Ethical-Unethical-Plagiarism Activity
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Presented at CTAM 2015 with Ceil McDonald and Margaret Kitterman

This activity is a great one for head -coaches to use to think through the issues of ethics and plagiarism themselves, with their assistant coaches to help define program coaching philosophies and expectations, and with their students, as an educational and character-building tool.

One of the trickiest things about coaching in the fine arts is that, while plagiarism is a "rules violation" subject to disqualification when it is "clear" (and it sometimes *is* clear, following a “dictionary definition”, like not crediting the New York Times when you state a quote directly from one of their reporters), more often than not, decisions we make about our performances fall into a grey area. That is because we, as artists, deal with considerations like "fair use" and "artistic license" in addition to plagiarism. And while many situations are not really plagiarism by the dictionary definition, they may still be unethical. The MSHSL (Minnesota State High School League) Rules and Policies document speaks to the consequences of plagiarism, but doesn't define it. We have an MSCA (Minnesota Speech Coaches Association.) Code of Ethics that all member coaches are expected to follow, but which does not discuss consequences. Add to that the individual values and philosophies of each competitor, coach, and judge, and we’ve got a lot of grey area!

To use this activity:

\*Break your class or team into small groups. Each gets:

--a white sheet of paper that has a dictionary definition of plagiarism, the quotes about plagiarism from the MSHSL handbook, and the MSCA Code of Ethics;

--three colored rectangles of paper: a green one that says "ethical", a yellow one that says "unethical", and a red one that says "plagiarism";

--eight slips of paper, each with a scenario from a different Speech category.

\*They should lay out the three colored rectangles, draw a scenario, and decide if the scenario is ethical, unethical, or plagiarism; they can use the white sheet as a resource. They should continue until they have discussed all eight scenarios, laying each scenario on the corresponding paper rectangle as decisions are made.

\*When all groups are done, you can ask things like, "tell me a scenario you are sure all groups agreed is plagiarism", and discuss; or, you read off a scenario and have each group hold up the colored card that reflects their decision of ethical, unethical, or plagiarism. You can discuss the issues of too many rules versus not enough rules as an organization, if a Code of Ethics with no levity or consequence is worthwhile, etc.