

WE THE PEOPLE



Thank you for attending TheaterWorksUSA's production of *We the People*. We hope this guide will help your students learn more about the musical and its content, as well as give you creative ways to make the show part of your curriculum. A trip to the theater is always very special and unique, and it can create a lifelong passion for performance and storytelling. We hope our production will inspire your students. You may want to review some basic theater etiquette with your class, as this might be one of their first experiences attending a live show. Talking or being disruptive during the performance is distracting to the actors and fellow audience members. However, we strongly encourage clapping, laughing, and cheering at the parts they enjoy.

Feel free to use this guide as a starting point for you and your students to explore the show and its rich content. This study guide is designed to enhance your students' experience in seeing *We the People*. It will provide discussion points after your class has seen the production, along with lessons and in-class activities. These activities will extend the topic-specific ideas within the show, and engage the students in a hands-on classroom project. Feel free to adapt or change any discussion prompts or material to suit your classroom and style!

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 of the United States of America.

Preamble of the United States Constitution - 1787

The Story

With cymbals and drum-roll, the Founding Fathers appear—George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin—looking like the funkiest rock band ever, wigs and all. They introduce our reluctant heroine, Dawn Shapiro, who is running for Student Council President. She's having a tough time getting her act together. Her speech is supposed to answer the question, "What Does My Government Mean to Me?," but Dawn is in panic mode: she feels that the local Mall has more meaning for her than her government. What to do?

When the Founding Fathers ask Dawn why she wants to be Student Council President, her answer disappoints them; she wants it for her future college applications, so she can get into a really good school! But the Founding Fathers don't give up. Using song, dance, role playing, and their own persuasive passion, they teach Dawn, and us, what she needs to understand her government: the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the branches of government, the Congress, how a bill becomes a law, the Supreme Court, the system of checks and balances, and even the Electoral College!

Gradually it dawns on Dawn that this is indeed an amazing government, but now she feels she's not good enough to be Council President! The Founding Fathers won't let her give up on herself. Hasn't she ever helped her school or her community? Has she done enough? What can a kid do for a government anyway? This funny, crazily sane, and hip musical will give you answers—and teach, too!

Before The Show

Vocabulary Building

Ask your students to study some new or challenging words that will be heard in the show:

Address: A speech or written statement

Amendment: An official change made to the Constitution or other legal document

Appeal: An application to a higher court for a decision to be reversed

Assemble: To gather together in one place for a common purpose

Bill: A draft of a proposed law presented for discussion

Branch: A specialized area of government, created to provide a separation of powers

Candidate: A person who applies for a job, nomination, or election

Check: To examine and limit, preventing a branch from becoming too powerful

Compromise: An agreement or settlement brought about by mutual concession

Consent: To give permission. Government only gets its powers from the consent of the people

Declaration: A formal statement or announcement

Electoral College: A body of people representing the states of the U.S., who formally cast votes for the election of the president and vice president.

Enforce: Cause observance or compliance with a law

Executive: Pertaining to the execution of laws and policies or administration of public affairs

House: A chamber of legislature, vital to bringing about laws and policies

Impeach: To charge a holder of public office with misconduct

Interpret: To explain the meaning of something or to understand in a specific way

Judicial: Involving a law court

Legislative: Having the power to make laws

Override: Using one's authority to reject or cancel

Patriot: One who loves and supports their country

Petition: A formal written request appealing to authority with respect to a particular cause

Preamble: The introductory part of a statute/deed, stating its purpose, aims, and justification

Precedent: An earlier event or action used as an example to be considered in future similar circumstances

Republic: A state in which power is held by the people and their elected representatives

Sovereignty: The authority of a state to govern itself or another state

Symbol: A thing that represents something else

Versus: As opposed to, in contrast to

Veto: A constitutional right to reject a decision or proposal made by a law-making body

Learning About Theater

Discuss with your students some important some important terms about a play or musical:

- 1) **Setting:** Where and when the story takes place
- 2) **Characters:** The people in the story
- 3) **Plot:** What happens in the play
- 4) **Theme:** The main idea of the play
- 5) **Structure:** Acts and Scenes, how the play is built
- 6) **Style:** The way in which the story is told
(ex: realistic, fanstasy, futuristic, etc)

There are also some important people who help make a play or musical:

- 1) **Playwright:** One who writes the play
- 2) **Director:** In charge of putting all the elements of the show together
- 3) **Actors:** those who play the characters on stage
- 4) **Designers (set, costume, lighting, sound props)-** Those who create the non-performance elements on stage
- 5) **Book Writer:** One who writes the spoken words in a musical
- 6) **Composer:** One who writes the music
- 7) **Lyricist:** One who writes the words in the songs
- 8) **Choreographer:** one who creates the dances in a musical

Learning to Be a Good Citizen

Much of this musical's plot is about the ways in which our government serves us, its citizens. But this is a two-way proposition: we citizens have an obligation to give back, help each other, and to help the political system. Ask your students, in small groups or as a class, to think about and discuss their own roles as young Americans. Explore their experiences and write down your thoughts and/or share them with the group.

- 1) How often do you listen or watch the news?
- 2) How often do you discuss the news with your friends or family?
- 3) What kind of "political system" is at your school?
Are you a part of it?
- 4) Have you done community volunteer work? If so, how did it make you feel?

After The Show

Being Drama Critics

While it's still fresh in your minds, discuss *We the People*.

- 1) If your class previously has been studying American History and/or US Government, discuss ways in which the musical further developed concepts or introduced new concepts. Was anything unclear? If so, help out each other.
- 2) Discuss the main characters and the actors who portrayed them. What specific lines or actions did actors use to help you understand these characters as historic American figures? If you were directing the musical, would you add or change anything about the characters?
- 3) How did the songs change or add to your understanding of the characters or the Big Ideas? Which songs did you particularly enjoy and why?
- 4) Discuss the designs. For example, how did the set help you to imagine the world of the show? How did the costumes say something about the characters and the Big Ideas?

Being You

A play is holding "a mirror up to nature." What do you see of yourself or someone you know when you look into the "mirror" of *We the People*? How does seeing yourself through this musical make you feel connected to others? Write a paragraph about your thoughts and share the paragraph in a small group or as a class.

Being Socially Conscious

Toward the end of the show, we learn that Dawn has done a number of things for others. Are there opportunities in your community to do things like the examples below/could you help bring them about?

- 1) **Food or Clothing Drive**
- 2) **Read-a-thon**
- 3) **Saving Water and/or limiting water use**
- 4) **Planting trees or other plants**
- 5) **Recycling or other ecologically friendly initiatives**
- 6) **UNICEF on Halloween**
- 7) **Getting involved in local or national politics**

Brainstorm in small groups or with the class about other ways to become socially conscious where you live. Discuss how young people can become involved in government, even though you're still in school. Remember, "when you do what heroes do, you can be a hero too." Like Dawn, we all can "change what we don't like and get passionate about things we do." What changes would you make? What could become your passionate cause?

Additional Activities

Reinforcing Vocabulary

Ask your students to group together words from the original vocabulary list that relate to an aspect of government described in the show, then turn each word group into a coherent paragraph explaining that aspect.

Creative Dramatics

Many of your students are probably familiar with the art of improvisation: actors create mini-scenes on the spot, usually being told by the audience only the basic situation and identifies.

Negotiation Improv

Harmonious politics depends on the ability of people with different views to *negotiate* and *compromise*. Discuss these two words, then ask students to write on a slip of paper a problem for two characters to solve (ex: between two disagreeing senators, citizens at a Town Hall meeting with opposing views, friends with seemingly opposing needs, a taxi passenger who feels the the taxi is driving too fast, etc.). Put the ideas into a hat. Have performers pick a slip of paper from the hat, read aloud, and begin! Limit the improv to about 2 minutes. The actors' goal is to negotiate a compromise, but it's fine if they don't achieve this by the end of their time. If this happens, have a group discussion about possible resolutions. For an extra challenge, have students resolve these issues as if they were the Founding Fathers—how would Benjamin Franklin work with Thomas Adams to get equal video game time?

Original Scene

Ask your students to research a current issue and then to write and act out a dialogue on the issue between two Supreme Court justices, following similar time limits to the above activity.



L-R: F. Michael Haynie, Colin Campbell McAdoo, Badia Farha, Abe Goldfarb, Jamie LaVerdiere. Photo by Joan Marcus

Creative Writing

Assign an essay. This can either be a few paragraphs or a few pages in length, depending upon the ability level of your students. Once everyone has written their essays, open a class discussion so that students can hear their classmates answers. Observe the similarities and differences in students' answers, and notice any common themes that appear.

- 1) What makes a leader?
- 2) If I ran for office, it would be for the job of...
- 3) If I were President of the United States...
- 4) My Bill for Improving My Country
- 5) What does my government mean to me?

Artistic Expression

- 1) Draw, paint, or sculpt a diagram of the three government branches and their responsibilities.
- 2) Make a chart showing how a bill becomes law.
- 3) Make a new symbol. This could be a new flag for the U.S. or an imaginary country, a new national anthem, a button or visual symbol for a political campaign, etc.
- 4) Create an effective campaign ad, commercial, or jingle for an existing political campaign, or for you to run for office!
- 5) Draw, paint, or sculpt your interpretation of our current national symbols: eagle, elephant, donkey, Uncle Sam, stars and stripes, etc.
- 6) Make your own political hand puppets (and let them talk politics together!)

Speaking

- 1) Have students make a persuasive argument: Pick a topic (the topic could be political or not. The skills of a persuasive argument can be made over which is the best breakfast food!) and pair students up or break the class small groups of even numbers. Arguments must be made on either side, and the rest of the class can vote on who won afterwards.
- 2) Design a shared class reading of the *Declaration of Independence*, with discussion following about these important words and how it feels to say them.

Important Dates & Numbers

Ask students to learn and memorize some key pieces of American information:

- **1776: Separation from England**
- **1776-1783: The Revolutionary War**
- **10: Number of Articles in the Bill of Rights**
- **538: Electors in the Electoral College**
- **270: Number of Electoral College votes needed to win the presidency**
- **1600 Pennsylvania Ave: White House address**

Research Projects

Students can learn more about the ideas, people, and events that led to an independent America and its government by doing some research, exploring the library or the internet for information. Students can work individually or in groups and create presentations displaying their finds. Here are some subjects to consider:

- Causes of the Revolution
- What your state was doing during the Revolutionary War
- The Boston Tea Party
- The Creation of the Declaration of Independence
- King George's failings, leading to the Revolution
- Famous paintings of the Revolutionary period
- Biographies of the Founding Fathers
- The issue of slavery in creating the Constitution
- Women's contributions during the War (ex: Molly Pitcher, Betsy Ross, Abigail Adams)

What Can YOU Do?

Write to your local Congressperson

Petition Collect signatures for a cause you believe in

Participate in your school government and local Town Hall meetings

Run for an office in your school government

Vote when issues come up in your school. Remember, you can register to vote at 17 if you will turn 18 by the next major election!



L-R: Jamie LaVerdiere, Badia Farha, Colin Campbell
McAdoo, F. Michael Haynie. Photo by Joan Marcus