



PRESIDENTS' DAY

Freedom's Feast PRESIDENTS' DAY

On-line Ceremonies to get the most out of your AMERICAN holiday Celebrations.

★ WE THE PEOPLE - A BACKGROUND GUIDE ★

THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Children aren't the "people" our founders had in mind when they wrote the Constitution. But children have tested the limits and demonstrated the power of the Constitution.

The stories below feature some of these young people and show how our Constitution gives ordinary citizens the power to do extraordinary things.

Three Supreme Court stories about children and the First Amendment

1. Tinker vs. Des Moines School District, 1969 *Free Speech*



WHO John and Marybeth Tinker, ages 15 and 13, and their friend Chris Eckhardt, age 16.

WHERE Des Moines, Iowa (Des Moines School District)

WHAT Felt suspension from their Des Moines public school for wearing black armbands to protest the Vietnam War violated their First Amendment rights. The Court's decision extended our notion of free speech and became a landmark case in free speech for students. Justice Fortas stated, "students do not shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

2. Board of Education v. Pico, 1982 *Access to information & ideas*



WHO Steven Pico, age 17, and four of his schoolmates.

WHERE Levittown, New York (Island Trees School District)

WHAT Objected to a decision by a school committee to remove nine books from their junior and high school libraries. This violated their First Amendment right to, as Justice Brennan put it in his majority ruling, "receive information and ideas" related to the sender's "right to send them." The Court determined that "local school boards may not remove books from school libraries simply because they dislike the ideas contained in these books."

3. Lee v. Weisman, 1992 *Establishment of religion*



WHO Deborah Weisman and her father, Daniel Weisman

WHERE Providence, Rhode Island (Providence Public Schools)

WHAT Objected to formal religious prayers included in Deborah's 1986 middle school graduation services. The Court found that the practice violated the First Amendment "establishment of religion" clause because the state sponsored a religious practice and point of view.



THE CONSTITUTION

The document that records & enforces the basic laws, functions, and limits of the United States government.

- Created September 17, 1787
- Contains 4,400 words
- Is the shortest and oldest national constitution in the world
- Has been amended 27 times



The Constitution Center

We The People

National Archives

THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people to peaceably assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Photo of Constitutional Convention courtesy of the [Library of Congress](#). Photo of John & Marybeth Tinker courtesy of [Syracuse University](#). Photo of Deborah & Daniel Weisman courtesy of [C-SPAN](#).

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Illustrations by Christine Marie Larsen



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THE FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT

Inspiring Stories about Children and the Fourteenth Amendment

1. **Barbara Johns**, age 16 (1951) *Fighting for our 14th amendment rights*



WHERE Prince Edward County, rural Virginia.

WHAT Barbara Johns was a high school junior at Moton High School in Prince Edward County when she finally decided enough was enough. She was no longer willing to accept the substandard school that she and her schoolmates were forced to attend. On April 23, 1951, she organized a school-wide walkout in protest. NAACP lawyers represented Johns and other students in Virginia courts in a desegregation suit. They lost, but their case became part of the larger *Brown v. Board of Education* case heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. The historic May 17, 1954 decision permanently outlawed segregation in schools.

2. **Claudette Colvin**, age 15 (1955) *Resisting & helping end bus segregation*



WHERE Montgomery, Alabama

WHAT One day during a bus ride home from Booker T. Washington High School in Montgomery, Alabama, Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat to a white bus rider. Claudette argued her constitutional rights were being violated. She was forcefully removed from the bus and arrested. Claudette was the first person to resist bus segregation in the South. The U.S. Supreme Court case stemming from this incident, helped to end bus segregation in Alabama, and eventually, the country.

3. **Ryan White**, age 13 *The boy who wasn't looking for a cause*



WHERE Kokoma, Indiana (Western School Corporation)

WHAT Ryan was only 13 when he contracted AIDS in 1984 through treatment for his hemophilia. Ryan faced terrible discrimination and ignorance as he fought his right to attend school and spoke out for AIDS research & public awareness campaigns. He provided testimony before the Presidential Commission on AIDS and gave a face to a disease that many people did not want to face. Thousands mourned his death in 1990. Hundreds of thousands have benefited from the legislation that came from his determination to exercise his rights.

Photo of Barbara Johns courtesy of [Washington & Lee University](#). Photo of Claudette Colvin courtesy of [New York Times](#). Photo of Ryan White courtesy of [Indiana University Bloomington](#).

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THE BILL OF RIGHTS

The first 10 amendments made to the Constitution in 1791. Outlines basic, individual rights our Founders wanted protected in the Constitution which many believe help define America's unique character.



[Newseum](#)

[National Archives](#)

THE FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. 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 laws.