

# NOTE TO TEACHERS:

## THIS IS A PLAY FOR YOUNGER KIDS, TO TEACH CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY/CONCEPTS.

**BOUND TOGETHER** is written and laid out to work best in a classroom setting, with desks in a crowded room. Actors stand at desks, a couple of characters are in the space around the desks, and one is at the teacher's desk.

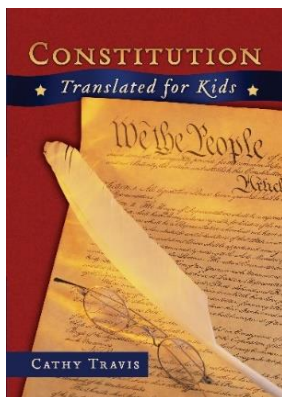
I deliberately wrote it for younger kids, simpler language, shorter sentences – which serves older students, too.

The play is in four acts. If you are looking for controversy, look at act 4 – that's a present-day conversation with the Constitution's Framers. It generally addresses the last 17 amendments, and some questions I got in classrooms recently.

Character names (all the Framers were rich, well-educated, arrogant, smart, white guys) can be changed to female names, or to a similar Latin version of the name. Just for fun. Or, girls could just play the male role. Whatever works best for your class.

Note that within the body of the play, *italicized text* is stage direction and not dialogue.

CATHY TRAVIS, author, [CONSTITUTION TRANSLATED FOR KIDS](#)



Teachers – I'd love your feedback.

You can reach me at:  
[author.travis@gmail.com](mailto:author.travis@gmail.com)

CT

# Title: BOUND TOGETHER

## CHARACTERS:

- **BENJAMIN FRANKLIN** (or **Benji**, or **Benjamina**) - delegate from Pennsylvania
- **GEORGE WASHINGTON** (or **Jorge**, or **Georgia**) - Convention chairman, from Virginia
- **SAM ADAMS** (or **Samuel**, or **Samantha**) - delegate from Massachusetts
- **JAMES MADISON** (or **Jane** or **Jaime**) - delegate from Virginia
- **CHARLES PICKERING** (or **Carlos** or **Charlotte**) - delegate from South Carolina
- **ALEXANDER HAMILTON** (or **Alejandro** or **Alejandra**) - delegate from New York
- **CALEB STRONG** (or **Cate**) - delegate from Massachusetts
- **RUFUS KING** (or **Ruth**) - delegate from Massachusetts
- **JOHN ADAMS** (or **Juan** or **Jackie**), an observer from Massachusetts
- **TEACHER** (present day)
- **KID** (present day)

General background on delegates: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/delegates/>

## NOTE TO KIDS:

This play is about the Constitutional Convention of 1787 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Delegates to the convention had desks, so it works in a classroom.

The characters you are playing were smart, rich, well-educated, arrogant, white guys. And it was only guys; women didn't get the right to vote until 1919.

The Framers (writers of the Constitution) were from the original 13 states. The ones from the northeast would have different accents than the ones from the south.

How much you strut/move around will depend on how much room you have/what the teacher says you can do. But these were dramatic guys. They'd won a war with England.

They were not scared of dying.

They were scared of failing at this.

**CATHY TRAVIS**, author, [CONSTITUTION TRANSLATED FOR KIDS](#)

# ACT 1

*KID and TEACHER stand to one side of the room.*

*JOHN ADAMS stands not far from TEACHER and KID, head down.*

*DELEGATES are sitting still at their desks, heads down, hands together.*

**KID**

What's so important about the Constitution?

**TEACHER**

Understanding that takes us on a field trip to 1787.

*DELEGATES raise heads, become engaged in a debate.*

*Some are reading papers on their desks, some are frowning, some stand, bang on desks, some mime talking to other delegates. TEACHER points around to delegates in the room.*

**TEACHER**

This is the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia - where they wrote the constitution over 230 years ago.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

*Stands on the other side of the room, in front of convention delegates.*

We must get this exactly right - the United States Constitution will be the highest law in the land.

**SAM ADAMS**

It'll belong to each of us - it may be the only thing all Americans share.

**JAMES MADISON**

It will be ....

*(Long dramatic pause, hand raised for effect)*

... our common birthright.

**KID**

What's a birthright?

**TEACHER**

*Points to players around the room*

Ask them - they wrote it.

**JOHN ADAMS**

*Stands near TEACHER and KID, head down. Raises head slowly.*

A birthright is something that belongs to you, just because you were born here. Hey, who are you? I'm John. Where are you from?

**KID**

I'm from your future. I mean, for me, it's [year].

**JOHN ADAMS**

No kidding! Where are we?

**KID**

The United States, this is [name of state/place].

**JOHN ADAMS**

*Looks excited, walks around, smiles huge, seems to celebrate ... just really proud. Runs back to KID, extends hand for handshake. They shake. KID looks at JOHN like he's gone a little crazy.*

So, you are from the year [year], and the United States still exists?

**KID**

Yeah, um, yes sir.

**JOHN ADAMS**

Is the Constitution still in force?

**KID**

I guess.

**JOHN ADAMS**

*Sounds horrified*

YOU GUESS????!!! Who would know?

**KID**

*Points to teacher*

**TEACHER**

The Constitution is still in force ... for the moment. Can you please get back to 1787, show us how this all started?

**JOHN ADAMS**

Right, right -

*Gestures between himself and the **TEACHER***

**JOHN ADAMS**

But we're gonna have a talk later.

*Waves **KID** to follow him*

**JOHN ADAMS**

You, come over here.

*They walk very slowly to other side of the room. **JOHN** can't stop smiling.*

**JOHN ADAMS**

The Constitution lasted this long. Wow.

*They pass **GEORGE WASHINGTON** who is standing in front of the other side of the room, where the convention delegates are seated at desks*

**JOHN ADAMS**

That's General Washington; he's the chairman of the convention.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

We're writing this Constitution to lay out the laws for the new country.

*Turns to **KID** to explain.*

Laws are the rules Americans will all live by. Just like games have rules, so do countries.

**JOHN ADAMS**

*To **KID**, smiling.*

This is important, the Constitution will govern all the laws Congress will write for generations - we hoped.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

The gentleman from South Carolina.

**CHARLES PICKERING**

Who, exactly, do we trust? Never a king. Kings are not mythical - this one is a human who steals our labor, our prosperity, and our liberty.

**JAMES MADISON**

We must decentralize power.

**CALEB STRONG**

But not so much that we cannot act.

**RUFUS KING**

That must be our balancing act.

*Delegates stop talking, lower heads, hands together in front.*

## ACT 2

**ALEXANDER HAMILTON**

We can make the government any way we want. We're the FRAMERS!

**KID**

Framers?

*Delegates draw squares with their fingers, those who are close to a framed picture on the wall, stand up and mimic tracing the frame with fingers.*

**JOHN ADAMS**

After our American Colonies won their war for independence from England, the "Framers" met here to write the Constitution. They "framed" the Constitution.

**KID**

How come you can talk to me, but not to them?

**JOHN ADAMS**

I was there when we declared independence, but was in France during the Constitutional Convention. I was also the first Vice President and the second President of the U.S.

*DELEGATES begin to wipe sweat, show signs of being so hot, fanning themselves.*

**CALEB STRONG**

Gawd, it's hot in here!

**RUFUS KING**

Can people hear us from outside?

**SAM ADAMS**

We have to do this privately - we must agree first, before word gets out about this!

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

Nail the windows shut!

*DELEGATES near the windows mime nailing the windows shut.*

**CALEB STRONG**

Oh, this'll make it easy....

*Wipes sweat, looks wilted, unhappy.*

**KID**

Why nail them shut?

**JOHN ADAMS**

They argued like crazy - and didn't want people listening to them while they looked for agreement.

**RUFUS KING**

States should be the ones to pick the government; how do we trust the passions of fellow citizens?

**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**

Then who will protect individual liberties for the people?

**SAM ADAMS**

Slavery is **WRONG!**

**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**

Sam! We agree slavery is the opposite of liberty, but we must govern for the ages. We'll come back to slavery. For now, who protects individual liberties?

**SAM ADAMS**

The courts, Ben. Courts will protect liberties. So they should be equal to the president and Congress. But we must include a Bill of Rights within the Constitution.



**MULTIPLE DELEGATES**

*Mumbling, shaking heads “no”*

I cannot support this. No.

**CALEB STRONG**

I refuse to support this without a Bill of Rights.

*Delegates clap, slowly lower their heads, hands together in front.*

## ACT 3

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

*Standing, bangs gavel*

I think we have a constitution. Mr. Madison, review it for us quickly.

**JAMES MADISON**

*Stands up, straightens papers. He's excited. This is the end of the bickering.*

We have set up the government and made standing rules for how the different parts of the government work.

**JAMES MADISON**

*Holds up 3 fingers*

Our Constitution splits up power three ways between ...

**JAMES MADISON**

*Holds up one finger*

The President ...

**ALEXANDER HAMILTON**

*Salutes George Washington, does a little march*

The President will lead the country, command the military ...

**JAMES MADISON**

*Holds up 2 fingers*

... the Congress

**ALEXANDER HAMILTON**

*Hand on hip, points around at the other delegates*

Congress will make the laws, including decisions about wars

**ALEXANDER HAMILTON**

*Pretends to count \$*

And paying for defense...

**JAMES MADISON**

*Holds up 3 fingers*

... and the Supreme Court and federal courts.

**JOHN ADAMS**

*To KID*

Courts will make sure everyone follows the Constitution fairly.

**ALEXANDER HAMILTON**

*Holds up hand as if to make a last point*

But the states get a great deal of power, too, running elections and managing their own laws -

**CHARLES PICKERING**

*Stands, hand on hip, other fist raised*

But ONLY if state laws do not conflict with the Constitution and federal laws that follow.

**JOHN ADAMS**

*To KID, holds two fists together*

Doing it this way, power is shared

*Holds up one finger*

So that no one person,

*Holds hands close together*

Or little group of people, can be too powerful.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

*Stands, arms spread wide*

Lastly, Mr. Adams - Sam - run down the Bill of Rights.

**SAM ADAMS**

*Stands, walks around, excited*

We demanded these 10 amendments be added before we sign off on the Constitution.

**CHARLES PICKERING**

*Dances around, all puffed up and arrogant*

That's what I'm talking about ...

**SAM ADAMS**

*Waves PICKERING over to his side*

Our fundamental human rights include: Free speech ...

**CHARLES PICKERING**

*Gestures "blah, blah, blah" with hands*

... to say whatever you want ...

**SAM ADAMS**

... Freedom of the press ...

**CHARLES PICKERING**

*Hand on hip, points to head*

Democracy depends upon citizens who demand facts.

**SAM ADAMS**

... Freedom of religion ...

**CHARLES PICKERING**

*Puts hands together, like praying*

You can worship any god you want, or not worship at all -

*Hand on hips*

And government can never favor one religion over another.

**SAM ADAMS**

... The rights to protest and to talk back to the government...

**CHARLES PICKERING**

Because God knows you'll need it ...

*Looks like he screwed up.*

... oops, freedom from religion.

*He shrugs, grins, bows.*

Hey ... celebrating the freedom to BE religious.

**OTHER DELEGATES**

Oooooohhhhhhh .....  
.....

*They clap and laugh.*

**SAM ADAMS**

... The right to own a gun ...

**CHARLES PICKERING**

*Pretends to shoulder a long rifle*

We must keep a national guard for local and national defense.

**SAM ADAMS**

... Limits on what the government and police can do ...

**CHARLES PICKERING**

*Hands on hips, nods head at other delegates*

Nobody should be too powerful over everyday citizens.

**SAM ADAMS**

... And gives rights to citizens blamed for crimes in a court.

**CHARLES PICKERING**

*Smiling, happy with all this, arms spread wide*

Citizens are equal to the government in our courts!

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

All in favor?

*Delegates answer together, "AYE"*

*Delegates clap slowly, bow heads.*

## ACT 4

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

*Sees JOHN ADAMS, walks over to shake hands.*

John, when did you get here?

**JOHN ADAMS**

Just now. Friends, we are together in the year [present year] - after 230 years of Constitutional rule.

*Delegates look around, happy, confused, pointing.*

**CALEB STRONG**

So the United States still exists?

**RUFUS KING**

Are we in Philadelphia?

**TEACHER**

Today you are in [NAME OF PLACE, EXPLAIN WHERE IT IS]

**BEN FRANKLIN**

Did we solve slavery?

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

How many states? Can we see a map?

**JOHN ADAMS**

The important thing. We added a couple of amendments early - were there others?

**TEACHER**

*Hands out copies of the constitution.*

*DELEGATES grab them, start reading ... excited ... smiling ... pointing ... handshakes, congratulatory arm punches ... hands on foreheads, hands on faces, as in disbelief. It's like winning a big game ... they are realizing that their daring and unique democratic experiment succeeded for 2 centuries. Emotional.*

### **TEACHER**

The United States still exists and the Constitution - with 27 amendments now - is still in force. For now.

*Delegates continue to read the amendments, following with fingers, half-reading aloud, just faces focused on the text, they are trying to read fast, but to understand it all, as well. Smiling. Surprised. Happy.*

### **TEACHER**

We didn't solve slavery, but we fought a civil war over it. Southern states left the union, but we got back together. That history still haunts us.

The 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments were post-Civil War - southern states had to support them to get representatives back in Congress.

*TEACHER gestures to map.*

### **TEACHER**

The country has grown ocean to ocean - we are 50 states and several territories.

We took over the continent, buying a big chunk in the middle, and fighting wars with Mexico and Native Americans for the rest of the territory.

*Delegates are overwhelmed, by the life of the Constitution and the gigantic territory of the United States of America.*

*They continue pouring over the amendments to the constitution, mouthing 'wow' ... 'oh my God' ... 'can't believe this.'*

*A couple of delegates wipe a tear.*

*They continue looking proud, surprised, and validated.*

### **CALEB STRONG**

Hey, women can vote. That will change everything.

*TEACHER nods knowingly.*

### **BEN FRANKLIN**

Our compromises over slavery gave all the northern delegates great pause. We figured the nation would tear itself up over slavery.



**TEACHER**

We very nearly did.

**RUFUS KING**

I see several amendments related to the Electoral College – how does that work 2 centuries later?

**KID**

Not so good.

**TEACHER**

These days, state voters choose a list of partisan electors, picked by the candidates.

So voters now have a say in the presidential election, but not much.

Twice in the past 16 years, the Electoral College misfired – meaning one candidate got more votes, while the Electoral College selected the other candidate.

**BEN FRANKLIN**

Senators are directly elected now, I see – that’s better.

**JOHN ADAMS**

*Looks over FRANKLIN’S shoulder*

Where?

**BEN FRANKLIN**

*Pointing to his copy of the constitution*

17<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**KID**

How come you guys only made 2 parties?

**TEACHER**

*Holds up hand, like “hang on”*

Well, now, they didn’t.

**BEN FRANKLIN**

Only 2 political parties? Oh my ... nooooo. We expected there would be dozens of parties, mostly regional – all of whom would have to negotiate and work together to pass anything.

**TEACHER**

We've had a series of different parties and several Independent candidates compete for Congress, president and several governorships, but only a few Independents have been successful and none succeeded in a presidential race.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

*Leans forward, taps desk*

How is the constitutional health of the country today?

**TEACHER**

*Pauses, purses lips. Doesn't want to be political.*

It's weak, actually. Our institutions are a little broken; nothing that can't be fixed. Congressional districts are generally drawn to the advantage of one of the major parties – and money has disrupted elections. Fewer people vote. The Electoral College is an antique that doesn't always select the popularly-elected candidate. That happened in 2016.

**KID**

Russia interfered to help –

**TEACHER**

*Raises hand to hush KID*

And ... for the first time in our history, the unanimous conclusion of all 17 U.S. law enforcement and spy agencies was that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election to lift one candidate over the other. The Justice Department is still investigating. That's kind of a mess.

**CALEB STRONG**

*Puzzled*

The Czars intervened in your election?

**TEACHER**

No - yes - well - they aren't the Czars anymore, but yes, the Russians.

**JAMES MADISON**

There's no constitutional remedy for that.

**RUFUS KING**

We have so much to catch up on.

**TEACHER**

*Teacher nods enthusiastically.*

More than you can imagine.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

What about the courts?

**TEACHER**

The Supreme Court has become increasingly partisan. They overrode Congress to make money equal to speech in 2010. In early 2016, the Senate refused to consider a replacement justice until elections occurred. But here are 2 pieces of good news, all thanks to your powerful constitution.

**KID**

Americans still have a revolution every 2 years.

**TEACHER**

*Looks surprised at KID, then pleased and proud.*

You listened!

**TEACHER**

*Turns back to delegates*

We have an independent federal judiciary, usually more careful than partisan.

**TEACHER**

Investigations of the 2016 election have awakened a lot of people who are disgusted by the power of money and manipulation - and now foreign manipulation - over voters.  
Votes still - generally - matter more. We needed to wake up.

**ALEXANDER HAMILTON**

That's the way of democracy, ey? Decisions get made by the people who show up.

**SAM ADAMS**

You're still only as free as your LAST election.

**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**

And only as hopeful as your NEXT election.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

Here's to democracy ... and to keeping her alive.

**ALL**

*Clapping*

Here, here ....

*Everyone bows head slowly.*

**THE END**