

Tinker v. Des Moines



An Online Conversation with the Tinker v. Des Moines Plaintiffs

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What does *Tinker v. Des Moines* mean to you? Tinker was the student rights case of the Vietnam War protest era. The plaintiffs of the Tinker case have a special story to share with this generation of students.

In 1965, 13-year-old student Mary Beth Tinker, her 15-year-old brother, John; their 15-year-old friend, Christopher Eckhardt; and two other students wore black armbands to school to express their mourning for the dead and injured civilians and soldiers in the Vietnam conflict. They were suspended from school in compliance with a recently enacted school



Christopher Eckhardt and his parents
Des Moines School Board Meeting 1965

district policy forbidding the wearing of armbands. Through their parents, the students filed a complaint at the United States District Court, requesting an injunction ordering the school district to reverse the punishment. When the students did not win at the district or appellate court levels, they petitioned their case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in their favor.

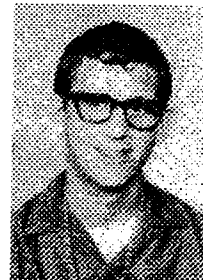
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Mary Beth Tinker



John Tinker



Christopher Eckhardt

The American Bar Association Division for Public Education encourages you to celebrate Law Day (May 1) with "Conversations with Leaders in the Law." In honor of this year's Law Day theme, "Celebrate Your Freedom," Mary Beth and John Tinker and Christopher Eckhardt have agreed to share their unique experiences in an electronic "Conversation" with students across the country by means of the Internet.


In March 1998, the Division for Public Education announced this internet "Conversation" with the Tinker plaintiffs on the ABA Web site, on the National Council for the Social Studies' Web site and sent a mailing to law-related education leaders and law magnet schools across the nation. Interested schools were encouraged to submit questions for the Tinker plaintiffs to a special Email address during the week of March 23-27. Over 130 questions were received from 27 schools. A selection of the questions were forwarded to Mary Beth and John Tinker and Christopher Eckhardt for their responses.



John Tinker, Mary Beth Tinker, and Christopher Eckhardt

Take a look at the case summary and then read the questions and answers. To enrich the learning experience, review the brief biographies of Mary Beth and John Tinker and Christopher Eckhardt and explore other resources about the Tinker case.

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Questions and Answers

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Over 130 questions were received from 27 schools around the country. A selection of the questions were forwarded to [Mary Beth](#) and [John Tinker](#) and [Christopher Eckhardt](#) for their responses. They fall into four general categories:

- [Perspectives Then](#)
- [Effect on Relationships with Family and Friends](#)
- [Reflecting Personally](#)
- [Opinions on Rights in the U.S. Today](#)

Before reading the questions and answers, a quick look at the case summary will help you understand the issues involved. You will find even more information relevant to the case, as well as a classroom activity, by checking out additional resources.

Mary Beth and John Tinker and Christopher Eckhardt all volunteered to participate in this Internet "Conversation" because of their continued concern about students' rights. You can read more about them in their brief biographies.

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Perspectives Then

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Below are seven questions submitted by students at a variety of schools, asking the Tinker plaintiffs about their perspectives at the time of their involvement in the students' rights case (1965-69). The name of the plaintiff answering each question is in brackets at the end of the answer.

1. Who was your inspiration to protest the war by wearing black armbands to school? Please explain why.

Who: The wounded, maimed, dying, and dead Americans and Vietnamese soldiers and civilians, of whom approximately 80% were civilian children, women, and men, on both sides of the 17th parallel of north latitude.

Why: We were involved in a civil war of Vietnam and we did not belong there. I do not recall that they involved themselves in our American Civil War.

On 9-2-45, Ho Chi Minh made a public declaration of Vietnamese independence before 500,000 people in Ha Noi. He began his speech: "We hold truths that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Does that sound like the enemy or an American founding father?

If we do not learn from history, then we are doomed to repeat it.

Vietnamese General Tran Hung Dao defeated the Mongols in the year 1284, and said: "We must weaken (the enemy) by drawing him into protracted campaigns... When the enemy is away from home for a long time and produces no victories and families learn of their dead, then the enemy population at home becomes dissatisfied and considers it a Mandate from Heaven that their armies be recalled. Time is always in our favor. Our climate, mountains and jungles discourage the enemy. But for us they offer sanctuary and a place from which to attack."

That was just one piece of history we did not learn from the Vietnamese people. [Chris Eckhardt]

2. What did you know about the legal system before becoming involved in the *Tinker v. Des Moines* case, and what did you learn from the process?

In my opinion, as a publicly educated student, in one of the top 5 best publicly educated states (Iowa) in 1965, I think I knew a lot about the American judicial system. I attended Perkins Elementary School, Franklin Junior High School, and Theodore Roosevelt High School, all in Des Moines, Iowa, so I had many excellent teachers. At Perkins and Franklin, I was elected President of the Student Council. At Franklin, I memorized The Gettysburg Address; I was promoted to advanced English classes; I was voted "Most Likely To Succeed", and kid with the "Cleanest Locker."

I learned that justice delayed is justice denied. I learned that the judicial system runs slow, and even slower now, since our current Republican controlled Congress chooses to stall the approval of appointing federal judges recommended by our President and needed by our country. I learned that the process, although slow, does work. I learned also that with faith, and patience, justice prevails. [Chris Eckhardt]

3. Where did you get the courage to bring this case (contesting your suspension for wearing black armbands to school) to the court?

Actually it took less courage than some people might think. I did not experience anywhere near the attacks that say,

the Little Rock students faced, when they integrated Arkansas' schools. My family did get some threats on our lives and on our house. Someone called on Christmas eve and said that the house would be blown up by morning. Some other people threw red paint on our house and threatened to kill me. I learned at an early age about the extreme right wing.

1965 was a time in history filled with courageous people taking risks. In 1963 Martin Luther King led the march on Washington and gave his "I have a dream" speech. Civil rights workers were being killed. Buddhist monks were lighting themselves on fire and burning to death to bring attention to the Vietnam war. American servicemen and women were going through the hell of war, and 1600 had already been killed. The Vietnamese people were watching their children burned by napalm. There were a lot of examples of courage.

My parents had a lot of courage. They were spiritual people (my father was a Methodist minister) who put their beliefs into action. "Brotherhood" and "peace" were ideals that my parents worked hard for, but this did not always make them popular. [\[Mary Beth Tinker\]](#)

4. What was it like for a 13 year old, 15 year old, and 16 year old to go to trial to contest your suspension?

First, to set one part of the record straight, Mary Beth was 13, John was 15, and although 99% of the literature for the past 30+ years wants to age me to being 16, I, like John, was only 15 years old. But, who's counting?

At one point when I was on the witness stand, I testified how the Vice-Principal of Roosevelt, on 12-16-65, asked me to remove my black arm band, and I refused on constitutional grounds. Then he asked me, "Do you want a busted nose?" While repeating this, I watched from the witness stand, as the Vice-Principal walked out of the courtroom. I still don't know whether it was out of shame, or just maybe because he needed to go to the bathroom. [\[Chris Eckhardt\]](#)

5. What did you really think was going to happen when the court case started?

I felt from the beginning that we were right, and that we would win. Later I was not so sure we would win, but I still thought we were right. [\[John Tinker\]](#)

6. In connection with your wearing the black armbands to school, the suspension, and the subsequent court case, were you ever intimidated by the court, the public, or by peers enough to want to give up or back down?

The tension I felt at the time that was due to my involvement in the armband case was not so much the result of intimidation in any overt sense. Rather, it was the result of social pressures from the cliques – the "in-crowd", and was more in the form of psychological abuse than physical threat.

Everyone involved in the armband case had to deal with the pressures coming from their individual circumstances. Some of our friends could not wear armbands because their parents' jobs were threatened. Chris, Mary Beth and I had the support of our parents, and there wasn't a problem with our parents' employers. I had friends at school who defended me openly. And, of course, we had the support of the peace community. No, I never wanted to back down. I thought that we were right, and that we should pursue the case as far as possible. [\[John Tinker\]](#)

7. After the Supreme Court decision in your favor in the *Tinker v. Des Moines* case, did you get much attention from officials at school or the local media?

After the Supreme Court decision, we got a lot of attention from the local and national media. By that time, we had moved to St. Louis and I was in a different school. I was in 11th grade. It was 1968. The school officials in my new school in St. Louis did not really give it much attention.

I remember Time magazine coming to the school and taking pictures of me in chemistry class. It was kind of embarrassing, especially since I had just started going to that school a few months earlier. But in a way, I was proud. [\[Mary Beth Tinker\]](#)

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Effect on Relationships with Family and Friends

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Below are four questions submitted by students at a variety of schools, asking the Tinker plaintiffs about how their involvement in the students' rights case affected their relationships with their families and friends. The name of the plaintiff answering each question is in brackets at the end of the answer.

1. Were your parents politically active? Did they have any influence on your wearing the black armbands to school?

Yes, all four parents involved (William and Maggie Eckhardt, and Lorena Jeanne and Leonard Tinker) were active politically, and had been involved in the civil rights and peace movements. They did not try to convince us to wear armbands, but they supported us in our protest. [John Tinker]

2. Did any of the students suspended for wearing black armbands personally know someone killed in Vietnam?

I did not personally know anyone killed in Vietnam. I would hear about kids at the high school who were going to Vietnam and I heard of some deaths in Des Moines. I do not know if the other students knew anyone personally, but I think they probably did because they were older and in high school. [Mary Beth Tinker]

3. What did your friends think about your wearing the black armbands to school?

My girlfriend dropped me and told me I could no longer come over to her house. Her father was a former military officer and didn't appreciate my position.

A buddy of mine, at whose house I would occasionally sleep over, lived south of Grand Ave. in Des Moines. This was an area of Des Moines known for its opulent homes. His father was a businessman, and on one occasion while I was there, his father had consumed too much alcohol. He told me he didn't care for my anti-war opinions and told me to get out of his home. I, of course, complied. That buddy stayed my buddy, and years later, his father would deny my eviction ever occurred. However, his family and I knew better.

Of course today, most of those who opposed me back then, say now that they really supported me. But George Wallace now says his best friend is an African-American. Regardless, we all learn at different rates of speed, but as long as learning is happening, that's good. It is healthier individually and as a nation to forgive our enemies and trespassers and get on with the joy and gift of living. [Chris Eckhardt]

4. Have you explained your "protest" to your children?

I have explained the case many times to my son, who is now 17. He knows all about it. He has seen books and articles about the case. I think he is proud of his mother. I remember one funny thing that happened. Once my son was suspended for throwing an eraser in 6th grade and he asked the principal if she had ever heard of the "Tinker" case. She said she had, but that it wasn't going to help him in his situation! [Mary Beth Tinker]

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Reflecting Personally

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Below are four questions submitted by students at a variety of schools, asking the Tinker plaintiffs personal questions about their lives. The name of the plaintiff answering each question is in brackets at the end of the answer.

1. How has your involvement in the *Tinker v. Des Moines* case affected the choices you have made throughout life?

For one thing, I have seen for myself that you never know who will have the "last word". We have recently seen the southern Baptist church apologizing for their support of slavery, Catholics and other Christians apologizing for their role in the Nazi holocaust, and the American government apologizing to the American Indians. Eventually, I think that apologies will be made for the way that gay people have been treated, too. So, I am less influenced by what may be a popular choice, because I know that popular choices do not always stand the test of history. [Mary Beth Tinker]

2. From a personal perspective, what was your greatest loss and greatest gain from your involvement in the *Tinker v. Des Moines* case?

Tinker v. Des Moines reinforced my belief that one person can make a difference on our planet Earth. I developed a new appreciation for the values of peace, freedom, equality, and spirituality, that my parents exposed me to and allowed me to explore on my own. [Chris Eckhardt]

3. Did your involvement in the armband demonstration and subsequent Supreme Court case in any way affect your professional future? Did it make it more difficult/easier to find a job or get into college?

No, the case did not adversely affect either my college education or my employment. It was not related to the armband case, but I did become disillusioned with our society during the years of the Vietnam war. That war, along with the nuclear arms race, convinced me not to expect that society would automatically be mature or sane. I "dropped out" in the sense that I abandoned formal education, and decided to educate myself, largely through reading and traveling. One of the things I learned was that education is different from merely receiving a degree, and that a degree is no guarantee against being closed-minded. [John Tinker]

4. Has contact over the years with those who were involved in your wearing the black armbands to school, suspension, and subsequent court case healed old "wounds" and replaced hard feelings with understanding?

In my particular case, I did not have especially stressful relationships with the school administration after wearing the armband. Even as the principal of my high school told me that I could not return to school with the armband on, he did so with a certain amount of respect. And I did not disrespect him for doing what he thought he had to do, even though I thought he was wrong. Several teachers did abuse me somewhat because of my political beliefs, but I never had any further contact with them after I graduated from high school. On the other hand, one teacher was especially supportive. At high school reunions, people are friendly to me, and seem to be proud of the armband case. [John Tinker]

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Opinions on Rights in the U.S. Today

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Below are five questions submitted by students at a variety of schools, asking the Tinker plaintiffs about their opinions on rights in the U.S. today. The name of the plaintiff answering each question is in brackets at the end of the answer.

1. Have your views on student protest changed? Would/do you support your children's political activities?

When students take action and speak up on the important issues of the day, it may be called "protest". They are usually trying to have an effect on decisions that will go down in history, and they should be encouraged. There are so many injustices in our world today. In order to be a democracy, we need the people -- all the people, including students -- to be involved.

I support the political activities of students who are trying to make a positive impact on the world. You have more power than you may realize! [Mary Beth Tinker]

2. Do you think schools today grant students all the rights they are entitled to under the Constitution?

Some schools probably do and some probably don't. It would depend on how progressive your parents/family, teachers, administrators, and school boards are. If they are denying you your perceived constitutional rights, use your common sense and get over it, or sue them. [Chris Eckhardt]

3. Since the time of your wearing black armbands to school, have you been active in any other political or protest activities?

Yes, I have remained interested in the issues of our times, and have been active when I thought I could help. I worked with the Mobilization for Survival to educate people about the dangers of nuclear power and nuclear proliferation.

Later, I spent parts of four different years in Nicaragua during the time of the CIA/Contra war against that country. There I was working with a project called Peace Parts, which I organized. The purpose of the project was to take repair parts into that country during the time of the US embargo against Nicaragua. During the four years of its existence, Peace Parts delivered about twenty tons of supplies to Nicaragua, including electronic parts to the Ministry of Health, and many bicycles and sewing machines, which were distributed to cooperatives. [John Tinker]

4. What exceptions, if any, would you make to freedom of expression today? Why?

I would tend to make very few exceptions to freedom of expression. If there is some other crime being committed, then that would still be a crime, but I do not generally trust our authorities to judge what speech or expression ultimately will have a good or bad effect on society. I think it is better that we know what people think, rather than forcing ideas to hide, and possibly fester. However, I would not consider the weary example of yelling "fire" in a crowded theater to be primarily an issue of expression because, if its intent is to create mayhem, then that would be a crime in its own right.

But in terms of current issues, I am not in favor of prohibiting the wearing of gang colors, for example. I think it is a sad commentary on our society that school authorities are attempting to deal with the problems of gangs by taking such an approach. To me it is covering up a symptom, rather than looking for the cause of a problem. All other things being equal, for authority to resort to suppressing the expression of ideas, is really to admit that they do not have

much positive to contribute to the discussion in the first place.

Recently in the news I heard about a situation where a student was punished for wearing a Pepsi shirt on a day when everyone was supposed to wear a Coke shirt. This is an example of why never to expect authority to be automatically sane.

Power corrupts. This is true of the power given to school authorities, as much as it is true of the power held by political leaders. In my opinion there is no better way to prepare students for their responsibilities in our democracy, than to encourage them to deal with serious ideas, in a democratic way. Of course, not all ideas are valid or useful. But making mistakes is also part of one's education. I think it is best to teach the principles of democracy by exemplifying them. [John Tinker]

5. What do you think of students standing up for their rights today?

I'm proud of those of you who do that. Never forget that students are "persons" under our Constitution. Practice democracy daily, and exercise your rights. Use it or lose it. Stand up not only for your rights, but also for your fellow students' rights. Let us respect each other and rise up together.

In the early 1960's, I marched for African-American rights. I'm not an African-American. But bigotry, oppression, discrimination, and prejudice were being used like a brick of hate against them. So whenever or wherever bricks of hate are thrown at any of us, then together we must stand up and peacefully take action against those bricks and brick throwers. You may choose to remain silent and stand on the sidelines because that brick doesn't have your name on it. If you do, then who will be left to defend you when someone puts your name on one of those bricks?

Students today can change America into an even better place to live, not only for yourselves, but for us all. Racism, sexism, ageism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, discrimination, prejudice, and bigotry are all bricks of hate.

Stand up for all of our people of color; stand up for all of our sisters; stand up for all of our people of faith; stand up for all of our senior citizens; stand up for all of our gay brothers and lesbian sisters; for only then, when we stand together with all of our differences, can we demolish the bricks of hate.

To the students of America, I thank you for being here with your hopes, dreams, energy, and idealism. I embrace you. Stand up for your rights and others' rights. Keep the faith and hope alive. Protect our Constitution. Make Law Day everyday. Break the bricks of hate. Remember, Justice Abe Fortas wrote,

" ... It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate..."

But, in our system, undifferentiated fear or apprehension of disturbance is not enough to overcome the right to freedom of expression. Any departure from absolute regimentation may cause trouble. Any variation from the majority's opinion may inspire fear. Any word spoken, in class, in the lunchroom, or on the campus, that deviates from the views of another person may start an argument or cause a disturbance. But our Constitution says we must take this risk, *Terminiello v. Chicago*, 337 U. S. 1 (1949); and our history says that it is this sort of hazardous freedom - this kind of openness - that is [393 U. S. 503, 509] the basis of our national strength and of the independence and vigor of Americans who grow up and live in this relatively permissive, often disputatious, society." (U.S. Supreme Court opinion, Feb. 24, 1969) [Christopher Eckhardt]

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Case Summary

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Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District 399 U.S. 503 (1969)

The Facts

In December, 1965, a group of adults and students decided to publicize their opposition to the Vietnam conflict by wearing black armbands during the holiday season and by fasting December 16 and New Year's Eve. Several of the students present had engaged in similar activities in the past, and they decided to participate in this activity.

The principals of the Des Moines schools heard about the plan and, on December 14, adopted a policy that forbade the wearing of an armband to school. Students who refused to remove such armbands would be suspended until they complied.

On December 16, several students who knew about the regulation wore armbands to school: Paul Tinker, 8 years old and in the second grade, Hope Tinker, 11 years old and in the fifth grade, Mary Beth Tinker, 13 years old and in junior high school, and Christopher Eckhardt, a 15-year-old high school student. The following day, John Tinker, a 15-year-old high school student, wore his armband to school.

The students were suspended and were told not to return to school unless they removed their armbands. They stayed away from school until after New Year's Day, when the planned period for wearing the armbands had expired.

Several incidents took place on the day the students wore the bands. There were comments and warnings by other students, some poking fun at them and an older football player warned other students they had better let the protestors alone.

The suspended students, through their fathers, filed a complaint with the United States District Court, asking for an injunction ordering the school officials not to punish them. In addition, they sought nominal damages – a small or token sum of money, usually \$1.00, to show that legal injury has been suffered.

The Arguments

In a criminal case, proof is necessary beyond a reasonable doubt, but since this was a civil proceeding, the attorneys for the Tinker children only had to prove by a fair preponderance of the evidence that their side was right.

The plaintiffs argued, in the first place, that the wearing of armbands was the equivalent of speech and was thus protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments. The First Amendment prohibits Congress from abridging freedom of speech, and the Supreme Court has expanded this prohibition to states under the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment ("No State shall ... deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law..." by interpreting liberty' to encompass the fundamental rights guaranteed by the First Amendment.

The second line of argument was that the action of the school authorities was capricious, arbitrary, and unreasonable because it simply singled out one form of expression – the black armband – rather than prohibiting the wearing of all controversial insignia. Furthermore, the administrators had permitted the wearing of political campaign buttons, and even the Iron Cross, in the schools. The action of the school authorities would have been understandable if they could show that trouble might ensue in the school. However, the school system did not have a history of disruptions and, in any event, a few armbands in a school system of 18,000 students, the plaintiffs argued, did not warrant the action of the school administrators.

The defendants responded with equally effective arguments. Amendment X of the Constitution vests the states with power over the educational system. Acting in the name of the state and with the powers vested in them, school authorities have the responsibility to take measures to protect the health, welfare, and safety of the students under

their supervision.

The school regulation against black armbands was necessary to preserve discipline in the school. The Vietnam War was a divisive conflict marked by public protest meetings, draft card burnings, and a march on Washington. A former student of one of the high schools had been killed in Vietnam and some of his friends might have reacted strongly to the wearers of armbands. Students at one of the schools had been heard to say that if black armbands were permitted, they would wear armbands of another color. The situation seemed rife with rumors of trouble and the school administrators were best qualified to judge the situation. The regulation against the black armbands had been necessary to maintain discipline in the school and to prevent any interference with learning.

The Decision


The plaintiffs' argument prevailed. The decision was seven to two in favor of Tinker. The Court noted,

"Certainly where there is no finding and no showing that engaging in the forbidden conduct would materially and substantially interfere with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school, the prohibition cannot be sustained." The Court further observed, "In our system, state operated schools may not be enclaves of totalitarianism. School officials do not possess absolute authority over their students. Students in school as well as out of school are persons' under our Constitution. They are possessed of fundamental rights which the State must respect, just as they themselves must respect their obligations to the State. In our system, students may not be regarded as closed-circuit recipients of only that which the State chooses to communicate. They may not be confined to the expression of those sentiments that are officially approved. In the absence of a specific showing of constitutionally valid reasons to regulate their speech, students are entitled to freedom of expression of their views."

[Adapted from "The Case for the Case Study Approach" by Isidore Starr, Update on Law-Related Education, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 1977), pp. 11-12]

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Tinker v. Des Moines

Resources for the Tinker v. Des Moines "Online Conversation"

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Books:

The Courage of Their Convictions by Peter Irons (New York: The Free Press, 1988) pp. 231-252 A chapter is devoted to the events leading up to and the legal arguments of the Tinker case. The context of the case is explored using background information about the Tinker family and Mary Beth Tinker's reflections on her role in the events surrounding the case.

The Struggle for Student Rights: *Tinker v. Des Moines* and the 1960s by John W. Johnson (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1997) A detailed description of the Tinker case, beginning with the events leading up to the armband demonstration and then following the course of events through the U.S. Supreme Court decision and beyond. It is particularly informative about the process followed by the plaintiffs and respondents in moving through the court system to the Supreme Court.

Classroom activity:

"Balancing Power and Liberty in the School" in Sure-Fire Presentations, pp.16-19. *Tinker v. Des Moines* is among three case studies used to explore the need to balance students' rights and the authority of a governing body. (PC# 497-0010) \$5.00 Contact: American Bar Association Service Center, 800/285-2221.

Magazine:

Goldfinch magazine, Vol. 18, Number 1, Fall 1996. This issue is dedicated to Iowa's Kid Heroes. The magazine is published by the State Historical Society of Iowa

Videotape:

Profiles of Freedom: A Living Bill of Rights

Features interviews with key players and audio footage of actual arguments made before the Supreme Court on Tinker and three other landmark cases. Includes teacher's guide. (1997) 28 minutes (#B2018T) \$59.95 Contact: Close Up Foundation, 800/765-3131.

Web sites:

This site has full text of the written opinions of the U.S. Supreme Court for the *Tinker v. Des Moines* case. You will also find much more information about the Supreme Court and the justices in this site.

- [The Oyez Supreme Court Database](#)



Oral arguments

FindLaw Written Opinions of the Court

These sites give background information about the Vietnam War:

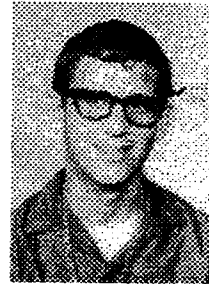
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Biography of Christopher Eckhardt

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After spending two years in Iowa selling life and health insurance, Chris published his own newspaper called Pax Today, whose advertisers included the National Democratic and Republican Parties. One of his first jobs was as a child care worker for the Canadian Ministry of Corrections at the Oakville Reception and Assessment Center in Ontario. He assisted in assessing and evaluating children in a maximum security setting to determine their next appropriate placement. He then took a position as a child care coordinator at Iowa Children and Family Services in Des Moines. He was soon hosting "Eckhardt's Enquiry," a live talk show, Monday through Friday from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m., on cable television. He became an "on call" mediator for the Polk County Attorney, focusing on crises with families and juveniles, gang members, and related situations.



Christopher Eckhardt

Chris went on to positions in psychiatric, child care, and juvenile detention facilities in Iowa and Florida. He moved to Florida in order to assist in the care of his elderly parents. Later, he worked for the State of Florida in establishing and collecting child support from the employed parents of children receiving public assistance. In the early 90s Chris established The Tutor, to provide tutoring and counseling for youth with social and remedial problems in school. He also established Eckhardt and Associates, to provide political consultation to people seeking election to public office.

In 1994 Chris completed his B.A. in political science at University of South Florida, where he had been the USF Student Government Supreme Court Chief Justice during his final year.

Chris believes freedom of speech and expression will best be protected when every classroom in America is connected to the Internet. He is interested in continuing the "Online Conversation" about the Tinker case and students' rights. He can be reached at the Email address: c.eckhardt@mci2000.com



John Tinker, Mary Beth Tinker, and Christopher Eckhardt

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Biography of John Tinker

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After high school, John spent two years at the University of Iowa. In the era of the Vietnam war and the nuclear arms race, he became generally disillusioned with the course society was taking. He decided to drop out of school and study on his own.

John moved into a small truck to minimize his living expenses and held a number of jobs, including working on a shrimp boat and driving a city bus. He studied radio electronics and became the chief engineer for a small AM station. John disassembled electronic equipment and opened a store called "Inventors' Supply" to sell them. During the war in Nicaragua he read an account of the impoverished situation there and organized a project to carry repair parts to that country.



John Tinker

When micro-computer kits were first available, he obtained one and learned to program. Programming became his primary means of support, and he is now part of a design team that is developing an invoicing system for one of the large telecommunications companies.

Recently John bought a large school building in a small town in Missouri and is turning it into his home. His avocation is social observer. He is concerned that we are not taking a sufficiently long view of our priorities. He worries that those who benefit the most from society do not feel much of an obligation to the rest of the people. The main social issue that he is watching today is the situation in Chiapas, Mexico.

John is interested in continuing the "Online Conversation" about the Tinker case and students' rights. He can be reached at the Email address: jtinker@mail.coin.missouri.edu



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