the Vesting Clauses, read “All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.” It goes on to outline their legislative powers.</p>
<p>Delineates who has the power to declare war</p>	<p>Article I, Section 8, Clause 11, also known as the War Powers Clause, gives Congress the power, “To declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water”</p>
<p>Creates a balance of power between the Iroquois Confederacy and individual tribes</p>	<p>The differing duties assigned to the three branches of the U.S. Government: Legislative (Congress), Executive (President), and Judicial (Supreme Court) act to balance and separate power in government</p>



**THE AMERICAN LEGION**

[The American Legion](#) is a nonprofit organization established by Congress in 1919 to serve United States veterans. According to its mission, the American Legion is “devoted to mutual helpfulness. It is the nation’s largest wartime veterans’ service organization, committed to mentoring youth and sponsorship of wholesome programs in our communities, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to our fellow service members and veterans.”

The Legion’s greatest legislative achievement was writing the first draft of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, also known as the GI Bill of Rights. Signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1944, the legislation provided benefits to veterans that included grants for school and college tuition, low-interest mortgage and small-

business loans, job training, hiring privileges, and unemployment benefits. Later amendments provided full disability coverage and additional construction of VA hospitals. Originally created solely for World War II veterans, the GI Bill of Rights was later expanded to provide benefits for all who had served in the armed forces.

The American Legion has nearly 2 million members in over 12,000 posts all over the United States, France, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. It is the largest wartime veterans’ service organization.

In addition to its Oratorical Contest, the American Legion offers support to young people in other ways including Boys/Girls State, scholarships, and baseball leagues.

## THE AMERICAN LEGION

The American Legion's Harry White Wilmer Post 82 in La Plata, Maryland, explains on its [website](#) why one would want to join:

### Why Join The American Legion?

#### *Do You Remember?*

*Do you remember when your unit was under fire? You were scared. You didn't know whether you would ever get home again, see your family, your loved ones. And the only thing that you could count on in that instant was your buddy. And you knew he was counting on you too.*

*Perhaps you were one of the lucky ones who never saw combat. Do you remember the tediousness of garrison life? Do you remember the interminable hurry up and wait? Do you remember the inane make-work projects you were ordered to do? But your buddy was always there alongside you, making the wise-crack, helping you make it through each day, maybe even covering for you on occasion.*

#### *Your buddy still needs you!!!*

*Maybe your buddy is in one of the VA hospitals; his war wounds and/or time have taken its toll on his body. Maybe he or she is a young veteran, just discharged from service in Iraq, Afghanistan or Vietnam, and is having difficulty finding a civilian job. Maybe your buddy is just an ordinary guy or gal like yourself, wanting to share stories*

*and comradeship with someone who was in a similar situation.*

*The American Legion is the place for you to help your buddy and for your buddy to help you. Founded in 1918, it is the largest veteran's organization in the United States with over 3 million members.*

*We are veterans just like you. We care about America, our fellow veterans. Our families and our children. As a member of our Post we continue to serve our God, our Country and our Community. Your Post needs you now.*

*Our Legionnaires participate in many community activities such as parades, memorials, dedications, etc.*

*We have a funeral honor guard detail ready, willing and able at the family's request. Our funeral detail is available to all veterans. When requested, we are also available to help other veteran organizations with their memorials.*

*We sponsor local students to participate in Boy State, sponsor scholarships to better educate our children.*

**AMERICA NEEDS YOU - JOIN NOW**

You can find other interesting information about The American Legion on its ["Fast Facts"](#) page.

# CONNECTIONS

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, students' lives, and the world we live in. Each section contains quotations and questions that may be used for reflection, discussion, and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

## FAMILY HISTORY

**“The play became about the stories of the women in my family—the way their lives have been shaped by the Constitution, the way the Constitution has failed them over generations”**

—Heidi Schreck

As Schreck dove deeper into developing *What the Constitution Means to Me*, she began to realize how disillusioned she was with the Constitution. In connecting the document to her personal life, she saw how four generations of women in her family had not been protected by it. This awareness clarified her vision for the play. She wanted the play to be as real, human, and anti-theatrical as possible. She came to understand that her female ancestors had been forced to endure debilitating silence. She also understood that she was lucky and privileged enough to live in a time where she didn't have to be silent. In the play, Schreck gives voice to her family narratives and the injustices committed against the women in her family.

- **What do you know about your family history?**
- **What do you want to know about your family history?**
- **How would a deep understanding of your family history affect your life?**
- **Have you ever created a piece of art about your family history? If so, what was it or what could it be?**

**“The structure is set, because I'm breaking down one amendment and then essentially one section of one amendment that has four points. There's the structure—the four points—and the first three are essentially in my past, and the fourth thing is now. It goes great-grandmother, grandmother, mother, me. Then there's the debate.”**

—Heidi Schreck



## PENUMBRA

**“The Constitution doesn’t tell you all the rights that you have—because it doesn’t know. When Justice William O. Douglas talked about this amendment, he used the word Penumbra.**

**What is a Penumbra? Well, here I am standing in full light. And there you are, sitting in darkness. And this space between us...this space of partial illumination.**

**This is a penumbra.”**

—Heidi, *What the Constitution Means to Me*

*Merriam-Webster* defines “penumbra” as “a space of partial illumination (as in an eclipse) between the perfect shadow on all sides and the full light.” Schreck borrows this metaphor from Justice Douglas to illustrate the undefined areas that exist within the Constitution.

Justice Douglas was referring specifically to the Ninth Amendment, which states, “The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.” In the play, Schreck explains, “This means that just because a certain right is not explicitly written in the Constitution, it doesn’t mean you don’t have that right.” Schreck expands on this idea of a penumbra by applying it to the entire Constitution.

The framers of the Constitution came to agree that it would be possible to clarify, change, and add to the document. In fact, it is believed that the Constitution would not have been approved if this was not allowed. Any amendment to the Constitution can be presented in the form of a bill and must be passed by a two-thirds vote of both houses of Congress and ratified by three-quarters of the states.

In October 1788, after the Constitution had been ratified, President George Washington sent to each state 12 amendments that had been adopted by Congress. By December 15, 1791, 10 of them had been ratified by three-quarters of the states. These became known as the “Bill of Rights.” Their existence gave citizens more confidence in the new government. Many of America’s most valued freedoms are chronicled here. The Bill of Rights seeks to protect individual liberty, limit government, and establish the rule of law.

The Preamble to the Bill of Rights states:

The Conventions of a number of the States, having at the time of their adopting the Constitution, expressed a desire, in order to prevent misconstruction or abuse of its powers, that further declaratory and restrictive clauses should be added: And as extending the ground of public confidence in the Government, will best ensure the beneficent ends of its institution.

## PENUMBRA

Over the course of United States history, a total of [27 amendments](#) have been added to the Constitution.

### RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS GUARANTEED IN THE BILL OF RIGHTS

AMENDMENT	RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS
First	Freedom of speech Freedom of the press Freedom of religion Freedom of assembly Right to petition the government
Second	Right to bear arms
Third	Protection against housing soldiers in civilian homes
Fourth	Protection against unreasonable search and seizure Protection against the issuing of warrants without probable cause
Fifth	Protection against <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trial without indictment</li> <li>• double jeopardy</li> <li>• self-incrimination</li> <li>• property seizure</li> </ul>
Sixth	Right to a speedy trial Right to be informed of charges Right to be confronted by witnesses Right to call witnesses Right to a legal counsel
Seventh	Right to trial by jury
Eighth	Protection against <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• excessive bail</li> <li>• excessive fines</li> <li>• cruel and unusual punishment</li> </ul>
Ninth	Rights granted in the Constitution shall not infringe on other rights
Tenth	Powers not granted to the Federal Government in the Constitution belong to the states or the people

Source: ushistory.org

## PENUMBRA

**“Why not just think of the Constitution as a human being? I mean it was made by human beings so it’s not a big stretch.**

**Are human beings perfect? No. Are we capable of perfection? No. But that doesn’t mean we are not valuable. We are always growing and changing. Learning. Just like us this document is flawed.**

**But just like us it is also capable of getting better. And better. With every generation.”**

—*What the Constitution Means to Me*

In *What the Constitution Means to Me*, Schreck goes on to describe how the penumbra, this “space of partial illumination” has affected her life, the lives of her ancestors, and of all Americans. In the play, she speaks extemporaneously about the Fourteenth Amendment, which she once described as “a super-charged force field protecting all your human rights.” Known as one of the post-Civil War reconstruction amendments, it gave newly freed slaves citizenship, protections under the law, and the right to vote.

However, Schreck points out “that these amendments guaranteed equal rights only to men. Black women were not given these rights. No women were given these rights. The question of Native American rights never even came up. Even Lincoln was trapped in a penumbra on that one.”



Bill of Rights in its encasement in the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom from the National Archives website.

- **Do you feel protected by the US Constitution or betrayed by it? Explain.**
- **How does the Constitution affect our lives today?**
- **Is there anything you would like to change about the Constitution?**

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

**“This is the first time the word ‘male’ is explicitly used in the Constitution. So, whereas before there was a little room for interpretation about whether women could vote, now it was explicit: we could NOT vote. Lincoln asked us to wait a tiny bit longer to get the vote. Just like 54 years longer.”**

—Heidi, *What the Constitution Means to Me*

Schreck addresses how the lives of women have been affected by the Constitution. At the same time that she was conducting research on the Constitution, she was also connecting her personal life and family history to the document. She came to realize that throughout our nation’s history, the Constitution had, time and again, failed women, including those from her own family. This epiphany crystalized her vision for the play.

Schreck relays stories from her life in the late 1980s as a young woman who had reproductive rights including access to birth control and the right to choose whether to keep a pregnancy. She then reminds us about the court battle of Estelle Griswold, who was arrested in 1965 for dispensing IUDs at her Connecticut Planned Parenthood. Griswold brought her case all the way to the Supreme Court. Nine men were to decide the fate of birth control. Schreck reveals that five of them were cheating on their wives; she wonders about their motivations.



Estelle Griswold, executive director of Planned Parenthood, stands outside the center in April, 1963. Photo credit: Lee Lockwood/Wikimedia Commons

The Court ruled in Griswold’s favor. This is the moment that Justice Douglas utilized his penumbra metaphor regarding the Ninth Amendment. Declaring that it guarantees the right to privacy, Douglas said, “Look here, if a husband wants his wife to have an IUD, that is *his private decision*.” In spite of Douglas’ patriarchal perspective on this matter, it was still a victory for women.



## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

**“...remember the ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors...If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.”**

—Abigail Adams

In other areas involving women's rights, including property ownership, financial control, and voting, the United States has had a difficult history. Schreck emphasizes the government's failure to protect women from domestic violence. She relays some disturbing statistics regarding violence against women, including that “three women are murdered every day in the United States by a male partner”; “ten million American women live in violent households”; and “forty million adult Americans grew up with domestic violence.”

She chronicles horrific acts of domestic violence committed against the women and children in her family, including her mother's mother. After becoming a widow with three children, Grandma Bette remarried “pretty quickly and pretty quickly [her new husband] started to beat her up. He broke her nose. He broke her arm. He beat up her kids. They had three more kids together. He beat them up too.”

The play connects Schreck's family history to the government's failure to protect others living in similar situations, including a 1910 Supreme Court ruling “that a wife could not press assault charges against a husband” a 2005 Supreme Court ruling that a woman could not sue her local police department “for failing to show up to protect her and her children.”

After chronicling the history of domestic violence in her family, Schreck wanted to bring some “positive male energy” up onto the stage with her. The character of Danny is allowed to have more of a voice.

Danny launches into a monologue about his personal history as a boy growing up in two different worlds. At home, his sensitivity was honored and embraced by his father. Out in the world, he was receiving other messages about how to be a man, without any real guidance: “As a 12-year-old it was Michael Corleone in the *Godfather* movies who appeared as the clearest example of how a real man should behave: No obvious emotion except maybe anger, always in control, and capable, and skilled at violent action to protect himself and his family.”

In spite of the dark moments that the women in her family have lived through, Schreck remains optimistic about the future. Her mother was only a teenager when she protected her family by testifying against her stepfather in court, when no one else would. This made Schreck look to today's young women to lead the way for all of us in improving women's rights:

When I remember how brave my mom was at fourteen, it makes me think about the fact that progress doesn't only move in one direction. I've learned so much from women who are younger than I am and more confident, more willing to speak things out loud that I have been ashamed to say. Sometimes I think they are shining a light backwards so I can follow them into the future.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS



Women Marching in Suffragette Parade, Washington, DC. Photo courtesy of the National Archives.

- **How do women's rights in the United States today affect your life and those of your family members?**
- **How has the history of women's rights in the United States affected your family members?**
- **Where do you see room for improvement in the area of women's rights?**

On August 24, 2020, our country will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. More information about the road to this historic moment can be found in these sources chronicling women's history:

- **National Archives:** [“Women's Rights”](#)
- **History.com:** [“Women's History Milestones: A Timeline.”](#)
- **National Women's History Museum:** [“Crusade for the Vote.”](#)

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINES**

**“If the American story is hopefully a story of emancipation—whether it’s emancipation from slavery, or emancipation from domestic violence, or emancipation from ignorance—hopefully our story is one that is moving toward some sort of freedom.”**

—Oliver Butler

If you, or someone you know, is living with domestic violence, there are organizations and emergency hotlines in the Los Angeles area that are there to help.

Established in 1971 by pioneering feminist activists, [Peace Over Violence](#) is a sexual and domestic violence, intimate partner stalking, child abuse and youth violence prevention center headquartered in Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles Rape & Battering Hotlines are a confidential non-judgmental resource where staff and volunteers are available to provide emotional support, advocacy, information and referrals. If you or someone you care about has been a victim of sexual assault, domestic violence, or intimate partner stalking, please call their 24-hour crisis line:

- **Central Los Angeles: 213.626.3393**
- **South Los Angeles: 310.392.8381**
- **West San Gabriel Valley: 626.793.3385**

The [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) (1.800.799.7233) is the only 24/7 center in the nation that has access to service providers and shelters across the US. Today, The Hotline continues to grow and explore new avenues of service.

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## Center Theatre Group Education and Community Partnerships

Center Theatre Group's mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

### Education and Engagement

Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions, and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination, and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue, and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community, and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

The Student Matinee Program is made possible in part by the  
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