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MIDDLE SCHOOL ETHICS BOWL

CASE SET

CASE AUTHORS: Elisha Amadasu, Jodi Robert-Oragbon, Joshua Grossman-Teller, J. Rafael Tolentino

EDITOR: Haley Thompson

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COMPETITION CASE #1: THE WILD PNut

By J. Rafael Tolentino

On November 1, 2024, Mark Longo's pet squirrel, Peanut, was taken and put to sleep by the New York State Department of Health. The department said they received several complaints from neighbors about Peanut and needed to act because squirrels can carry rabies, which could put people's health at risk.

For seven years, Peanut lived happily in Mark Longo's home. Mark took great care of Peanut, feeding and training him. Mark and thousands of online followers of "PNut the squirrel" loved Peanut. Mark felt it was unfair and cruel for the state to take away and kill his pet. He also believed Peanut had a very low chance of having rabies since Peanut lived indoors and had little contact with other animals.

However, keeping squirrels as pets is not allowed in New York because they are considered wild animals. Rabies, a dangerous disease, had been spreading among squirrels in the state. To prevent an outbreak, it is common practice to test animals that might have rabies by putting them to sleep.

Even though Peanut is gone, it raises the question of whether the state's decision was fair.

Match Question: Should the New York State Department of Health have taken Peanut from Mark and put Peanut to sleep?

Discussion Questions:

- Are there times when trying to "protect" the public ends up doing more harm than good?
- Does the fact that Peanut was loved by Mark and thousands of people make the state's decision wrong?
- Could the state have done something else, like moving Peanut somewhere safe or putting him in quarantine, to balance public health with Mark's love for his pet?

COMPETITION CASE #2: EYES EVERYWHERE

By Jodi Robert-Oragbon

Because of an increase in crime in Square County, the government started using new technology to keep people safe: facial recognition. Cameras were set up in public places like parking lots, roads, and schools. These cameras take pictures of everyone who passes by and match their faces to a database of residents. Each person's daily movements are recorded and stored so the information can be used if a crime happens.

Many people in Square County were upset and thought this was an invasion of privacy. The system doesn't just track people with criminal records; it tracks everyone. This means the movements of all residents are saved in a database.

Mr. Smith, a local resident, spoke out against the decision. He said, "The government has no right to track everything I do. Why do they need my face? I haven't done anything wrong! And we don't even know who has access to this information!"

Others, like Mr. Lawrence, a clothing store owner, think the technology is a good idea. He said, "My store has been vandalized three times this year. This will help stop crime. If you're not planning to do anything bad, then what's the problem?"

County officials agree with Mr. Lawrence. They point to the high crime rate in Square County compared to safer places nearby. They believe tracking everyone is the best way to protect the community.

Match Question: Should Square County use facial recognition technology?

Discussion Questions:

- Should the government focus on keeping people safe even if some residents are unhappy with how it's done?
- What should county officials think about before making this decision?
- Some people suggest having a curfew instead of using facial recognition. How are these two ideas different?

COMPETITION CASE #3: I (DON'T) HAVE EVIDENCE

By J. Rafael Tolentino

Officer Martinez was working on a robbery case in a small town. The police hadn't made much progress, but they had a suspect: a 20-year-old college student named Alex who had been in trouble for small things before.

During questioning, Officer Martinez decided to use a common strategy to get Alex to confess. He told Alex something that wasn't true: he said the police had found Alex's fingerprints on a stolen item and had security camera footage of the robbery.

At first, Alex denied doing anything wrong. But after hearing from Officer Martinez that the police "had evidence," Alex started to get nervous. He worried about getting in even more trouble if he wasn't honest, so he finally confessed to the robbery.

Some people think what Officer Martinez did was unfair. When the police lie it can make suspects feel really stressed. In some cases, it might even cause someone to admit to something they didn't do. Because of this, some places are thinking about making laws to stop police from lying to suspects during questioning.

On the other hand, some people believe that using lies can be helpful. They argue that sometimes suspects won't tell the truth unless they feel pressured. In this case, for example, Alex really was guilty. If Officer Martinez hadn't lied, then the police wouldn't have been able to help find out the truth.

Match Question: Should police be allowed to lie to suspects during an investigation?

Discussion Questions:

- Is it ever okay to lie?
- Was it right for Officer Martinez to lie if it helped get a confession, even though it might lead to someone confessing to something they didn't do?
- Was it fair for Officer Martinez to lie to Alex?

COMPETITION CASE #4: KEEP YOURSELF A LIE

By Joshua Grossman-Teller

A biopic is a movie that tells the story of a real person's life. *Bohemian Rhapsody* is a music biopic about Freddie Mercury and his band, Queen. The movie shows their journey, including Freddie's accomplishments and the band's success. It became very popular, won many big awards, and donated much of its earnings to charities.

However, some parts of the story were changed to make the movie more exciting. For example, the timeline of Freddie's concerts, when certain songs came out, and some big events in his life were not accurate. The movie also showed Queen as the main act during their first tour, but in real life, they were opening for another band. Another big change was the movie showing Freddie as the reason for the band breaking up, which never actually happened.

These changes were made to make the story more dramatic and fun to watch. Some people believe the movie would have been boring if it only showed everyone getting along and supporting each other.

Still, the movie received criticism for being inaccurate in some areas. Some people watched the film to learn more about Freddie Mercury's life, while others saw it as a way to introduce Queen's music to younger fans.

Match Question: Should the film have shown Freddie in the way that it did, even if it wasn't true to real life?

Discussion Questions:

- Should the filmmakers think about how the movie affects how people remember Freddie and Queen?
- Does it matter if the movie changed some facts about Freddie as long as it didn't make him look bad?
- Is it important that some of the money from the movie went to charities?
- Should the filmmakers let the audience know that parts of the movie were made up so people don't get the wrong idea?

PRACTICE CASE #1: A ROCKY CHOICE

By Elisha Amadasu

Eric is working on a class project about how mountains are formed. His teacher asked everyone to use the theory of plate tectonics to explain their research. The plate tectonics theory says that the Earth's surface is made of huge pieces of rock called plates, and when these plates crash into each other over a long time, they create mountains.

But Eric has a different idea. He believes that mountains were formed all at once by a powerful force or being, not by the movement of plates over millions of years. For his project, Eric is supposed to use the plate tectonics theory to explain how mountains are made, but he feels unsure about what to do. He wants to stay true to his own beliefs, but he also wants to show his teacher that he understands the assignment.

On one hand, Eric knows why his teacher asked him to use plate tectonics. It's the most widely accepted scientific explanation, and the teacher wants to make sure students understand how it works.

On the other hand, Eric feels his beliefs about how mountains were created are just as important. He wishes he could include them in his project too.

Match Question: Should Eric have to use the plate tectonics theory in his project?

Discussion Questions:

- Is it fair for Eric to be required to use the plate tectonics theory in his project?
- Should teachers only teach one explanation, or should they include other ideas too?
- Why is it important to understand different ways of explaining how mountains were formed?
- How can Eric show he understands the theory while still respecting his own beliefs?

PRACTICE CASE #2: THE TEAM CAPTAIN

By Joshua Grossman-Teller

Samuel has been in Math Bowl for a few years and was just chosen as the captain of his team. He loves being part of Math Bowl and really wants his team to win.

This year, there's a new member on the team: Samuel's friend, Jordan. Jordan has never been in the Math Bowl before, but he's excited to be part of the team. Jordan listens to advice from the coach and works hard during meetings, but he's struggling with his responsibilities. Jordan was assigned to handle the Geometry and Measurement section of the competition, but he's not ready yet.

The competition is in one week, and Samuel doesn't think Jordan is prepared. Another teammate, who has a lot of experience, offers to take over Jordan's section. Samuel trusts this teammate to do well and isn't sure Jordan is ready. Samuel talks to Jordan about the idea, telling him he'll still be part of the team even if he doesn't compete in Geometry and Measurement. But Jordan says no—he's confident he can improve and be ready in time.

Now, Samuel has a hard choice to make. He was chosen as captain to help the team succeed, and he's not sure if letting Jordan stay in his role will help them win. At the same time, Jordan believes in himself and wants the chance to prove it.

Match Question: Should Samuel let Jordan compete, or should he give Jordan's spot to the experienced teammate?

Discussion Questions:

- Does Samuel owe it to Jordan to support him more because they're friends?
- Should Jordan step down on his own to help the team?
- Is it Samuel's job as captain to decide, or should Jordan and the rest of the team have a say?
- Does the fact that Jordan is new to the team make a difference in what Samuel should decide?