

Ten Brave Seconds

Music & Lyrics by **Will Van Dyke**

Book & Lyrics by **Jeff Talbott**

Directed by **Ellie Heyman**

Choreographed by **Reed Luplau**

Music Supervised by **Patrick Sulken**

January 30 - February 14, 2026

SPOTLIGHT STUDY GUIDE For Teachers and Students



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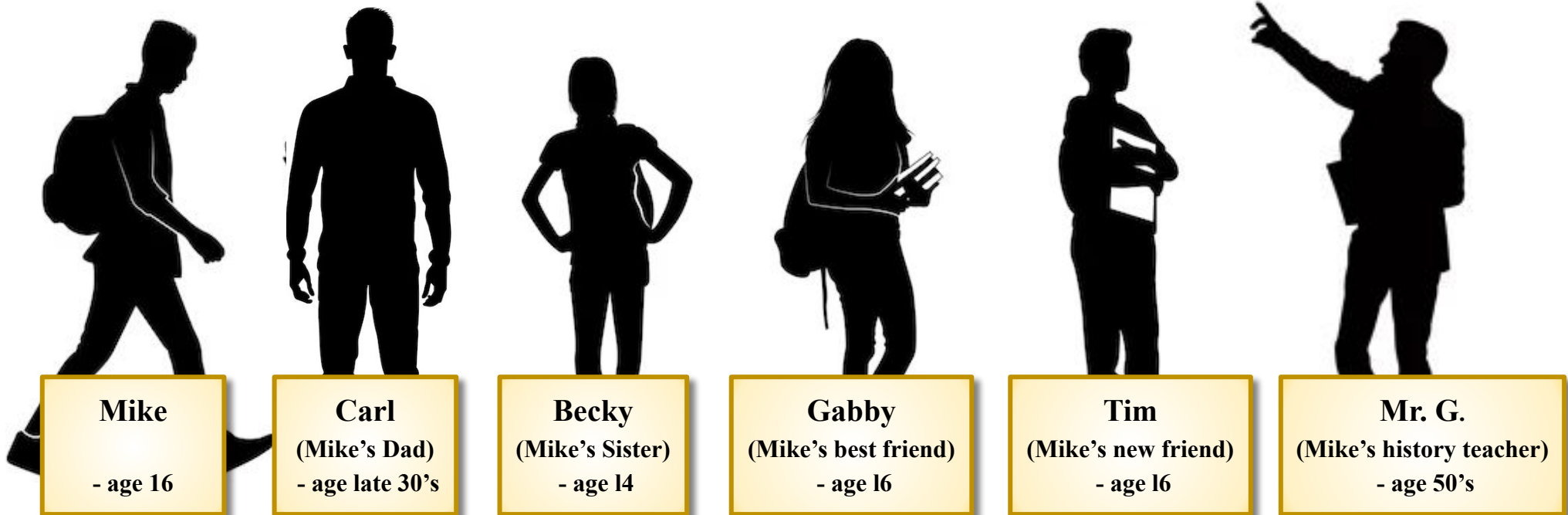




SETTING: Wooster, Ohio, April 28, 2015

SYNOPSIS: One day can change everything if you pay attention. And Mike is certainly looking for something to change. He and his family are finding their way the best they can on a new and rocky road. Mike has also been sitting on something about himself that he's been waiting to say, but he's got a thing or two to find out first. What he is learning is that in order to step into his community, he's going to have to be brave and join in. And today's the day. It is the examination of one day in the life of a kid, a family, and a community stepping bravely from the dark unknown into the daylight together.

CHARACTERS



Meet the Writers

TEN BRAVE SECONDS is a new musical about the day that 16 year old Mike comes out and the cosmic change that affects his community. Mike is about to find out that it's on the other side of the telling that all the good stuff sits waiting. This original story is about those tiny, brave seconds that make up the gargantuan moments that tell you and the world who you are.

In your collaboration on this and other shows, how open are you to changing what you've written during the rehearsal process?
Completely, let's say 233%.

What is your earliest musical theater memory?

JEFF: Getting on a bus and taking it three hours to Denver, Colorado to see the national tour of *A Chorus Line*.

When did you realize that you wanted to make musical theater?

We both did in high school; but in different decades.

How did pursuing an education in musical theater help to shape your voice?

Every class helps hone how you hear/see the world from a musical standpoint - which clarifies how you write. Every day of life does that, too.

What is more important to you: entertaining audiences, or making them think?

Can't we do both? And also: making them FEEL is even better.

As a musical theater creator, do you think of Broadway as your ultimate goal?

Nope. Writing good or even great musicals is the goal.

So Jeff and Will, how did you come to collaborate? And what inspired you to create this coming-of-age while coming out musical story of hope?

WILL: Jeff and I were both looking for new people to collaborate with. And Jeff actually sent me an email one day. It was like, I don't know if you are looking to write the new people or anything like that, but I'd love to pick

your brain and talk to you. And we went out for chicken and waffles and the rest is sort of history. We started talking about an idea for a musical that day, just over brunch, and started writing it - I think that week. And it was kind of crazy and wild, and that got us today.



*Collaborators and Writers of TEN BRAVE SECONDS,
Will Van Dyke (Music & Lyrics) & Jeff Talbott (Book & Lyrics)*

Talk a little bit about how you guys came to write about this story together.

WILL: We wanted to write a musical about coming out, but more about the sort of breaking down that structure a little bit where the musical is not just about the event of coming out itself, but sort of the idea of coming out and that it's a small regular moment. And we tried to frame it in the idea of like one day, to sort of like constrain ourselves a little bit to like time and tell a story that way. But it was really important to us that the music, the event of the musical, was not just this concept of a kid coming out - because we've all seen that story - and more about how that affects the people around him. And how everybody, gay or straight or whatever, comes out almost every single day of their life. Because we all have things that we're holding on to, and then we sort of release them as we grow. That is what really interested me, interested us, about this story. So it's really a show about a family who's dealing with this one particular event, but they're each, in their own way, coming out of something.

You and Will have written a lot of different shows together, but what sparked your excitement about this show?

JEFF: I think both of us have always had a desire to enter the narrative landscape of talking about coming out. But there are so many versions of that story. We first started fishing around thinking about adapting, but the stories that we found were either too heavy, too "After School Special"-ly, or too too tricky and too high context. And we really wanted to sell something straightforward about recognizable human beings at crossing

Meet the Writers (cont.)

point in their lives where they have to say something scary. So it isn't just about coming out as a gay human being into the world, but everybody in the show has a secret, something they're afraid to share. And by the end of the show, everybody has to face that, that "ten brave second" moment of actually saying something to tell somebody who you are.

What kind of show is it? I think musicals can be so many things right now.

JEFF: I think it depends on a director's vision, really. I mean, it's heavy narrative. All of our shows have a big book element.

WILL: Because a lot of the show takes place in high school. There's also that ensemble element that's really interesting to bring into it. And the way we've constructed the show and written it is, it's a lot of narrative with those people.

JEFF: My dream would be that we're writing a show that a family could come to and at the end of the show, either that a kid could turn to his parents, or parents could turn to their kid and say, I have something to tell you. You know, that it opens a conversation. It creates a platform for a family or a human being to have a conversation with another human being about something they're afraid to talk about.

WILL: Yeah, I agree with that. I think I really am hooked into this "ten brave seconds" idea that we came up with when, which ended up being the title of musical. And just the idea that the most monumental things that we'll ever do in our life really happen in like these really brief seconds. And if you can learn to embrace them and be comfortable with them, you become your true self. To be able to deliver that message to anyone would be awesome.

When did you realize the show was going to be called TEN BRAVE SECONDS? Because it sounds like it was a part of the fabric of what your show was before it was your full identity as the title.

WILL: I might say this wrong, and Jeff you might correct me, but I don't know that we knew it was the title right away. But then once we wrote the song, we were like, oh, that's the title of this musical.

JEFF: Right. It also gave us the larger lens to write us a show that takes place in one day. Time is the character in the show. Time is a thing that's everybody's working against in good and and less good ways, and we wanted to embrace that in a narrative structure too. So it isn't just your typical musical where the beginning, middle, and end happen with flashbacks and all sorts of things that are non-linear. This is ultra linear in that it takes place in a from sunup to sundown.

TEN BRAVE SECONDS Musical Numbers

ACT I

"Day One" Mike, Carl, Becky, Gabby, Tim & The Teens
"A Moment of Silence" Becky, Mike & Carl
"Astronaut 63" Mike & The Teens
"Ten Brave Seconds (Stinger #1)" . . . Gabby
"Making Up the Rules" Gabby, Mike & The Teens
"Virginia & Oliver" Mr. G. & The Teens
"Ten Brave Seconds (Stinger #2)" . . Tim
"Ride to the River" Tim, Mike & The Teens
"The Hallway" The Teens
"Pop Quiz" Gabby, Mike, Mr. G., Tim & The Teens
"Anyone Else" Mike & The Teens
"Sally at the Water Park" Carl
"Straight" Mike, Carl, Gabby, Tim, Becky & The Teens

ACT II

"Ten Brave Seconds" Mike, Carl, Becky, Gabby, Tim & The Teens
"Three-Thirty" Mike, Gabby & The Teens
"Pop Quiz (reprise)" Gabby & Tim
"Anyone Else (reprise)" Carl
"Beautiful Boys if Boystown" Mr. G.
"Trying" Mike & The Teens
"Off the Playground" Gabby, Mike & The Teens
"Citizen" Mike
"Finale" Company

Science Fiction & Space

Science fiction, or “sci-fi,” is a special type of fiction, or story. Humans have long wondered what life on another planet might be like. People have also wondered how different kinds of technology might affect life on Earth. Made-up stories that address such questions are called science fiction.

These stories may discuss ideas about scientific facts or real technology. But they also involve a lot of imagination. For example, a story might describe people meeting with space aliens for the first time. Another story might imagine what would happen if robots or computers could think and feel like humans. Many science fiction stories present different possible futures for human society.

Science fiction stories also imagine different ways people might act and relate to one another. In this way science fiction may help reveal important things about human nature and society.

A few authors, such as Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, wrote science fiction in the 1800s or even earlier. But science fiction did not become a major type of writing until the 1900s. The first rockets sent into space and rapid advances in technology helped create an interest in this writing. Authors such as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and Robert Heinlein helped establish the style as a form of serious literature.

Sci-fi is especially popular in young adult novels. One might think that books written specifically for young audiences would be a bit gentler than

those written for adult audiences. But the opposite is often true. It seems that the most popular young adult stories are those that put the protagonists in difficult, even extreme, environments and dire situations. For example, in Suzanne Collins’ wildly popular *Hunger Games* trilogy, poor Katniss and her friends are thrown into life-or-death gladiatorial games, and then a full-scale, violent revolution. Even the *Harry Potter* series is often seen as a whimsical look at a magical world, but starts out with the orphaned Harry living in a closet. While he is rescued by an invitation to Hogwarts, before the series is over, he and his friends will be engulfed in a grueling total war between the forces of good and evil.

Science fiction stories have also been the subject of television shows and movies for many years. Popular examples include the *Star Trek* television shows and movies and the *Star Wars* series of movies.

Reading adventures set in dystopias, and seeing the protagonists overcome the intense challenges they face, gives the readers a sense that they, too, can overcome their own obstacles and anxieties. Also, seeing how characters react to adversity can teach youngsters some valuable lessons about life and ethical behavior. While older adults might want to shield the young from difficult thoughts and concepts, younger adults are eager to leave the nest and strike out on their own...and fiction can be a first step in doing that.

CITIZEN OF THE GALAXY

In *TEN BRAVE SECONDS* Mike is reading *Citizen of the Galaxy*. *Citizen of the Galaxy* is a science fiction novel by American writer Robert A. Heinlein, (1907-1988) who is among the most notable of science fiction authors, who also wrote *Starship Troopers* and *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. *Citizen of the Galaxy* was published in 1957 as part of their series of Heinlein juvenile adventure novels.

The novel is set in a future in which the human race has developed interstellar spaceflight and is engaged in trade with a number of alien races. However, human slavery has reappeared on some planets. The Hegemonic Guard, the space military force of the human government, tries to enforce the law and fight the slave trade.

Thorby is a young, defiant boy who is purchased at a slave auction on the planet Jubbul by an old beggar, Baslim the Cripple, for a trivial sum and taken to the beggar's surprisingly well-furnished underground home. Thereafter, Baslim treats the boy as a son, teaching him not only the trade of begging, but also mathematics, history, and



Science Fiction & Space (cont.)

CITIZEN OF THE GALAXY (cont.)

several languages, while sending Thorby on errands all over the city. Thorby slowly realizes that his foster father is not a simple beggar, but is gathering intelligence, particularly on the slave trade.

When the authorities close in on Baslim, Thorby must ride with the Free Traders — a league of merchant princes — throughout the many worlds of a hostile galaxy, finding the courage to live by his wits and fight his way from society's lowest rung. But Thorby's destiny will be forever changed when he discovers the truth about his own identity.

The book is episodic in nature, with each stage of Thorby's journey, and each difficulty he endures, offering some different perspective on the topics of freedom and responsibility. There are some solid action scenes throughout that keep the reader engaged (and keep the narrative from reading too much like a civics lesson).

As in many of Heinlein's books, the principal character grows in wisdom and knowledge, beginning in relative ignorance, learning from experience, receiving the benefits of education, and using that education to resolve subsequent problems - both his own and those of the people around him. Thorby learns to survive in four major completely different social settings, each of which presents a form of slavery contrasted with personal freedom.



Science fiction writers will always be one step ahead of engineers. Science and space exploration have caught up to science fiction in many ways, producing marvels beyond the imaginings of the visionary writers of the past.

NASA, which stands for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, is an organization that explores space and conducts scientific research about the Earth, other planets, and beyond. It's like a big team of scientists and engineers who work together to learn more about space and our universe.

NASA builds and launches satellites, telescopes, and spacecraft to study different things in space. They study planets, stars, galaxies, and even objects in our solar system, like the Moon and Mars. They also send astronauts into space to conduct experiments and explore new frontiers.

NASA's work helps us understand how the universe works, how planets form, and whether there might be other forms of life out there. They also study our planet



Earth, monitoring things like weather patterns, climate change, and natural disasters to help us protect our home planet.

In TEN BRAVE SECONDS, Mike's dream of being "Astronaut 63" would take a lot studying and working hard. To qualify as an astronaut for NASA, you must be a U.S. citizen with a master's degree in a STEM field (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) or have equivalent experience.

You also need at least two years of professional experience or 1,000 hours of flying a jet plane! Passing a physical examination is also necessary for long-duration space flights. A doctoral degree, a medical doctor degree, or completing a test pilot school program can also boost your chances of being selected as an astronaut for NASA.

In addition to these qualifications, astronauts should have skills in leadership, teamwork, and communication. The selection process involves reviewing applications, conducting interviews, and training selected candidates for two years at NASA's Johnson Space Center. During training, they learn important astronaut skills such as spacwalking and operating the space station.

Fun Facts About Astronauts

We have all gazed up at the night sky and marveled at the mysteries of space. Astronauts are the daring explorers who venture into this unknown, experiencing wonders and challenges we can only dream of. But there's so much more to these space travelers than just their iconic spacewalks and moon landings.

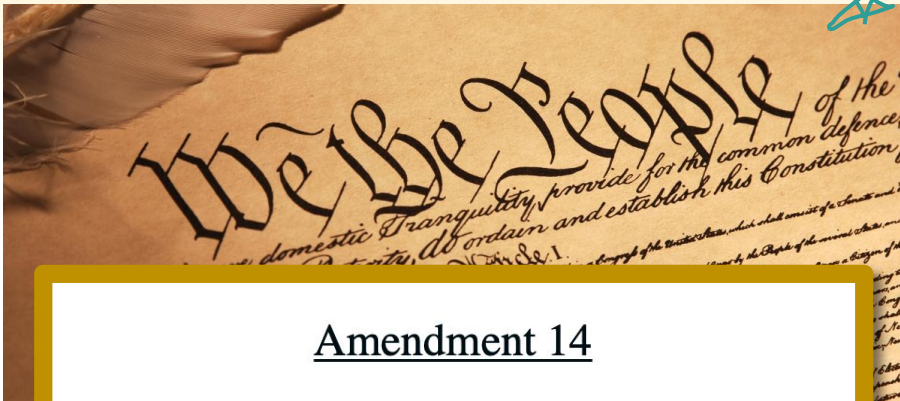
- The word "astronaut" comes from the Greek words "astron nautes," which means "star sailor."
- Astronauts are known by different names in other parts of the world. In Russia, they're called "Cosmonauts" and in China, they're known as "Taikonauts."
- Guion Bluford was the first African American in space. He began as a mission specialist on the Challenger in 1983.
- Sally Ride was the first American woman in space. She was also the youngest American astronaut to travel to space.
- Apollo 16 Astronaut Charles Duke left a photograph of his wife and their two sons sitting on a bench on the Moon. He signed the back of the photograph. The photograph remains to this day.
- Astronauts experience weightlessness in space because they are in a constant state of freefall. This means they feel like they are floating, and everyday activities like eating and sleeping require adjustments.
- Astronauts sleep in special sleeping bags that are attached to the walls of their spacecraft. Without the pull of gravity, they can sleep in any position, even floating in the air.
- Astronauts can't take showers in space like we do on Earth. Instead, they clean themselves by using special wipes and waterless shampoo. Water would float away in the zero-gravity environment.
- Did you know that astronauts have to eat specially prepared food in space? This food is designed to be lightweight, easy to store, and easy to eat in a zero-gravity environment.
- Astronauts wear space suits when they go outside their spacecraft



during spacewalks. These suits protect them from the vacuum of space and extreme temperatures. They also have built-in communication systems and tools to help them work.

- Astronauts wear diapers -- well technically called "Maximum Absorbency Garments." Missions are unpredictable and long, so when Astronauts can't unbuckle to go to the bathroom . . . well you get understand. Luckily, they change their own garments.
- Astronauts live and work on the International Space Station (ISS), which is a laboratory orbiting around 250 miles above Earth. They stay there for months at a time, conducting experiments and research.
- Astronauts have to learn Russian to be on the International Space Station in order to read manuals on the Russian side, communicate and know what's going on!
- Exercising in space is essential for preventing bone and muscle loss. On average, astronauts exercise for two hours a day on special equipment designed for space.
- Astronauts actually grow taller in space! In the microgravity environment, astronauts experience a 3% increase in height. But, once they return to Earth, they slowly revert to their original height within three or four months. It's like a temporary boost that fades away over time.

The 14th Amendment



Amendment 14

No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States granted citizenship and equal civil and legal rights to anyone born in the United States or who became a citizen of the country. This included African Americans and slaves who had been freed after the American Civil War. The amendment, an addition to the U.S. Constitution, was ratified and entered into force on July 28, 1868. However, further U.S. laws and rulings promoted segregation, thus hindering the guarantee of civil rights for African Americans for many decades. These included the Jim Crow laws and the U.S. Supreme Court's "separate but equal" ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).

The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments were known as the Reconstruction amendments. States ratified all three shortly after the Civil War, when legislators attempted to correct the inequities of slavery. Radical Republican Thaddeus Stevens played an important part in the preparation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The amendment is made up

of five sections. Four of the sections began in 1866 as separate proposals that stalled during the legislative process. They were later combined, along with a fifth section on enforcement, into a single amendment.

The Fourteenth Amendment prohibited the states from depriving any person of "life, liberty, or property" without fair treatment under the law (also known as due process). It also stated that African Americans and former slaves should be included in state population counts. These counts determined the number of representatives each state would have in the House of Representatives. The amendment also prohibited former civil and military office holders who had supported the Confederate States of America from holding any state or federal office. However, those individuals could once again hold office if two-thirds of both the Senate and House gave approval. Moreover, the amendment upheld the national debt but exempted the federal government and state governments from the debts incurred by the Confederate States. Finally, the last section provided for enforcement of the amendment.



ACTIVITY: How do you think the 14th Amendment has affected your life directly? In what ways do you think it has affected the lives of your extended family members?

Supreme Court Cases Based on the 14th Amendment

The Brown v. Board of Education Case (1954)



On May 17, 1954, U.S. Supreme Court listened to a case where the 14th Amendment was used as a reason to overturn segregation in the United States.

Rev. Brown led a relatively normal life at the time as a family man, homeowner in an integrated neighborhood, assistant pastor at a church, and union welder for the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad at the time.



But because his oldest daughter, Linda, was unable to attend their local all-white school and was forced to travel 24 blocks to the nearest African American school, Monroe Elementary, Brown was recruited by his friend in the NAACP to participate in a lawsuit against the Board of Education of Topeka.

Though Rev. Brown was not the first to join the lawsuit, or the first plaintiff alphabetically, the case was filed in Rev. Brown's name and he was assigned the role of Lead Plaintiff, representing his daughter Linda. Though the reason for this assignment was never obviously stated, several theories - such as being the only male plaintiff - remain. Still, the name Brown became etched in American history as a major civil rights figure as the lead plaintiff of 13 others who took the case to the Supreme Court.

Justice Earl Warren delivered the unanimous ruling in the landmark civil rights case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. State-supported segregation between blacks and whites in public schools was found to be a violation of the 14th amendment and was therefore unconstitutional.

This historic decision marked the end of the "separate but equal" way of life set by the Supreme Court nearly 60 years earlier

The Brown decision determined that "In the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities

are inherently unequal," beginning the process of overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

It was both the culmination of a century of personal struggles and legal battles; and the basis for the major civil rights actions to come.

The Minor v. Happersett Case (1875)

Virginia Louisa Minor was born March 27, 1824. During her life she was known for her charm and was described as being "sweet and retiring-looking," with "ladylike manners."



In 1852 Virginia Minor launched the woman suffrage movement in Missouri, and in 1867 took an active role in founding the Woman Suffrage Association of Missouri and was even elected the first president of this organization.

On October 15, 1872, as part of a nation-wide plan organized by the National American Woman's Suffrage Association, Virginia Minor tried to register to vote in the upcoming election. She was refused by St. Louis' registrar because she was a woman. While other women, like Susan B. Anthony, were jailed for their civil disobedience of voting, Virginia and her husband sued the registrar. They argued that women were U.S. citizens under the 14th amendment to the Constitution, which "nowhere gives [states] the power to prevent" a citizen from voting. The case eventually was heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. The judges ruled that citizenship did not guarantee the right to vote. The decision was a blow to woman suffrage, and suffragists changed their tactics to get women access to the ballot.

Though Minor's court case failed, it gave great publicity to the cause of women's suffrage. It wouldn't be until 1919, 25 years after Virginia Minor's death, when things would change. Passed in June 4, 1919, and ratified on August 18, 1920, Congress passed the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women the right to vote.

The 14th Amendment & Gay Marriage

Background

Federalism is a type of government where power is divided between the national government and state governments. Some powers are shared between the national and state governments. Some powers only belong to the national government while others only belong to the state governments. One power traditionally belonging to state governments is the power to pass laws about marriage. The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says state laws must treat all people who are in the same situation equally unless the state has a very good reason for treating them differently.

Between 1996 and 2005, several states, including Ohio, passed laws and state constitutional amendments defining marriage as being between one man and one woman. This meant same-sex couples could not marry in those states and were stopped from receiving the same benefits opposite-sex married couples received, like being allowed to visit each other in the hospital when visitors were limited to family members.

Several states also passed laws allowing same-sex marriage during that time. However, even if a same-sex couple was legally married in a state

that allowed same-sex marriage, their marriage would not be considered legitimate if they moved to a state that banned same-sex marriage.



Same-sex couples all over the country argued that banning same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. Some district courts agreed, saying it was unfair to treat same-sex couples differently. Other courts upheld the bans, arguing that because states that banned same-sex marriage voted to do so, they should be allowed to.

The U.S. Supreme Court was asked to hear many of these cases, and it decided to hear four of them. They were combined into one argument under the name *Obergefell v. Hodges*. The Supreme Court began to hear these arguments on April 28, 2015 - the exact day that the musical *TEN BRAVE SECONDS* takes place.

A Brief Glossary

- **Compelling:** very important and persuasive.
- **Discrimination:** when someone is treated differently just because of certain characteristics, like their race or gender.
- **Due Process Clause:** the part of the 14th Amendment that says the states cannot take away someone's life, liberty, or property without due process of law. "Due process of law" means that the government must follow certain procedures, like a trial. These procedures are different depending on what the government is trying to take away.
- **Equal Protection Clause:** the part of the 14th Amendment that guarantees that individuals are treated equally regardless of their race, gender, religion, nationality, or other characteristics.
- **Equal protection of the laws:** the idea that people who are in the same situation must be treated the same by the government.
- **Federalism:** the division of powers between the national and state governments.
- **Fundamental right:** a right that is considered so important that the government must protect it.
- **LGBTQ:** lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning.
- **Majority:** the opinion signed by more than half of the Supreme Court.
- **Marriage license:** a document that shows that the state has given a couple permission to get married. Couples must have a marriage license in order to get married.
- **Sexual orientation:** a part of someone's identity defined by their gender compared with the gender or genders of people they are attracted to.

The 14th Amendment & Gay Marriage (cont.)

The Obergefell v. Hodges Case (2015)

Lawyers for Same-Sex Couples argued that:

- Laws banning same-sex marriage take away important rights from same-sex couples and their families simply because of their sexual orientation. This is discrimination and is not allowed under the 14th Amendment.
- Marriage is a fundamental right. It has been a key part of society for a long time. It is also very important to a lot of people because it represents love.
- States should have to show a compelling (very important) reason to support laws banning same-sex marriage. This is the test that is required to support laws that discriminate based on race. People can't change their sexual orientation, just like people can't change their race. There is no good reason to discriminate against people in same-sex relationships.
- Although the states argue this should be left to the state legislatures to decide, marriage is a fundamental right, and people's rights should not be put up to a vote.

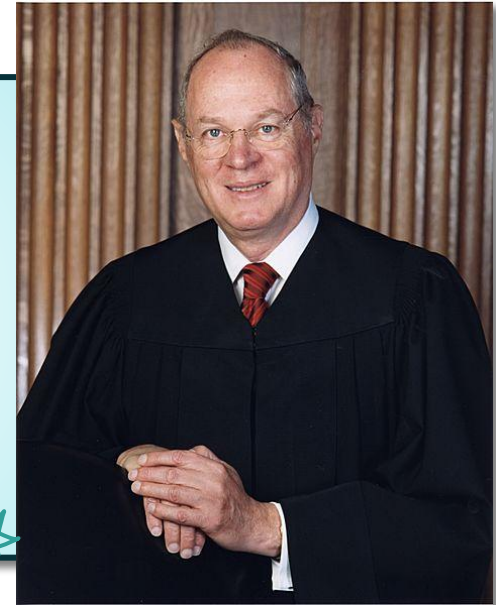
Decision

The Supreme Court ruled for Obergefell and the other same-sex couples in a 5 - 4 decision. Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote the majority opinion, ruling that bans on same-sex marriage are unconstitutional.

The Court said the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment says the government cannot take away certain fundamental rights unless there is a very good reason. The Supreme Court has held for a long time that marriage is one of these fundamental rights. All of the Court's previous decisions assumed marriage was between a man and a woman. However, times have changed and laws should change with society. In this case the Court decided the characteristics of marriage that make it a fundamental right are true for same-sex couples as well. Marriage is a very personal decision for all couples. It creates and protects families and supports society. The Supreme Court said that even though voting on issues is important, fundamental rights like marriage should not be left to a vote. The justices also said that the bans on same-sex marriage violate the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The laws were unconstitutional because they treated people in same-sex relationships differently from how they treated straight people.

"Marriage is sacred to those who live by their religions and offers unique fulfillment to those who find meaning in the secular realm. Its dynamic allows two people to find a life that could not be found alone, for a marriage becomes greater than just the two persons. Rising from the most basic human needs, marriage is essential to our most profound hopes and aspirations."

- Justice Anthony Kennedy,
speaking for the majority



Impact

When the Court decided *Obergefell v. Hodges* on June 26, 2015, many people across the country celebrated. James Obergefell said, "Today's ruling from the Supreme Court affirms what millions across the country already know to be true in our hearts: that our love is equal." Bans in the 14 states that had them were struck down. Same-sex couples now had all the benefits of marriage such as Social Security survivor benefits, being able to file taxes jointly which often results in lower taxes, and being eligible for a spouse's health insurance.

Although many agreed with the Court's decision, others continued to oppose same-sex marriage. Months after the decision, Kim Davis, a county clerk in Kentucky, made the news when she refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Davis was sued by those couples who were denied licenses and jailed for contempt of court for refusing to comply with the court order. She lost her campaign to be re-elected county clerk in 2018 and no longer holds that position within the Kentucky government.

Today families continue to face overwhelming threats to their freedoms. Last year alone, more than 550 anti-LGBTQ+ bills were introduced in states across the country—many targeting LGBTQ+ youth, families, and the transgendered community.

The Science Behind Counting to 10

We've all heard the advice: "*When you're angry, count to ten before you react.*" It sounds simple — even cliché. But counting to ten is far more than a saying; it's actually a proven technique based on psychology and neuroscience that can help you manage intense emotions in real time. If you've ever wondered *why* counting to ten can help you feel calmer and more in control, here's a look at the science behind it, along with tips on how to make the most of this technique.



Why We Get “Hijacked” by Emotions

When we feel threatened, disrespected, or frustrated, the brain's emotional center — known as the amygdala — can take over. The amygdala controls our “fight or flight” response, prompting us to react instinctively and often impulsively. While this response is helpful in real danger, it can lead to overreactions in situations that don't actually pose a physical threat (like an argument with a friend or a difficult conversation).

When emotions take the driver's seat, our rational brain — the prefrontal cortex — is often bypassed. This part of the brain is responsible for planning, judgment, and impulse control. Unfortunately, the amygdala acts much faster than the prefrontal cortex, making it hard to respond thoughtfully in the heat of the moment. This is where counting to ten comes in.

The Science of Counting: How It Calms You Down

Counting to ten is a form of *cognitive distraction* — it gives your brain a brief task that requires minimal cognitive effort, enough to engage your rational thinking but not so much that it becomes overwhelming. Here's how it helps in three key ways:

1. It Gives the Brain a Moment to Cool Off

Counting to ten provides a short, structured break, giving the prefrontal cortex time to “catch up” and override the emotional response from the amygdala. Studies have shown that a short delay can prevent the knee-jerk reaction that can lead to saying something hurtful or making a decision you might later regret.

2. It Refocuses Your Attention

Directing your attention to counting — even just for a few seconds — shifts your focus away from the emotional trigger and onto a neutral task. This redirection can slightly diminish the intensity of the emotion, helping

to break the “thought loop” that can cause emotions to spiral out of control.

3. It Helps Regulate Your Breathing and Heart Rate

When we're upset, our breathing often becomes faster and more shallow, which can make us feel even more anxious. Counting to ten usually prompts slower, deeper breathing, which activates the body's parasympathetic nervous system, responsible for calming us down. This activation leads to a slower heart rate and a reduction in stress hormones, helping your body and mind feel more centered.

ACTIVITY: What is one effective activity that you do to calm and center yourself?

How to Make Counting to Ten Even More Effective

Counting to ten doesn't have to be the end of your calming strategy — it can be the start. Here are a few ways to maximize the effect:

- **Count Mindfully:** Instead of rushing through the numbers, take a deep breath with each count. For example, inhale on “one,” exhale on “two,” and continue this pattern until you reach ten. This combines counting with a breathing exercise for a stronger calming effect.
- **Visualize Each Number:** For some people, imagining the numbers in their mind or even saying them out loud can enhance focus. Picture each number slowly appearing as you count to add an extra layer of distraction from the triggering event.
- **Count Down Instead of Up:** Try counting backward from ten instead. This requires just a bit more concentration, helping you to shift even more focus away from the emotional intensity.

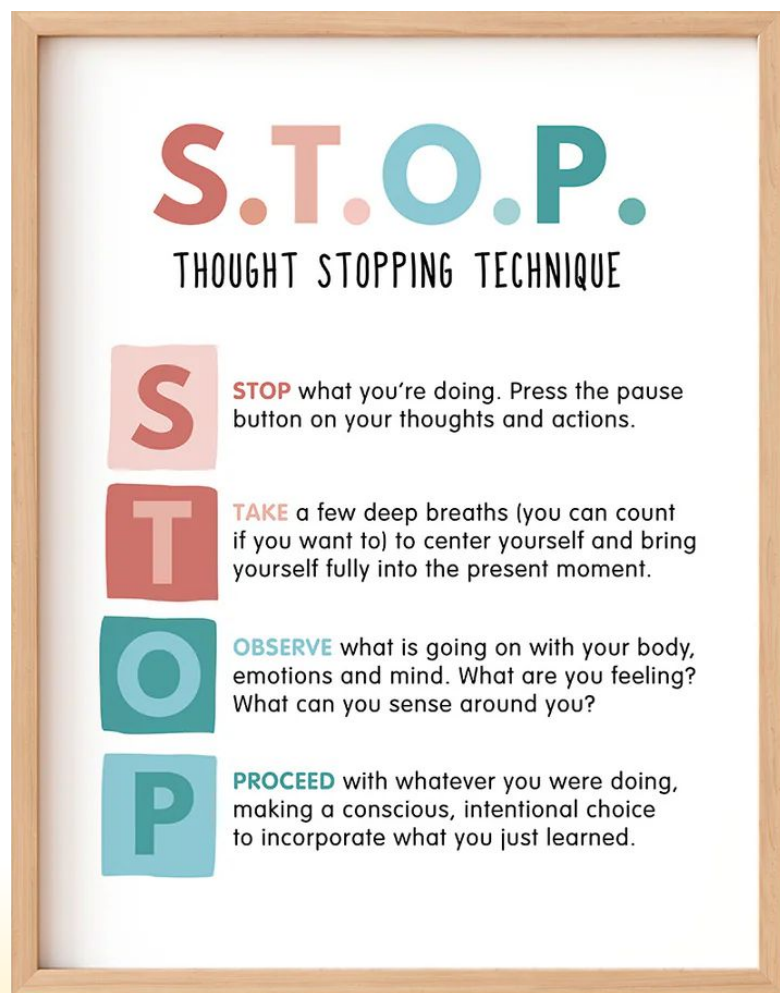
The Science Behind Counting to 10 (cont.)

Use It as Part of a “Pause” Strategy: In emotionally charged situations, counting to ten can be your signal to pause, take a step back, and give yourself permission to assess the situation. Sometimes, just acknowledging, *“I’m feeling frustrated; I need a moment to think”* can be enough to reset your mindset.

When Counting to Ten Isn’t Enough

While counting to ten is a great in-the-moment tool, it’s not a long-term solution for managing chronic stress or deep-seated emotions. If you find yourself frequently struggling to manage anger or emotional responses, other practices like mindfulness focus/meditation or journaling.

Next time you’re on the verge of snapping, try counting. You might be surprised by how much control this little pause can give you over your emotions.



Resources

If you or someone you know is having a crisis —

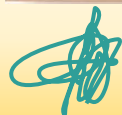
- Talk to a trusted adult (parent, teacher, school nurse, coach, pediatrician, etc.)
 - Contact an anonymous hotline:
 - Text or Call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Hotline (988)
 - The Trevor Lifeline (LGBTQ+ youth):
 - Text ‘START’ to 678-678
 - Call 1-866-488-7386
 - Utah Crisis Line (direct): 801-587-3000 or 833-723-3326. You’ll receive phone support and Mobile Crisis Outreach to come to you.
- Not an emergency but need to talk:
- Utah Warm Line: 801-587-1055 (8 a.m.–11 p.m., daily).

Did You Know?

Obergefell v. Hodges is still the law when it comes to marriage equality. Proposals in states like Idaho and Texas cannot override this constitutional right. Only the Supreme Court can reverse it.

The Respect for Marriage Act, enacted in 2022, requires the federal government and all states to recognize the marriages of same-sex and interracial couples performed validly in any state—even if some states were to attempt to ban those marriages in the future.

If *Obergefell* were ever overturned, couples could still marry in many states, and their marriages would continue to be fully recognized nationwide thanks to the Respect for Marriage Act.



Meet the AEA Cast Members



WILL BLUM* (Carl) Broadway: *Beetlejuice*, *Torch Song*, *School of Rock*, *The Book of Mormon*, and *Grease*. Off-Broadway: Kowalski. National Tours: Stephen Sondheim's *Company*, Rodgers + Hammerstein's *Cinderella*, *Elf the Musical*, *Hair*, *Grease*, and *Seussical*. Regional: Dromio of Syracuse in *The Comedy of Errors* (The Old Globe), Mozart in *Amadeus* (Cleveland Playhouse), George in *Sunday in the Park With George* (CCAE, Craig Noel Nominee), *Harmony* (Alliance, Ahmanson Theatre), *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Paper Mill Playhouse, Philadelphia Theatre Company), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Pittsburgh CLO). TV: *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver*, *Elementary*, *Wacky Races*, and *The Tony Awards*. As a Director: the Off-Broadway premiere of Pedro Antonio Garcia's *The Witness Room* (AMT), Nick Blaemire's *Soon* (East Village Basement). BFA - The Boston Conservatory. IG: @willblum



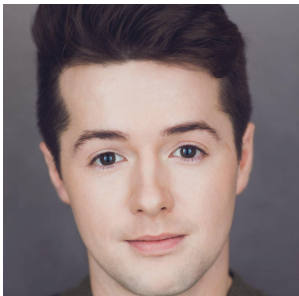
AMBER IMAN* (Sally) Broadway: *Lempicka* (Tony and Drama League nominations), *Soul Doctor*, *Shuffle Along*. Off-Broadway: *Tartuffe*, *Goddess* (AUDELCO Award for Best Actress in a Musical), *The Ford/Hill Project*, *Rent*. National tours: *Hamilton*. Regional: *Goddess* (Berkeley Rep), *Hippest Trip* (A.C.T.). Film: *Steve*, *Blackberry Winter*. TV: "High Maintenance" (HBO). Co-founder of Broadway Advocacy Coalition (Tony Award) and Black Women on Broadway. Howard University. @amberiman_



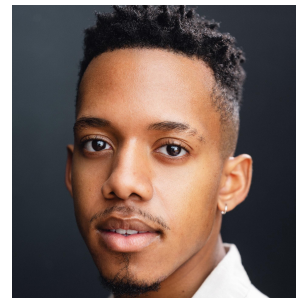
JOHN CARIANI* (Mr. G.) Broadway: *Caroline, or Change* (Grammy Award Nomination); *The Band's Visit*; *Something Rotten!* (Grammy and OCC Nominations); *Fiddler on the Roof* (OCC Award; Tony Award Nomination). Off-Broadway: *The Atlantic*, *The Public*, *Transport Group*. Regional: Williamstown Theatre Festival, The Old Globe, Center Theatre Group, Barrington Stage Company, Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival. Several films. TV: best known for Forensics Tech Beck on *Law & Order* and Michael Falk on The Onion News Network. Playwright: best known for *Almost, Maine* and *LOVE/SICK*. Thanks to creators Jeff and Will and Patrick and Ellie for taking me on a couple of great rides over the past year.



ZACHARY DANIEL JONES* (Teen) is over the moon to make his Pioneer Theatre Company debut! Zach most recently portrayed Angie in the Broadway revival of *Gypsy* starring Audra McDonald. Other credits include... Broadway: *Wicked*, *Beetlejuice* (OBC), *Cats* (Mungojerrie). Off-Broadway: *Black No More*. Regional: *Footloose*, *Gypsy*, *Annie*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Young Frankenstein*, *42nd Street*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Hairspray* (The Muny); *Mamma Mia!*, *Memphis* (TUTS). BFA in Musical Theater from The Boston Conservatory. Endless love and gratitude to the entire company of *Ten Brave Seconds*, CESD, Mom, Howard, Austin, Sean, Jesse, Mookie and Cha Cha!



NICK EIBLER* (he/they) (Teen) is thrilled to make his Pioneer Theatre Company debut! Nick is an actor, producer, director, and writer. Self-identifying as a "Queer artist," Nick feels most at home creating and supporting work that centers the LGBTQIA+ community and our joy. Broadway: *The Prom*. Regional: *Fly* (La Jolla Playhouse), *The World According to Snoopy* (TUTS). As a producer, Nick launched the "Broadway Our Way Cabaret" at their alma mater, Texas State University, the podcast *Queer Queeries*, and the national storytelling series *Queer To Tell*, which currently produces shows in NYC, Austin, Louisville, and Pittsburgh. Much love to his family, the creative team, Tom/Kaycee/Charlie/Jay/Mo (the real ones), and, lastly, to the LGBTQIA+ community. I do what I do for you. IG: @nicktheeibler.



JALEN MICHAEL JONES* (Teen) is excited to return to PTC for the premiere of *Ten Brave Seconds*. Jalen has performed at regional theaters, with productions including *Bye Bye Birdie* (The Kennedy Center); *Newsies* (The Rev Theatre); *Kinky Boots* (The Fulton Theatre and Maine State Music Theatre); *The Prom* (Pioneer Theatre Company), *A Chorus Line* (Cincinnati Playhouse), and *Few Words* (A.C.T. of CT). Jalen would like to thank his parents and loved ones for their utmost support! IG: Jalenjones #PonyUp #CESD



Meet the AEA Cast Members



LAURA LEO KELLY* (they/them) (Teen) is a performer based in NYC—or wherever the good theatre is. After traveling the world as Anybodies in Lonny Price's International Tour of *West Side Story*, they found themselves diving into original work, including the Broadway-bound *Regency Girls* at The Old Globe. Regional favorites: *Once* at CCAE Theatricals (Andrej), *Grease* (Sonny), *Newsies* (Romeo), and *The Buddy Holly Story* (Jerry) at Musical Theatre West; and *Jack & Aiden* at Ground Floor Theatre (Aiden). Off-Off Broadway: *Apocalypse Truck* (Jacob Jr.)—cast album out now! OCTG Award winner, AMDA Alum. Thanks to Lindsay and the ATB Team! Love you, Victoria! @laukell_



CARSON STEWART* (Mike) is over the moon to join the *Ten Brave Seconds* universe. BROADWAY: *The Notebook*. OFF-BROADWAY: *The Gospel According to Heather*. Regionally, Carson has developed work and performed with Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Center Theatre Group, Edinburgh Fringe, WPPAC, and the Center for Wrongful Convictions. A New York-based actor and writer and proud graduate of Northwestern University, Carson is honored to be telling Jeff and Will's story every night. Many thanks to JT, WVD, Ellie, Patrick, Reed, the creative team, the Pioneer Theatre Company team, and his agents at BRS/Gage. Special gratitude to his parents and Mr. Wallenfang, and to every parent and educator who encourages children to be brave. @thegingerbreadboy



LUKE KOLBE MANNIKUS* (Tim) Thrilled to be telling this story with this inspiring group of artists! Select Credits Include: *Bye Bye Birdie* (Kennedy Center), *Ghost of John McCain* (SoHo Playhouse), *Pippin*, *Matilda* (OBC), *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (OBC). UMich MT Alum. Grateful to God and his support system. Believe in yourself, it is one of the most powerful things you can do. @lukemannikus



JESSICA MONEY* (Gabby) is a Philadelphia-based actor and a graduate of Temple University's Musical Theatre and Acting programs. Favorite credits include: Olive Ostrovsky (*Spelling Bee*, Arden Theatre Co.); Nettie (*The Color Purple*, Theatre Horizon, PSF); Cordelia (*Falsettos*, Arden Theatre Co.); Sarah (*Ragtime*, Duluth Playhouse); Emily Webb (*Our Town*, New Light Theatre); Miranda (*The Tempest*, Delaware Shakespeare Company); Audrey (*Little Shop of Horrors*, People's Light). @money226156

