



Ethics Olympiad

2026

MIDDLE SCHOOL CASES PACKAGE

Welcome to the cases for the 2026 Middle School Ethics Olympiad. The Ethics Olympiad is a collaborative event which encourages students to analyse and discuss real-life, interesting, ethical issues. An Ethics Olympiad differs from a debate in that students are not assigned opposing views; rather, they defend whatever position they believe is right and succeed by showing that they have thought more carefully, deeply, and perceptively about the cases in question. Experience shows that this type of event encourages and helps students develop ethical awareness, critical thinking skills, civil discourse, civic engagement, and an appreciation for diverse points of view.

Thanks again for supporting this initiative. More information about the Ethics Olympiad can be found here; www.ethicsolympiad.org Please feel free to email us if you have any queries at: admin@ethicsolympiad.org

Teachers are encouraged to familiarise students with these cases and then select 5 (or 10) students to represent their school. There are eight cases below.

See Resource Kits for Coaches and students' guidelines.



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Please note Case 1 and Case 6 involve video clips.

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Case 1- Liar, Liar



(Click on the image above to view the clip)

Overview of *Liar Liar*

Fletcher Reede is a very successful lawyer who often wins cases by bending the truth. But his constant lying and focus on work have damaged his personal life. His wife, Audrey, has left him, and his young son, Max, feels let down because Fletcher keeps breaking promises. On Max's birthday, he makes a special wish: that his dad won't be able to tell a lie for 24 hours. To Fletcher's shock, the wish comes true—on the very same day he has one of the most important cases of his career. Suddenly, Fletcher has to face what life is like when he can only tell the truth.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think Fletcher is acting morally in the first or second scene? Should he lie to spare the feelings of his co-workers?
2. Fletcher promises his son Max that he will come to his birthday party, but then breaks his promise. Is breaking a promise always wrong, or are there times when it can be forgiven?
3. The magic in the film forces Fletcher to always tell the truth. Do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing? Why?
4. Can telling the truth sometimes cause harm? Can lying sometimes be the kinder option?



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Case 2 – Dear Grandma

Haley wants to write a letter to her grandmother, who is about to turn 80. Her grandmother's health has been getting worse, and Haley feels it is important to tell her just how much her love and support have meant over the years.

But when Haley sits down to write, the words don't come easily and she feels stuck and frustrated. Then she remembers a story she saw recently: in it, someone used artificial intelligence (AI) to help write a letter. The person gave the AI a few ideas, and the AI turned those ideas into a beautifully written message.

Curious, Haley tries the same thing. She types in some sentences about her memories with her grandmother and how grateful she feels. Within seconds, the AI creates a letter that is thoughtful, clear, and polished. It says everything Haley wanted to say — and more...but Haley feels uneasy. The letter is perfect, but is it really *hers*? In school, Haley has been taught that using AI to write essays is wrong, because essays should show the students' own thinking and abilities. Now she wonders: does the same rule apply to writing a personal letter?

Is it wrong to let AI express her feelings for her or is AI just another tool that can help people say what they truly mean, like a dictionary or a spellchecker? Haley is torn between sending the polished letter made by AI or writing her own version — which may not sound as perfect but would come directly from her heart.

What matters more: that the letter is beautifully written, or that it truly comes from Haley herself?

Discussion Questions

1. Should Haley send the letter written with AI? Why or why not?
2. Is there an ethical difference between using AI to write for school and using AI to write a personal letter?
3. How important is authenticity (being true to yourself) in personal communication?
4. How could using AI for everyday tasks change the way we think and express ourselves?



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Case 3 – The Invasive Species Plan

Cara is 14 years old and dreams of starting businesses that help both people and the planet. She believes that making money should also mean protecting the environment and supporting the community.

On a trip to the coast, Cara learns about the problem of invasive species. These are plants or animals that are not originally from a place, but when introduced, they can grow too fast and cause harm to the local environment.

In this case, the problem is the European green crab. These crabs are spreading quickly and damaging the local ecosystem. They eat clams, mussels, oysters, and even baby lobsters — animals that many people rely on for food and income. The crabs also destroy eelgrass beds, which clean the water and stop the coastline from washing away. Scientists say that one female crab can produce up to 4.7 million offspring in her lifetime, which makes the problem even worse.

Cara comes up with an idea: she could collect the crabs and turn them into an organic fertilizer for plants. This way, the crabs would stop harming the environment, and farmers could use a natural alternative instead of chemical fertilizers. It sounds like a win-win solution.

But Cara faces a serious problem: how should the crabs be killed before being processed? The cheapest method is freezing them, but experts are unsure whether this is truly humane. The only method that is proven to be quick and painless uses a machine called a CrustaStun, which costs around \$3,500. Cara, however, only has \$50. She cannot afford the machine, and no one is willing to invest in her project.

Cara doesn't know what to do. If she does nothing, the crabs will continue destroying the ecosystem. If she continues without the CrustaStun, she fears she might be causing unnecessary suffering to the crabs.

Discussion Questions

1. Should Cara go ahead with her fertilizer business even if she cannot be sure the crabs are killed humanely?
2. Is it wrong for Cara to walk away from this problem after finding a possible solution?
3. What is more important: preventing harm to the crabs, or protecting the whole ecosystem?
4. Do invasive species deserve the same rights and protection as native animals?



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Case 4. Begun, the Star Wars have

Back in 1983, U.S. President Ronald Reagan announced a plan called the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI). The idea was to build space weapons to shoot down Soviet missiles. Critics laughed at it and called it “Star Wars.” The program was shut down after a few years, but the idea of weapons in space never really went away.

Today, countries like the United States, Russia, China, and India are once again developing space weapons. Some are designed to destroy satellites, which we all rely on for GPS, weather forecasts, communication, the internet, and even power grids. Experts say that losing GPS alone could cost billions of dollars a day.

There’s another problem too: space junk. When satellites or other objects break apart, they leave debris. Right now, there are already over a million pieces of space debris big enough to damage spacecraft. If too much junk collides, it could create a chain reaction (called Kessler syndrome) that makes Earth’s orbit too dangerous to use.

Despite these dangers, many countries see space as the “next battlefield.” In 2019, the U.S. created a new military branch called the Space Force, and in 2023, Israel even destroyed an Iranian missile in space—the first-time combat happened beyond Earth. With new projects like mining on the Moon and Mars, many fear a new space race—but this time not just for exploration, but also for control and profit.

Discussion Questions

1. Is it right for countries to put weapons in space, even if it might protect their people on Earth?
2. Who should be responsible for keeping space safe and protected from dangerous space junk?
3. Does space belong to all humanity, or can powerful countries claim it for themselves?



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Case 5 – The Six-Million Dollar Banana

In late 2024, something surprising happened in the art world. An artwork that looked extremely simple—a real banana taped to a wall—was sold at an auction for 6.2 million US dollars. The artwork was called *The Comedian*, and it was created by an Italian artist named Maurizio Cattelan.

This artwork didn't start out as something super expensive. When it was first shown at an art fair in 2019, it sold for \$120,000, which people already thought was a lot. But as the years went on, it became more famous, more controversial, and eventually much more valuable. One unusual thing about the artwork is that the banana isn't meant to last. Because bananas rot, the artwork instructions say that the banana must be replaced regularly. In fact, just before the 2024 auction, the banana on the wall had been bought from a local grocery store for only 35 cents—even though the artwork sold for millions. Some people think this is funny or clever. Others find it confusing or frustrating.

Supporters of this type of “conceptual art” say that the *idea* behind the artwork is the real art—not the object itself. They argue that some artworks are meant to make us think about the world, challenge our assumptions, or start conversations. In this case, the artist may have been trying to make us question what we value, how the art market works, and why some things are considered important.

But the story didn't end there. The person who bought the piece in 2024 was Justin Sun, a technology entrepreneur known for spending large amounts of money on art. Not long after buying it, he held a press event in Hong Kong. During the event, he walked up to the wall, peeled the banana, and ate it in front of everyone. He said he wanted to “become part of history” by doing so.

Videos of him eating the banana spread quickly online. Some people thought he was rude and disrespectful to the artist and to the artwork. Others believed he was continuing the performance and that eating the banana was actually something the artwork encouraged people to think about. After all, the banana was meant to be replaced anyway, and the instructions for the artwork remained intact.

Discussion Questions

1. Can art be immoral, or does its status as “art” shield it from ethical judgment?
2. When a banana can be sold for the price of a hospital wing, what does that say about our society's priorities?
3. Do you think the person who bought the artwork was wrong to eat the banana? Why or why not?



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Case 6 – Pirate Disco/Simpsons



(Click on the image above to view the clip)

The Simpsons is an American animated sitcom which has been airing since 1989. In this episode, the main protagonist Homer cannot afford an expensive movie ticket. Being unable to watch the movie the conventional way, he chooses to pirate the movie on behalf of himself and the community, before being reported by his wife, Marge.

Discussion Questions

1. Does an inability to watch a movie through conventional means make piracy more permissible? Do Homer's good intentions for the community matter?
2. Does Marge have an ethical obligation to report Homer? Does their parental and marital status change this?
3. Homer created a place where people could view pirated movies, and many individuals chose to watch them. Which party is more culpable for piracy?



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Case 7 – Tourism: Finance or Nature

New Zealand has become a very popular place for international tourists in recent years. People are drawn to its amazing natural beauty — such as Milford Sound and the Waitomo Caves — and its rich and unique culture.

Milford Sound, which was once a quiet and almost untouched place, is now visited by around 100,000 people every year (Milford Sound). Tourism brings lots of benefits. For example, it has created new jobs and given many businesses more income, especially after the difficulties of COVID-19 (Tourism New Zealand). In 2024, international tourists spent so much money in New Zealand that the government earned \$1.7 billion in GST (Tourism New Zealand). Tourism also helps airports, hotels, and transport services, which all rely on visitors.

Tourism can also help to share and protect Māori culture. Through guided tours and traditional performances, visitors learn about indigenous practices, values, and history. This means Māori culture is not hidden but celebrated and respected alongside New Zealand's natural beauty.

However, there is another side to this story. Tourism can put pressure on the environment. Too many visitors can cause overcrowding and overuse of natural resources (Andrea Insch, 2020). For example, walking paths get damaged, and water supplies are sometimes used at an unsustainable rate. Some tourists do not always take care of the environment by following rules or throwing their rubbish away.

Studies also show that wildlife can be harmed by tourism. At Lake Rotoiti, near Rotorua, researchers found that jet skis and boats disturbed water birds, like shags. When the lake was busy, the number and variety of birds dropped (Department of Conservation).¹

So now New Zealand faces a big question: Should it keep encouraging tourism for the money it brings, or slow things down to protect nature? On the one hand, businesses want the chance to earn money and grow. On the other hand, the environment is fragile and has been here for centuries — once it is damaged, it may not recover.

Discussion Questions

1. What responsibilities does the tourism industry have to protect the environment while also making money?
2. Is it fair or ethical to restrict access to certain places to protect nature? Why or why not?

¹ Department of Conservation, Abundance and distribution of waterbirds of the Rotorua lakes, 1985-1996. Available at: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/science-and-technical/casn236.pdf>



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Case 8 – To Persevere or to Pass

Luca, Joseph, and Max are three classmates who have been best friends for many years. They have different interests and ideas but have usually managed to keep their friendship strong.

Not long ago, Max's family went through a very difficult time when his parent lost their job and the family had to move houses. This made life tough for Max, and he began struggling with schoolwork. Through it all, Luca and Joseph stood by him.

Recently, though, Max has been spending more and more time online playing games. He enjoys the escape it provides and the community of gamers he has met there, but his online behaviour has started to affect his real-life friendships. At school, Max has become more aggressive, often talks over classmates, and has started using a lot of bad language. His words are not aimed at any one person, but because he uses many offensive terms, he has upset people from different groups. As a result, many students have turned away from him.

Joseph has already begun to avoid Max, not wanting to be connected to his behaviour. Now Luca is the only one who still spends time with him. Luca feels torn:

- If he stays close to Max, Luca risks losing other friends.
- If he leaves Max too, he worries Max will feel even more isolated and retreat further into his online world.

Should Luca stay loyal to Max and hope he changes? Or is it sometimes better, even kinder, to step back from a friendship that has become difficult?

Discussion Questions

1. At what point should Luca consider ending his friendship with Max? Why?
2. Do people have the freedom to end a friendship whenever they want? Does Luca?
3. Who in Max's life has a responsibility to help him change his behaviour?



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Acknowledgments –

Case 1- Liar, Liar - <https://vimeo.com/37281369> This video was produced by Professor Tom Wartenberg at Mt Holyoke College in Massachusetts as part of the “What’s the Big Idea” program for Middle school students. <http://whatsthebigideaprogram.com>

Case 2- Dear Grandma- Written by Katherine MacKay, age 14 Kent Place School, New Jersey, USA - 2025 Kent Place Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set- To learn more about this event, please visit: <https://www.ethicsatkentplace.org/student-programs/middle-school-ethics-bowl>

Case 3- Invasive Species Plan - 2025 Kent Place Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set- To learn more about this event, please visit: <https://www.ethicsatkentplace.org/student-programs/middle-school-ethics-bowl>

Case 4- Begun Star Wars Have – Is an adaption of Case 2 in the 2025 APAE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl- <2025-Regional-Case-Set-Final.pdf>

Case 5 – The Six-Million Dollar Banana - An entry in the 2025 Ethics Olympiad Case Writing competition by Amara Ganglani MLC Melbourne Victoria - <https://ethicsolympiad.turbifysites.com/case-competition.html>

Case 6 – Pirate-Diso – An entry in the 2025 Ethics Olympiad Case writing competition. A video by Owen Moxham and Richie Huang in 2024 while both were students at St Leonard's College. <https://ethicsolympiad.turbifysites.com/case-competition.html>

Case 7- Tourism: Finance or Nature- An entry in the 2025 Ethics Olympiad Case writing competition, by Yi Fei Fan- Macleans College-New Zealand- <https://ethicsolympiad.turbifysites.com/case-competition.html>

Case 8- To Persevere or To Pass – 2025 Kent Place 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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