

## **2024-2025 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set**

To learn more about this event, please visit:

<https://www.ethicsatkentplace.org/student-programs/middle-school-ethics-bowl>

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### **Case 3: Prayers for Peers**

Luisa is president of the student body at Sigmund Hills, a California private school, grades 6-12. Her friend Muhammad, a strict follower of Islam, is required to pray five times every day which means he must find a quiet spot to pray by himself during lunch or recess. This makes him feel isolated. Muhammad has told Luisa that he wishes there were a designated time for prayer during the school day so that he didn't have to pray by himself and feel so alone. Muhammad isn't the only student who prays during school. Many Buddhist students pray with their prayer beads as they walk through the halls between classes. Sometimes, they don't pay attention to their surroundings and trip or fall, a safety hazard for them and others. Other students can be seen meditating during the school day at various times.

Luisa wants to accommodate the religious students in her school. She thinks about creating a new daily period, "General Spirituality," a 12-minute interlude before lunch during which all students sit silently at their desks. Some could pray; others could read or simply rest. To carve out time for this period, two minutes would be subtracted from each of the six class periods throughout the day. Luisa wants to bring this idea to the school's Headmaster. Advocating for her plan, Luisa would argue that the General Spirituality period would encourage religious diversity as well as inclusiveness by making students aware of various religious denominations. This aligns with the school's Initiatives for Inclusion and Diversity.

Before approaching the Headmaster, Luisa asks members of the school community if they would support a General Spirituality period. Many students are enthusiastic, saying that it would allow students to connect with their religions and grow as individuals while at the same time allowing students to learn about religious traditions other than their own. Students who aren't religious or spiritual could use the time to decompress and relax.

However, some students feel that the proposed period is a waste of time: students who need to pray can do so during lunch or recess as they do now. Other students believe that religion has no place in school. Some students worry that the General Spirituality period would cut into time in class; for example, the 12 minutes lost from class each day would add up to 36 minutes per week. Teachers are also concerned about lost class time. They worry that some students would use the prayer period to goof off. Student Life officers think the plan could factionalize rather than unite the study body. Stressing religious differences could encourage bullying and other objectionable behavior.

After polling students, teachers, and administrators, Luisa is faced with a difficult decision. She isn't sure whether he should propose the General Spirituality period after all.

#### **Match Questions**

1. Should Luisa propose the "General Spirituality" period to his Headmaster? Why or why not?
2. If Luisa proposes the "General Spirituality" period, should her Headmaster approve it? Why or why not?

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. What place does religion have in schools?
2. Are religious commitments more important than learning time?
3. How may interfaith initiatives bring together or divide students?