

## The Bill of Rights Readers Theatre Script

Developed by Dr. Rosalind Flynn with Ms. Zander's Class  
Kenmore Middle School Arlington, Virginia  
Adapted by Erin K. Hulse, Drama Resource Teacher  
Albuquerque Public Schools

Staging: Performers seated numerically, 1-25, stage right to stage left. As scenes are performed, those actors who are part of that scene stand while the others remain seated.

### *Scene One* *Readers 1-15*

READER 1: (*seriously*) What is a "right"?

READER 2: (*eager*) The correct answer!

READER 3: (*know it all*) Not being wrong!

READER 4: (*having fun*) Not on the left!

READER 5: (*trying to help #1*) No—not those kinds of right!

READER 1: Right—as in "It's my right to have fun!"

READER 6: (*getting it*) Oh, that kind of right--It's something you're entitled to,

READER 7: Something everyone deserves,

READER 8: Something you're allowed to do or have.

READER 9: Like we're allowed to wear our own clothes to school.

ALL READERS: Right! (*head nod or gesture*)

READER 10: (*eager*) Like we can vote if we are 18 or older.

ALL READERS: Right! (*gesture*)

READER 11: Okay, now that we've got that right, who knows what the Founding Fathers added to the Constitution?

READER 2: (*unsure but willing to try*) The Declaration of Independence?

READER 11: Nooo... (*sound effect—confused grumbling from others*)

READER 1: (*informing*) That came before the Constitution.

ALL READERS: Oh yeah, The Bill of Rights!

READER 2: (*confused*) How much did it cost?

READER 12: (*irritated*) Not that kind of Bill!

READER 3: (*eager*) Bill as in Clinton?

READER 12: (*annoyed*) No....

READER 3: Then what kind of Bill?

READER 13: A Bill as in a Law.

ALL READERS: The Bill of Rights is the first ten amendments to the Constitution

READER 14: Guaranteeing certain basic rights and liberties for all citizens.

READER 15: Ratified in 1791, these ten amendments are.....

*Scene Two*  
*Readers 16-25*

READER 16: (*strong*) The First Amendment

READER 17: (*clear*) We can follow our religion and not someone else's

READER 18: Cool.

READER 19: (*adding*) Also, we have the freedom of speech.

READER 20: (*perplexed*) What? Huh?

READER 19: You can say what you want freely. (*sound effect—all begin talking freely...*)

READER 21: Okay! (*clears throat*) And don't forget the freedom of the press.

READER 22: You mean we can press all the buttons we want? (*gesture*)

ALL READERS: (*exasperated*) No! The freedom of the press lets us print newspapers with our own thoughts and opinions.

READER 23: Totally!

READER 24: There's also the freedom of assembly.

READER 25: You mean we have to go to a school assembly?

READER 24: (*patiently*) Kind of. It means we can meet together in groups freely.

ALL READERS: The first amendment--Freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly.

***Scene Three***  
***Readers 1-4***

READER 1: (*knowingly*) The second amendment says that all states have the right to keep a militia.

READER 2: Militia?

READER 1: (*explaining*) A defense, like an army, navy, or National Guard.

READER 3: Also the second amendment protects the right of the people to bear arms.

READER 4: (*oblivious*) Bare arms and wear tube tops! Yes!

READER 3: (*sighs*) Not the right to wear bare arms. The right to bear arms means the right to carry a weapon.

READER 4: (*contrite*) Oh.

***Scene Four***  
***Readers 4-8***

READER 4: (*teen speak*) Amendment three says that, ....like, ....no soldier shall, ....like, .....in time of peace or war, .....like, .....be quartered in any house, .....like, .....without the consent of the owner.

READER 6: (*confused*) What the...?

READER 5: (*explaining*) Look here, it means that soldiers and troops should not live in people's houses without their permission.

READER 6: Isn't that just common sense? Why do they need to put that on paper?

READER 7: Remember how the colonists were put under the Quartering Act?

READER 8: When the British couldn't afford temporary housing?

READER 6: Oh yeah—so the British made the colonists give their soldiers shelter.

READER 8: Correct. So the Founding Fathers said our government doesn't have the right to do that.

*Scene Five*  
*Readers 9-13*

READER 11: Excellent. On to Amendment Four which states:

ALL READERS: The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures...

READER 9: (*sound effect*) Get on with it!

READER 10: What's it mean?

READER 11: The colonists wanted the right to privacy.

READER 12: People's houses and the people themselves cannot be searched without a warrant.

READER 10: A warrant?

READER 13: (*confused*) A warranty?

READER 12: A warrant--An order given by a judge. The police can't come in and search your house unless they have one.

READER 13: (*understanding*) I'll remember that. It's our right under the fourth amendment.

READER 12: It also says...

READER 11: Information or evidence of a crime that was found by searching a person's house without a search warrant cannot be used in court.

*Scene Six*  
*Readers 13-16*

READER 13: Next--the fifth amendment. That's a big one.

READER 14: No person should be held for a crime without a grand jury.

READER 15: What does that mean?

READER 13: It means that all people have the right to a trial.

READER 14: Nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb.

ALL READERS: (*looking at one another*) Now we're really confused.

READER 14: (*explaining*) It means that if you go to trial for a crime and are found innocent, you can't be tried again for the same crime.

ALL READERS: Double Jeopardy!

READER 11: Isn't that a movie?

READER 16: Right—but there's another part of the fifth here—Nor shall a person be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself.

ALL READERS: Huh?

READER 16: Say you are accused of committing a crime. When the police ask you, you don't have to tell them if you did it or not.

ALL READERS: We can claim the Fifth!

READER 15: That means we don't have to testify against ourselves in a court of law!

READER 16: Right. And they need evidence to arrest you. They cannot arrest you just for looking suspicious.

ALL READERS: Phew!

*Scene Seven*  
*Readers 17 and 18*

READER 17: (*seriously*) Amendment six—in all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial....

ALL READERS: Okay, okay...translation please.

READER 17: If you were to commit a crime and you got arrested, your trial must follow soon afterwards.

ALL READERS: A-S-A-P!

READER 18: What if I don't have enough money to hire a lawyer?

READER 17: The government has to give you one.

ALL READERS: Got it. Onto Amendment seven.

*Scene Eight*  
*Readers 18-22*

READER 18: (*somber*) Amendment seven says that in suits of common law where the value in controversy shall exceed \$20, the right of trial by jury shall be otherwise examined....

ALL READERS: Say what? (*gesture*)

READER 18: Okay. It means that if you stole something worth more than \$20, you'd have to go to Federal Court.

READER 19: (*clarifying*) So if I stole something like a TV, I'd have a jury trial in Federal Court?

READER 18: You could have a jury trial, but Federal Courts deal with the big money cases.

READER 19: (*half joking*) If I stole something cheap like a Slurpee, would you bail me out?

READER 18: Probably not, but now that you've mentioned bail, that's the subject of the eighth amendment.

READER 22: (*quoting*) Excessive bail shall not be required nor excessive fines imposed.

READER 20: Nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

ALL READERS: (*sound effect*) English again, please!

READER 20: Officials can't charge too much for bail or fines.

READER 21: So like, if you stole a candy bar, they can't make your bail or fine \$20,000.

READER 22: And you couldn't be given the electric chair for stealing a TV either.

ALL READERS: Whew!

*Scene Nine*  
*Readers 23-25*

READER 23: The ninth amendment says that 'this enumeration in the Cons....

ALL READERS: (*sound effect--groans*)

READER 23: Okay, okay! If there are rights that they left out of the Constitution, the people still have those rights.

ALL READERS: Your point is.....

READER 23: People have other rights that might not be in the Constitution.

READER 25: Right. I guess they were afraid they might have forgotten some.

READER 24: Good thinking. What comes next?

READER 25: The tenth – the last one in the Bill of Rights, but there are 27 amendments to the Constitution altogether.

ALL READERS Holy Cow! (*gesture*)

*Scene Ten*  
*Readers 1-5*

READER 1: The tenth amendment protects the states and the people from powerful governments.

ALL READERS: How?

READER 1: Remember how King George was too controlling of the colonists?

READER 2: He didn't give them any say in Parliament?

ALL READERS: (*annoyed*) That's not fair!

READER 1: Right. So that's what the 10th is all about – It says that any powers not given to the Federal Government...

ALL READERS: Go to the states!

READER 2: So the Federal government doesn't get too powerful.

READER 3: And those are the first ten amendments to our Constitution, which are called

ALL READERS: The Bill of Rights!

READER 4: I guess all Americans should know them.

READER 5: Or people could take advantage of us.

ALL READERS: Not us! WE (*gesture*) KNOW our rights! Yeah!