

# A Way With Words

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**Overview of Lesson Plan:** In this lesson, students will examine the case of a particular author accused of stealing another author's work. They then create plagiarized pieces of work and reflect on the writing process.

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**Suggested Time Allowance:** 1 hour

## **Objectives:**

Students will:

1. Examine how plagiarism can occur unintentionally or unconsciously.
2. Consider a seemingly unintentional case of plagiarism by reading and discussing the article, "Novelist Says She Read Copied Books Several Times."
3. Explore different perspectives of the situation described in the article and, through a fishbowl discussion, examine various degrees of responsibility and ways to rectify the situation.
4. Rewrite a poem or song by intentionally plagiarizing it, then writing reflection papers exploring their own writing processes, including influences from other writers.

## **Resources / Materials:**

-student journals

-pens/pencils

-paper

-classroom board

-copies of "Novelist Says She Read Copied Books Several Times" (found online at [http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured\\_articles/20060428friday.html](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20060428friday.html) (one per student)

-resources about the roles of various people involved in the publishing process, such as writer, editor, agent, publisher, etc. (career textbooks, computers with Internet access, etc.)

## **Activities / Procedures:**

1. WARM-UP/DO-NOW: Journal: "According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary ([www.m-w.com](http://www.m-w.com)), to plagiarize means to 'to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own....' How do you think plagiarism occurs? Under what circumstances? Can this happen unintentionally? How? Have you ever plagiarized someone's work unintentionally?" After a few minutes, allow students time to share their answers.
2. As a class, read and discuss the article, "Novelist Says She Read Copied Books Several

Times”

([http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured\\_articles/20060428friday.html](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20060428friday.html)), focusing on the following questions:

- a. To what has author Kaavya Viswanathan admitted?
  - b. What reasons did Ms. Viswanathan give for copying novels by Megan McCafferty?
  - c. What suggestion did Suzanne Gluck, Ms. Viswanathan’s agent, have regarding her writing?
  - d. How are Ms. Viswanathan’s plots and Ms. McCafferty’s plots similar?
  - e. What experiences does Ms. Viswanathan credit for her book?
  - f. Which ideas did Asya Muchnick suggest?
  - g. How is Ms. Viswanathan working to rectify the situation?
  - h. How does Ms. Viswanathan feel about what happened? Why?
3. Divide the class into five groups. Explain that each group will explore a different perspective in the plagiarism case described in the article, “Novelist Says She Read Copied Books Several Times” and participate in a fishbowl discussion from these various perspectives. Assign each group a perspective: author Kaavya Viswanathan, author Megan McCafferty, publishing company (Little, Brown), agent Jennifer Rudolph Walsh, editor Asya Muchnick, and a consumer. Instruct each group to embody the role of their assigned perspective and consider the issue described in the article “Novelist Says She Read Copied Books Several Times.” As a group, students brainstorm their assigned person’s perspective on the situation and, if necessary, research the appropriate job description. Each group should consider some or all of the following questions (copied into a handout for easier access):

**QUESTIONS FOR ALL ROLES EXCEPT CONSUMERS:**

- What role does your assigned person play in the publishing process?
- What motive does your assigned person have for getting a particular piece of work published?
- From your assigned perspective, why did this plagiarism accusation take place?
- From your assigned perspective, how did this act of plagiarism occur?
- What role does your assigned person play in this situation?
- How do you think your assigned person feels about this situation?
- What does your assigned person think should be done to resolve this issue?

**QUESTIONS FOR CONSUMERS:**

- Does this news change how you feel about the book, “How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild and Got a Life”?
- Is it possible for a book to be uniquely original? Why or why not?
- Do you feel taken advantage of?

What do you think should be done to resolve this issue?

Explain to the class that they will be participating in a “fishbowl” discussion about the plagiarism accusation surrounding the novel, “How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild and Got a Life.” First, assign each perspective a number from one to five, keeping a list on the board of the numbers and corresponding perspectives. Ask one member from each group to sit facing one another in the middle of a circle created by the rest of the students. The students in the center are the only ones allowed to speak. If a student from the outer circle wants to add to the discussion, he or she moves to the middle of the circle, taps a participant to indicate that he or she should resume a place in the outer circle, and takes that student’s place as the new person in the discussion. After

discussing the first question, switch the students in the center to a new member from each numbered group and allow the same fishbowl procedure to occur. Be sure to switch topics enough times so that all students have the opportunity to be in the center of the discussion at least once.

Questions to pose to students include:

- How do you avoid crossing the line between influence and plagiarism?
- What is the danger of this process?
- What is each person's role in the development of this story?
- What responsibilities does each person have in this situation?

4. WRAP-UP/HOMEWORK: Individually, students intentionally plagiarize a song or poem. Have students choose a piece of work with which they are familiar. Encourage them to change the words but use the premise and some of the wording of the original work. Then have students write a reflection paper examining how this process differs from the writing process they normally use. Ask students to consider how other writers influence their work. Plagiarized pieces and reflections may be shared in a future class.

### **Further Questions for Discussion:**

- Why would someone write a book?
- How do you remember things you have read or seen?
- Why are there laws against plagiarism?
- How are ideas "property"?

### **Evaluation / Assessment:**

Students will be evaluated based on completion of thoughtful journal assignments, analyses of assigned roles, participation in class and group discussions, and well-explained reflection papers.

### **Vocabulary:**

unintentional, unconscious, plagiarism, acknowledged, synopsis, manuscript, echoing, protagonist, specify, breach, distress

### **Extension Activities:**

1. Read any of the works mentioned in the article, such as "Sloppy Firsts," "Second Helpings" or "How Opal Mehta got Kissed, Got Wild and Got a Life," and comment on the novel's style and the story. What is interesting and unique? What appeals to its targeted audience? Write a review of the text you chose.
2. Create a "How It Works" poster explaining the writing process or the publishing process. For the writing process, consider how ideas are developed (such as brainstorming) through the revision process. For the publishing process, consider the stages as they relate to the roles assigned in class, such as writer, editor, agent, publisher, etc.
3. Write a paper explaining the difference between plagiarizing and fabricating. Research what former New York Times reporter Jayson Blair did, and compare it to the actions of Ms. Viswanathan.
4. Research your school's honor code. What does it say about plagiarism? If your school does not have an honor code, look at the codes of other schools, found online at The Center for Academic Integrity ([http://www.academicintegrity.org/samp\\_honor\\_codes.asp](http://www.academicintegrity.org/samp_honor_codes.asp)). Write a letter to your

school's administration either recommending such a code, or commenting on the quality of the current policy. What should be changed or improved? Why?

### **Interdisciplinary Connections:**

Civics- Explore the concept of intellectual property. How is it defined? Who "owns" ideas? Research how patents, copyrights, or trademarks help protect "original ideas." Prepare an oral report on your findings.

Fine Arts- Prepare a skit about a student whose life is changed after they are accused of plagiarism in school.

Science- How are discoveries researched and protected in the science community? Look at medical treatments or surgeries, breakthroughs for diseases or ailments, or even creations of new products such as chemicals or medicines, etc. Write an article on your findings.

Teaching with The Times- Learn how to correctly cite a newspaper source. Choose any topic in the paper and write a one-page reaction paper in which you correctly cite the article two to three times. To order The New York Times for your classroom, [click here](#).

### **Other Information on the Web:**

Purdue University's Online Writing Lab "Avoiding Plagiarism"

([http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_plagiar.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html)) and "Paraphrase: Write it in Your Own Words"

([http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_paraphr.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_paraphr.html)) provide guidelines on how to avoid plagiarism.

A previous Learning Network lesson plan

(<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20010629friday.html>) explains how to accurately quote and cite sources.

### **Academic Content Standards:**

Grades 9-12

Language Arts Standard 1- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process. Benchmarks: Writes compositions that fulfill different purposes; Writes reflective compositions; Writes in response to literature

Language Arts Standard 6- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts. Benchmarks: Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of literary forms and genres; Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works; Relates personal response to the text with that seemingly intended by the author

Language Arts Standard 8- Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning/ Benchmarks: Asks questions as a way to broaden and enrich classroom discussions; Adjusts message wording and delivery to particular audiences and for particular purposes

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