Name: _____ Date: _____

The Four Big Pages

Reading level 7 (3rd grade) · 451 words

Yusra stood in a cool, dim room with her class. Under the glass lay four big pages. The writing was small and curly.

Yusra leaned in. Her nose almost touched the glass. "What is it?" she asked.

"Those pages are the Constitution," said her teacher. "It is the plan for how our country is run."

The first words were big and bold. Yusra read them out loud: We the People. "Those words open the whole plan," said her teacher.

Yusra shut her eyes and pictured the year 1787. Leaders came to a big building in Philadelphia.

They had a job to do. They had to make a plan for the new country.

George Washington led the meeting. Benjamin Franklin was 81, the oldest one there. Yusra thought of someone who was 81.

The meeting was a secret. No one could come in to watch. Yusra tiptoed back from the glass.

One man, James Madison, wrote down what people said. Yusra wrote down what her friends said.

Big states and small states argued. "We have more people," said the big states. "We want more votes."

"No," said the small states, "every state counts the same." Yusra said both parts. She used a big voice, then a small one.

At last they made a deal. In one group, every state gets two seats. In the other, states with more people get more.

Yusra drew two boxes in her notebook. She filled them with little chairs.

They split the work in three. One part makes the rules, and one runs things. One part is the judge.

Yusra lined up three pencils on the floor. One, two, three. Each pencil was one part.

Then the plan was done. On September 17, 1787, the leaders signed it. Yusra signed her name in the air.

But the plan was not law yet. The states had to say yes first. Yusra crossed her fingers.

Many people said, "We want a list of our rights." Yusra wrote rights at the top of a clean page.

Yusra tapped her pencil on the page. The list would say what the government may not do.

So the list was added. It is like a new page added to a book.

A change added to the Constitution is an amendment. The first ten amendments are the Bill of Rights.

One amendment says people may say what they think. It says people may gather in peace, too. Yusra and her friends stood in a circle.

Another is about soldiers. In peacetime, they cannot live in your house. The owner has to say yes.

Now try this. Ask an adult to read the first words with you. Who do you think We the People means?

Questions

1. What is the Constitution?

A. A story book
B. The plan for our country
C. A kind of map

2. Who wrote down what people said at the meeting?

A. Benjamin Franklin
B. George Washington
C. James Madison

3. What did the small states want?

A. All states to count the same
B. A bigger building
C. A new leader

4. Why did many people want a list of rights added?

A. They wanted to save paper
B. They wanted to know what the government may not do
C. They wanted a longer meeting

5. In this book, what is an amendment?

A. A kind of meeting
B. A big state
C. A change added to the Constitution

6. What are the first ten amendments called?

A. The Bill of Rights
B. The State House
C. The secret

Words to know

Constitution: country's plan
amendment: added change
rights: freedoms you have
Philadelphia: big old city

Answer key: The Four Big Pages

1. B. The plan for our country
2. C. James Madison
3. A. All states to count the same
4. B. They wanted to know what the government may not do
5. C. A change added to the Constitution
6. A. The Bill of Rights