

Plagiarism Exercise

This exercise is designed to make you think about the issue of plagiarism from a personal perspective. You will be divided into five groups. Each group will be given instructions about how to discuss the issue after having read the articles that follow. Read the summary of the event in question, then read student the newspaper article from The Harvard Crimson and the Wikipedia entry listed below.

Each group will be given 15 minutes to discuss their issues. Afterward each group will appoint one person from the group to report the group's findings to the entire class.

19 year-old Harvard student, Kaavya Viswanathan, accepted a \$500,000 book-writing deal which resulted in her 2006 "chick lit" best seller, *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life*. Shortly following publication though, accusations of plagiarism killed a pending deal for a Dreamworks film based on the book and it was pulled from bookstore shelves. Over 40 passages were identified as having been plagiarized. Viswanathan's statement, that she "must have internalized" those sections, couldn't undo the damage as the book was cancelled. She remained at Harvard, however.

Now read both sources below.

The Harvard Crimson, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2006/4/23/students-novel-faces-plagiarism-controversy-beditors/>

Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaavya_viswanathan#Alleged_plagiarism

Group Questions

Group 1: If you were the author Meg Cabot, how would you feel about your ideas being stolen by Kaavya Viswanathan and used in *Opal Mehta*? If you were Viswanathan, would you apologize to the author? Why or why not?

Group 2: Why do you think Viswanathan plagiarized passages from the other chick lit author in her novel? Do you think that this case of plagiarism was intentional? In your opinion, what should the consequences be for plagiarizing in the publishing world?

Group 3: One student was interviewed about the *Opal Mehta* issue and said, "What difference does it make if [Viswanathan] wrote it or not? It's still a good book." How do you feel about this statement? What responsibility should the editor and publisher have with regard to verifying that their authors do not plagiarize?

Group 4: What are the roles and responsibilities of a university community to ensure that students do not plagiarize for campus assignments? Do you think an honor code is adequate to ensure that students do not plagiarize? What, if any, consequences should be instituted?

Group 5: If you were Viswanathan, would you have gone back to Harvard after this incident of plagiarism? Do you think Harvard should have expelled Viswanathan? Do you believe that Viswanathan's professors are going to treat her in the same respect as other students after this incident?

Adapted from:

Burkhardt, J. M., MacDonald, M. C., & Rathemacher, A. J. (2010). *Teaching information literacy: 50 standards-based exercises for college students*. Chicago: American Library Association.

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