

2026-2027 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set

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

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Case 3: The Price of the Perfect Cast

Blue Ridge High School is holding auditions for the annual spring musical, *Wizard of Oz*. Ms. Smith, the drama teacher, has directed musicals for the past seven years and is known for creating spectacular productions. The high school has won state competitions for musicals three years in a row.

Anita Jackson, a junior, gives an incredible audition for the role of Dorothy. She has performed in musicals and plays since she was in fifth grade. She easily memorizes her lines and has a dazzling stage presence. Another student, Lily Zu, a junior, also auditions for the role of Dorothy. For the past two years, Lily has been one of the hardest working cast members and has often stayed late for extra rehearsals or come in early to improve her singing. She has a great audition, demonstrating real confidence – but she lacks Anita’s experience. Students all know that theater is “Anita’s thing” and simply assume that she will be cast as in the musical’s leading role.

The cast is finally announced: Lily will play Dorothy, and Anita will be the Wicked Witch. Anita is crushed. As the Witch, she will only have 15 minutes of stage time while Dorothy will appear in nearly every scene. Anita asks Ms. Smith why she was not chosen for the lead and how she could improve for her next audition. Ms. Smith compliments Anita’s audition and says that Lily was simply a better “fit” for the role because she is petite, just as Judy Garland was when she played Dorothy in the original 1939 film. Anita, however, towers over most boys in her class. Ms. Smith explains that a director should give her audience the most “authentic” version of a production and make casting choices based on what is best for the production as a whole. That is what directors on Broadway and in Hollywood do. What’s more, Ms. Smith argues, nobody questions a coach who recruits tall students for the basketball team. Why should a theater production be any different?

Match Questions

1. Given that Lily and Anita both gave excellent performances in their auditions, what weight should Ms. Smith have given to other factors in casting Dorothy?
2. In using the norms of professional theater to decide the cast of a school production, has Ms. Smith committed a moral error? Why or why not?
3. Should Anita simply make the most of her role as the Witch or continue to pursue a fairer casting choice? Why?

Study Questions

1. What makes a particular production “authentic”?
2. Is there any moral difference between how schools should approach casting a musical and how they approach recruiting a basketball team? Why?