

**Constitution of the United States**  
**Reader's Theater**  
Written by Marletta Eich

**Characters:** 14 readers

**Vocabulary:** compromise, ratify, democracy, Constitution, delegate, Articles of Confederation, Congress, Preamble to the Constitution, Bill of Rights

**Reader 1:** I'm a United States citizen and proud of it! The boys and girls in my school have many rights thanks to the Constitution. The Constitution was written by our Founding Fathers in 1787.

**Reader 2:** You said Founding Fathers. What did they find?

**Reader 1:** I don't really mean they found something. They were actually the first people to write the laws for our country. They are the very same laws that we all must follow today.

**Reader 2:** I know that the United States of America is a **democracy**. The people are in charge. The President has power and so do other government officials. Their fellow citizens give them that power.

**Reader 3:** You are right. The United States is a free country. But that doesn't mean that we are free to do anything we want. We cannot steal from others. That is why there are laws against stealing. Laws are made to protect our freedom.

**Reader 4:** I know that the **Constitution** is made up of a system of laws. To have a nation that is free, there must be a system of laws. The Constitution is a guide for how our government should be set up and how it should run.

**Reader 3:** Yeah! That's kind of like our school. In our classroom we have rules that are like laws. I don't think we could learn very much if we didn't have rules such as raising our hand to speak and being respectful to others.

**Reader 5:** I was just wondering, "How did we get the Constitution?"

**Reader 1:** Well, first our country, the United States, won its freedom from England. In 1776, Thomas Jefferson, a colonist from Virginia, was asked to write the Declaration of Independence. It told England and the rest of the world that the 13 colonies did not want to belong to England.

**Reader 6:** That's right, we told England a thing or two, didn't we! Then the 13 colonies united to form a new country called the United States of America. They had to decide what kind of government their new country would have. A group of men were chosen to write plans for the new government. The plans were called the **Articles of Confederation**.

**Reader 7:** The men who wrote the Articles of Confederation set up a group of lawmakers called a **Congress**. Citizens in each state were to choose men to represent them in Congress. At first the members of Congress worked together, but then they began to disagree. Each state had the right to print its own money. Sometimes people in one state would not accept the money printed from another state. Some states put their own taxes on goods coming in from other states.

**Reader 6:** Wow, I didn't know the states didn't get along sometimes! That sounds like sometimes on the playground when we have different ideas about playing a game. Our teacher makes us sit down together and decide what would be the best rules for everyone.

**Reader 8:** Well, they didn't always agree and Congress had trouble getting enough money to pay for running the government. Most states would not send the amount of money that Congress had asked them for. In 1787, the men in Congress decided that things needed to be changed. They called a special meeting called a **convention**.

**Reader 9:** The convention was called the **Constitutional Convention**. On May 25, 1787, the first meeting took place in the State House in Philadelphia. The State House is now called Independence Hall. People called delegates came to the meeting. The delegates came from all 13 states except Rhode Island.

**Reader 10:** The 55 delegates who met were all men.

**Reader 9:** Did you say all men? That doesn't sound fair. Why weren't there any women?

**Reader 10:** Yes, they were all men. 1787 was a long time ago. Women did not have the same rights as men back then. Since that time there have been laws to give women equal rights. Also, all of the men who met at the convention were white.

**Reader 9:** Did you say all white? That doesn't sound fair either!

**Reader 10:** You are right. It wasn't fair. Our country has since made laws to have equal rights for people of all color if they are citizens of the United States.

**Reader 8:** Most of them were also rich and had graduated from college.

**Reader 10:** These men or delegates had been sent to the Convention to help find ways to change the Articles of Confederation. It was very hard for them! They finally decided it was impossible to fix the Articles and decided the United States needed a whole new plan of government.

**Reader 8:** You mean they had to start all over?

**Reader 11:** That's right! The new plan of government would be called the **United States Constitution**. Jonathan Dayton of New Jersey was the youngest writer of the Constitution. He was only 26 years old. Benjamin Franklin from Pennsylvania was the

oldest at 81 years old. George Washington was chosen by the delegates to be the chairman of the meetings. He had to make sure the meetings ran smoothly.

**Reader 9:** George Washington was a general in the army. I bet he was very good at keeping everyone in order...kind of like our teacher!

**Reader 12:** I'm sure Mr. Washington did a fine job. The meetings were kept secret. There were armed guards at the doors. The delegates could not tell anyone about the Convention business. James Madison took very careful notes during the secret meetings. Thanks to him we can understand what happened.

**Reader 13:** The delegates decided to first write a Preamble.

**Reader 9:** A Preamble! What is a Preamble?

**Reader 13:** The Preamble is an introduction to the Constitution. The Preamble is short and very important. It explains who created the Constitution and the basic purposes of our United States government.

**Reader 14:** The delegates thought there should be reasons for writing a new Constitution. They put those reasons in the **preamble** at the beginning of the Constitution.

**Reader 1:** Here is the Preamble. *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.*

**Reader 3:** I like the part about **establishing justice**. I think that means that citizens of the United States will be treated fairly and honestly. I also like the part to secure the blessings of liberty. That means our rights and freedoms will be protected.

**Reader 1:** You are right. It means you can choose your own religion, you can say what you think, and get together with friends, family and other people.

**Reader 3:** I also like the part about **forming a more perfect union**. The founding fathers wanted the states to come together and make things better for everyone who lives in our country.

**Reader 5:** Yes, the men wanted the states to get along with one another. There were many arguments about how to get what they wanted. So they made **compromises**.

**Reader 3:** What's a compromise?

**Reader 5:** A compromise is when people give in a little so that everyone is happy.

**Reader 4:** That's sound like today in gym. Johnny wanted to be the catcher all the time and Jeff wanted to pitch and catch. Johnny told Jeff he could catch for the first 15 minutes and then they would switch for the next 15 minutes. They were both happy after that.

**Reader 5:** Exactly, and that is what the delegates did. The first compromise was that Congress would have two houses. In one house, the number of members from each state would depend on the number of people living in that state. In the other house, each state would have the same number of members.

**Reader 3:** I don't get it. What do you mean by having two houses? Didn't they have their own house to live in?

**Reader 5:** That does sound funny! A house is actually a group of men who would meet and make laws for the United States. It's not a house that you build and live in. That was a very good question!

**Reader 3:** Oh, I get it. It is like our leaders in Washington, D.C. One house is called the Senate made up leaders called senators and the other is called the House of Representatives made up of leaders called representatives.

**Reader 5:** You are a genius! Yes, the Senate is made up of two members from each state. There are fifty states. How many senators are there?

**Reader 3:** I know, I know. The answer is 100! I also know that the two senators from South Dakota are Senator John Thune and Senator Tim Johnson.

**Reader 5:** Again, your genius is showing! The House of Representatives is different. It depends on the population or number of people from each state. South Dakota does not have many people, so we only have one member of the House of Representatives.

**Reader 9:** Hallelujah, finally a woman in office! I know that our one representative from South Dakota is Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin.

**Reader 7:** Okay, calm down. Yes, times have certainly changed. Now, let's get back to our story. The second compromise was how long a President could be in office. Some thought the President should be elected for life and some for one or two years. They finally agreed to have the President elected for four years.

**Reader 8:** That sounds like a good decision to me. Some people live to be a 100! I can't imagine having a president that is 100 years old!

**Reader 9:** Well, the delegates worked very hard to write a plan for a strong federal government. It let the states keep some important powers. The finished plan was called the **Constitution of the United States**. The Constitution was made up of seven sections or articles that told about one part of the plan.

**Reader 11:** Finally, the Constitution was sent to Congress to be signed. Some of the members of Congress were very upset with the Constitution. They said the delegates had no right to write a new plan of government. Their job was to fix the Articles of Confederation, not make a new plan.

**Reader 2:** Many people thought the new federal government had too much power. They were afraid a strong government would take away their rights, like England had. Thomas Jefferson and others thought there should be a **bill of rights** to protect the individual rights of the people.

**Reader 4:** With the promise of the Bill of Rights added to the Constitution, Delaware became the first state to **ratify** the Constitution.

**Reader 2:** Did you say ratify. What does that word mean?

**Reader 4:** Ratify means to approve of something. After Delaware approved of the Bill of Rights, more states ratified, or also approved after that. New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify the Constitution. If nine states ratified or approved the Constitution, it would become the new plan of government.

**Reader 6:** Congress now planned for the change to a new form of government. They chose New York City to be the new national capital.

**Reader 4:** New York City! I thought Washington, D.C. is where our nation's leaders meet.

**Reader 6:** Now remember, we are talking about a very long time ago. Back then they chose New York City to be the new national capital. Today the leaders meet in Washington, D.C., in the Capitol. Now, let's turn back the clock again. There were elections in 1789. Senators and representatives were chosen to serve in the new **Congress**. George Washington was chosen to be the first President of the United States.

**Reader 2:** Wow! That was quite a story! The Founding Fathers had a big job to do.

**Reader 1:** Now you know why I'm A United States Citizen and proud of It. I live in a country where the people worked together to have the freedom we have today. It was not an easy job for those first leaders. They did such a good job that we still live by the same laws today, over 200 years later!

**ALL:** I'm A United States Citizen and proud of It!