

2026-2027 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 6: Reading Between the Headlines

Every Friday at Great Umbridge Public Middle School, students in Mr. Kennedy's 7th-grade Social Studies class give presentations about current events. Students can choose any event they find interesting but must report what happened, where they got their information, and why this specific piece of news matters. At the beginning of the school year, students gathered their news from a wide variety of sources. Some used major newspapers, others social media, and others independent news sources that their families follow regularly. Regardless of the source, Mr. Kennedy required students to go through a series of steps to verify if the information is correct.

One Friday in December, two students presented the news that a windfarm would be installed off the coast of their community. However, they each covered the article in a very different light. One student portrayed the event as a huge step forward for the environment and a major source of new jobs; the other student presented it as a pointless undertaking that would destroy the local fishing and tourist industries. Both students were set in their opinions. Each one was angered by the other's perspective, and their disagreement caused considerable unrest in the classroom. Mr. Kennedy looked into the new sources that both students used and found that each article in fact did portray the event in opposing ways.

Incidents like this continued throughout the year, leading to clashes of values that have soured the classroom culture. Parents started complaining that the class was discussing "inappropriate content." Tensions grew to the point that the school newspaper ran a story on the class, and the school principal told Mr. Kennedy to find a resolution quickly. As a way forward, Mr. Kennedy proposed a new policy that students must run their presentations by him before the start of class so he can decide if the presentations are "appropriate." Some students and parents like this solution because it should limit the unrest by keeping controversial issues out of class. Others worry that this policy will put a stop to necessary discussion and will silence valuable perspectives.

Match Questions

1. Should Mr. Kennedy implement the new policy of vetting students' presentations? Why or why not?
2. What is more important: to maintain a peaceful classroom environment or to prepare students for the real world by discussing controversial ideas? Why?
3. Propose an alternative way forward and explain why it would be better than Mr. Kennedy's proposal.

Study Questions

1. Who should have the final say in what issues and news sources are appropriate for use in class: parents, politicians, teachers or students? Why?
2. Does Mr. Kennedy's proposed policy contradict students' freedom of speech?