

Activity sheet: Identifying Plagiarism

Please read the following scenarios and answer the questions on a separate sheet of paper.

A: Maria got an I-Pod for her birthday. Then she discovered Kazaa on the Internet and downloaded a song or two everyday. Maria thought it was great that she could download all her favorite tunes for free.

*Do you think Maria has done anything wrong? Why?
Is anyone hurt by her actions? Who?
How would you feel if you were the songwriter?*

B: In the movie *Bring it On* (2000), cheerleaders from a San Diego high school won a national competition several years in a row with cheers they did not know were created by a teammate who spied on an East Compton squad. They discovered this only a couple weeks before the regional competition and hired a choreographer to help them design a new program, which they performed instead. Another squad performed that same routine, also learned from the choreographer. For the national finals, the San Diego squad created their own piece and won second place.

*Do you find anything in this scenario problematic? Why?
Who, if anyone, gets hurt by these actions?
Are there parallels between this scenario and classroom plagiarism?*

C: Desmond's teacher assigned a history paper six weeks before it was due. Five weeks pass, and Desmond has been busy with work from other classes. He also works after school, making it difficult to get started on the paper. He wants to do well since the paper counts for 20% of the course grade. Desmond soon feels panicky because the paper requires more than one week of effort. His solution is to photocopy pages from sources that deal with his topic. Using whole paragraphs from these pages, he hurriedly puts together his paper. He completes the assignment without including the sources he used.

*Has Desmond done anything wrong?
Why did this happen?
Whom, if anyone, do his actions hurt?*

D: In Mr. Thompson's SAT Prep class, students were asked to look up 20 vocabulary words and then use each word correctly in an original sentence. For the word "indolent," Robert and Ling handed in the following sentences:

Robert's: Ashlee was indolent when she watched TV instead of doing her homework.
Ling's: Ty was indolent when he played videogames instead of doing his homework.

*Have Robert and Ling done anything wrong?
What if all 20 sentences seemed similar? Would this change your response?
Whom, if anyone, do their actions hurt?*

(over)

Identifying Plagiarism, cont.

E: Students in Dr. Emily Saltzer's biology course attend weekly lab sessions. They work in pairs to complete the lab, and then each writes an individual report that gets graded. Sheila and Seth worked together on a forensics problem that asked them to determine which of four chemicals killed a laboratory frog and what was the time of death. When Sheila was completing her report, she asked Seth if she could look at the formulas he used to complete his calculations. She liked how he wrote his conclusion, and she included it in her report.

*Has anyone broken the rules here? If so, who? How?
If you were the teacher, would you modify the assignment? If so, how?*

F: Jeni received an assignment for a philosophy research paper due at the end of the semester. Not one to wait until the last minute, she visited the library beginning in the third week of the semester. She began taking notes and made photocopies of material that would take too long to copy by hand. One week before the paper was due, Jeni had compiled an impressive number of materials relevant to her topic. She was now ready to write her paper. Unfortunately, she had neglected to write down some of the citation information for her Internet sources. She included the citations when she could but had to leave out some bibliographic material. Jeni said, "At least the teacher will see that I made the effort."

*What has happened here?
Is there anything wrong with Jeni's actions? Why?
Does anyone get hurt in this scenario? Who?*

G: A sociology teacher gave an in-class practice writing assignment to prepare her students for their blue-book midterm. After distributing copies of a magazine article, she asked students to take 45 minutes to write an essay responding to a question discussed in the article. Most of the students included information and/or quotations from the article, but few of those students actually mentioned the article or gave credit/citations.

*Has anyone broken the rules here? If so, how?
Would your answer change if it were the actual midterm? Or a graded paper?
When is it OK not to give credit or include citations when quoting something?*

H. Marcus watched *American Idol* one night and got a good idea for the short story he had to write for his humanities class. He decided to write a behind-the-scenes romance between two of the contestants on the show, and he used some details from the program that aired that evening, changing some parts to fit his story. He made no mention of the actual program anywhere on the story he handed in.

*Did Marcus do anything wrong here?
What would you do in a case where you aren't sure what's appropriate?*