SOCIAL ISSUE: 
Students’ Rights

Causes and Research
Have you ever heard the saying, “An apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”? This usually means that a child is just like his or her parents. This statement is true for Mary Beth Tinker. Her parents were activists. They cared about social justice and peace issues. In 1964, Mary Beth’s parents went to Mississippi to protect the rights of African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement. Mary Beth learned from her parents how to take a stand to create change.

As Mary Beth grew older, she became more aware of problems around the world. In 1965, Mary Beth and her brother were watching the news on TV. They saw violent images about the US war in Vietnam. They were upset because tens of thousands of US soldiers and millions of Vietnamese people were being killed and hurt.

Goals and Obstacles
Mary Beth was only 13 years old and in the eighth grade. She wasn’t sure that anything she did would be able to stop a war. Mary Beth also knew that she might get in trouble for taking a stand. She said, “I had examples of people who stood up for what they believed in, like my parents, Martin Luther King, and the kids who took part in the Birmingham Children’s crusade against segregation.

“Students and teachers do not shed their constitutional rights...at the schoolhouse gate.”
— Justice Abe Fortas

THE FACTS
› Born in 1952
› Mary Beth was a shy student
› Suspended from school for using her First Amendment Rights

VOCABULARY
Activist › a person who takes action to fix a problem in their community
Mourn › the act of feeling and showing sadness because of a loss
Suspend › to be forced to stay home from school and miss classes

SOURCES
› http://yousngheroesadvisors.libertymuseum.org/heroes/marybeth

Photo credit: TinkerTourUSA.org
in 1963. We had seen those kids on TV. Even when they were arrested and attacked with dogs and fire hoses, they kept marching. So I got the idea that sometimes you should still do that.” Mary Beth knew that she could not sit by and watch horrible things happen to families and children on the other side of the world. She knew that if she could convince more people to care about the Vietnam War, then the US government might decide to end it. She decided to take action!

**Actions**

Mary Beth, her brother, and some of her friends made a plan. They decided to wear black armbands to school to show that they were against the war. The armband represented a wish for peace, and to **mourn** the lives lost in the war. The principal found out about Mary Beth’s plan and made a new rule saying that anyone who wore an armband would be asked to take it off and if they didn’t, they would be suspended.

Mary Beth and her friends decided not to follow the new rule. On December 16, 1965, Mary Beth and her friends wore their armbands to school. Some of their classmates teased them, but most of them wanted to learn more about the war. They were impressed that Mary Beth and her friends were standing up for their beliefs.

After lunch when Mary Beth got to math class, her teacher was waiting at the door with a pink slip for her. Mary Beth took the pink slip and went to the office. The principal asked Mary Beth to take off the armband. Mary Beth was scared so she took the armband off and went back to class. That night, Mary Beth found out the principal decided to **suspend** her and her friends for wearing the armbands.

**Impact**

Mary Beth believed that students should have the right to say what they think. She believed that the First Amendment gives adults and children the same rights. The United States Supreme Court agreed with Mary Beth. In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled that students couldn’t be punished for peacefully expressing their opinions in school.