



## Shh! We're Writing the Constitution

*Jean Fritz, Tomie dePaola (Illustrations)*

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**Shh! We're Writing the Constitution** Jean Fritz , Tomie dePaola (Illustrations)

This factual gem that's written with Jean Fritz's humorous touch chronicles the hot summer of 1787 where fifty-five delegates from thirteen states huddled together in the strictest secrecy in Philadelphia to draw up the constitution of the United States!

## Shh! We're Writing the Constitution Details

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## **From Reader Review Shh! We're Writing the Constitution for online ebook**

### **Kyra Christiansen says**

this book explained that the writing of the Constitution and the forming of our current government was no easy feat. This book is very informational because it explains the struggle and how a country cannot be formed over a night. Plus, it includes the Constitution and explains reasons for the different articles. It also has the names of everyone who signed it and a breakdown of where they were from. Very fun and informational!

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### **Denise Krebs says**

Again, Jean Fritz does such a good job of taking a dry subject and adding life. For instance, I learned that during a break from the Constitution Convention Oliver Ellsworth wrote a letter home about visiting an Egyptian mummy on display in Philadelphia and how he opened it up so he could see what the flesh was like. That is a horrific fact, but there are occasional such engagements for young readers. Details about the first July 4th parade and celebration in Philadelphia were great too!

However, as I read this book, with all my background knowledge about the Constitution, I wasn't fully engaged on every page. I continue to realize how important passion and choice are for students. If a student is interested in government and specifically the U.S. Constitution, this book would be awesome. If not, it would be hard for a young person to sit through the whole book, which is only 44 pages.

I also always love the pictures by Tomie dePaola.

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### **Carol Evans says**

I read this with my daughter, who is 8. I enjoyed it a lot. It was informative, funny and had a lot of interesting trivia. Who knew Benjamin Franklin came to the convention in a Chinese sedan chair carried by four prisoners from a Philadelphia jail? I think I got more out of it than A did, though. Hopefully, she picked up some bits and pieces.

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### **Heather says**

Hmmm, I thought I had written a big long review for this, but I guess I didn't.

This was a solid introduction to the events leading up to the Convention as well as some of the debates that occurred. My boys were able to understand the Virginia plan and why the smaller states had issues with some things. The book briefly touched on the conflict between Northern and Southern states as well.

It'd difficult to condense everything that was said and all the personalities into one book for children. Fritz

did a good job. While I think this is a good choice, I will continue to try to find one I like better. But I wouldn't hesitate to use this again.

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### **Brooke says**

#### **Biography**

In fifth grade, we learned a great deal about the Revolutionary war. Then when we were done that unit, we went straight to the Civil War. We missed such an important part of American history!

This book teaches us such key topics that I feel students should know, like how to pick a president, state rights, slavery, and representation.

America had succeeded from England, then they had to write an entire constitution! This book is an easy way to explain to students what our founding fathers went through to make our country what it is today. It also eases the passage way from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, since they had to make some changes to the constitution after the civil war, for instance: abolishing slavery.

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### **Leah Jay says**

A very informative and easy-to-read book about the constitutional convention!

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### **Nancy says**

Any book by Jean Fritz get my 5 star rating! I have my students at the University read this book as an introduction to the time period. So historically accurate, so delightfully detailed, so short, so funny, so readable.

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### **Tracey says**

"Shh! We're Writing the Constitution" should be a must read for every elementary school student! This book presents the summer of 1787 in a manner students can understand. Humor is thrown in, as well, to bring the Founding Fathers to life! I am considering the inclusion of this book into our classroom activities. Any adult would find this book intriguing, too, especially if they don't know much about the Constitutional Convention. Pick up this book and read it! You can read it in less than an hour!

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**((Silver O. Smith - "You wanna know why I haven't cracked? It's because I'm a**

**diamond. Diamonds don't crack. They cut." - Harley Quinn )) says**

The artwork is spectacular, as usual. I actually enjoyed reading this school book.

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**Michael Fitzgerald says**

Fritz tells the story very well, in 44 pages. The remaining 20 pages consist of notes (4) and the full text of the Constitution. This is an essential book for young students of American history. I'm not crazy about dePaola's illustrations here (everyone always looks like him), but the text is the important part.

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**Robert Owens says**

I think this would be an excellent book to read with my fourth graders. So much so that I am now looking into electronic classroom wish lists so I can list the book. I don't seem to be able to find enough copies used to make it worthwhile to purchase a class set.

Fritz has a way of describing history well. I really liked this book. Admittedly, I am a fan of the Revolutionary period and the Constitution specifically. I do carry a copy in my breast pocket!

Anyhow, this book pretty much describes the ending of the fourth grade social studies curriculum I teach. Unfortunately, Fritz does not use the term *New Jersey Plan* to describe the part of the Great Compromise that create the balance in the Senate that we have. The plan is described accurately, just not named so.

One gains a pretty good feel for the struggle our forefathers had in crafting our government. We learn of the different sides of terms like federal and national. And we see how some were not in favor of a federal government preferring the states to remain sovereign (can you hear me, George Mason?).

If anyone would like to donate a copy of this book for my fourth graders to use, let me know and I will provide the particulars. That is how much I enjoyed reading this!

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**Nicole Flores says**

This is another one of Jean Fritz's wonderful stories. This is a historical fiction book about how hard it was to come up with this document and the importance of it. I would do this as a read aloud because it is a high level book but it is definitely important and it puts the writing of the constitution in perspective.

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**Katie Fitzgerald says**

This month, while the Old School Kidlit Reading Challenge has been focusing on nonfiction, I decided to finally sit down and read a stack of the late Jean Fritz's books about the history of the United States. In total, I read 8 titles:

And Then What Happened, Paul Revere? illustrated by Margot Tomes (1973)  
Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams? illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman (1974)  
Where Was Patrick Henry on the 29th of May? illustrated by Margot Tomes (1975)  
What's the Big Idea, Ben Franklin? illustrated by Margot Tomes (1976)  
Will You Sign Here, John Hancock? illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman (1976)  
Can't You Make Them Behave, King George? illustrated by Tomie dePaola (1977)  
Where Do You Think You're Going, Christopher Columbus? illustrated by Margot Tomes (1980)  
Shh! We're Writing the Constitution illustrated by Tomie dePaola (1987)

All of these except the last one are biographies of key figures in early America. In each biography, Fritz focuses on a representative quirk of each individual she profiles, which serves as a unifying thread for the important events of that person's life. For John Hancock, whose signature looms so large on the declaration of independence, this is his desire for attention and the ostentatious ways he went about trying to get it. For Sam Adams, it is his refusal to learn to ride a horse, for Columbus, his terrible sense of direction and tendency to stumble upon good fortune, and for King George, his blind paternalism toward the colonists, even when they have made very clear their disdain for him. In the last book, *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution*, Fritz tells the story of the difficulties and compromises that occurred among different historical figures as the U.S. Constitution slowly took shape.

In both types of books, Fritz focuses heavily not just on historical events, but on the personalities of the key figures who contributed to the outcomes of these events. Fritz does not simply idolize these men for their greatness; instead she shows both how they were ordinary (stubborn, foolish, insufferable, laughable, quirky, selfish, etc.) and extraordinary. No one is treated as all good or all bad, but instead they are portrayed as very human. For a reader like me who reads books mainly for their characters, I found this approach refreshing and endearing. Whereas I struggle to focus on lengthy informational texts that try to drill details into my memory, the "characters" in each of these books were fascinating to me. As I read in the evenings, I kept saying to my husband, "Hey did you know...?" and "I never knew that..."

None of these books is enough on its own to convey all the details of the discovery of America, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary War, or the drafting of the Constitution, but every single one of them provides context for understanding those events on a more personal and emotional level. The straightforward facts which are included alongside the biographical details are made more memorable by Fritz's engaging and humorous writing style, and everything she writes about comes to life in a way that school textbooks never could. They would make wonderful read-alouds for elementary kids who are studying colonial America, but they are just as entertaining as independent reads for older readers who want a refresher.

Also wonderful are the illustrations for each volume. There are three illustrators for these books: Margot Tomes, Trina Schart Hyman, and Tomie dePaola. Though all three artists' styles suit the mood and content of the books, my personal favorite is Hyman. Her pictures have the most detail, and in my opinion, the most personality. Tomes is a close second - I especially like the way she draws children - but found that I associated dePaola too much with other books and other genres to feel like he was a good fit for this subject matter. Still, I think the designer for these books did a great job of keeping a consistent look to the whole series that places the reader in a particular frame of mind regardless of who drew the pictures.

Now that I have read all of these books, I understand why they were so popular in my school library during

childhood and why I hear so much about them in homeschooling circles. I plan to use them with my kids when we study U.S. history and I hope they will learn to love history (as I never did as a child) by observing how much fun Fritz clearly had writing about it.

This review also appears on my blog, [Read-at-Home Mom](#).

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### **Ruth says**

A good story-based introduction to the constitution. It was a bit fact-heavy for a picture book, and it would have been nice if it was divided up into chapters; it was hard to find good stopping points. Some of this was over my seven year old's head, but she got the general idea that deciding on our country's form of government was not an easy decision and it took a while for the delegates to agree.

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### **Kiri says**

This is a great little book (probably aimed at middle-school kids, but great reading even for adults) telling a short version of the story of the Constitutional Convention. It is peppered with little tidbits about the delegates (like fishing habits or what they wrote home to their children) that give them personality and humanity. Told in simple and straightforward language, it also hits on all of the hot-button topics that would ultimately lead to four months of deliberation and debate: state rights, representation, slavery, how to choose a president, etc. I also gained a better sense of the important distinction between the terms "national" (a central government with power over the states) and "federal" (a government of an association of states that give up none of their individual rights). The original Constitution never used the word "national" because it was so offensive to many of the delegates. Our states therefore were joined into a federation, and not a nation, to create the United States of America.

Overall, an enjoyable and educational read. The full text (and it's not very long) of the original Constitution is included at the end of the book. "We the people" never fails to inspire a little thrill of pride.

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