Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Class I
I have read and understood the material on academic integrity and will abide by its guidelines.

Print name:

Signature:

Date:
Plagiarism

TWO BASIC PRINCIPLES

Plagiarism is the attempt to pass off the thoughts of another as one's own. Whether those thoughts come from a book, a lecture, or an Internet site, the simple—but crucial—point for students to remember is this: you must give someone credit when you use his/her ideas in your own work.

The Milton Academy English department believes that you will learn more from struggling with a text yourself than from reading what others have written about it. Therefore, we expect you to operate by a second principle as well: in preparing for class and in writing papers about literature, you are not to consult any interpretive secondary sources, printed or electronic, unless your teacher has explicitly permitted you to do so.

We encourage you to engage in class discussion and teacher conferences as ways of refining your understanding and to converse about literature with peers and adults outside of class. But the ideas you represent in your paper as your own must be your own: specific suggestions and language drawn from conversation with others outside the classroom must be acknowledged explicitly as their contributions to your argument.

Without your teacher's permission the written work of others about the text you are studying is out of bounds at all stages of the reading and writing process. Forbidden secondary sources include scholarly works of literary criticism; notes such as the Spark or Cliffs series, which are specifically designed as crutches for students; and Internet sites. Electronic sources are fundamentally the same as print sources, and their use will be treated the same way. A student who has used and cited secondary material without prior permission will be asked to rewrite the paper; a student who has used secondary material without citing it will be subject to an Academic Discipline Committee.

Please see p. 2 for a discussion of permitted use of factual information from secondary sources.
ABOUT FACTUAL INFORMATION

Writing critical papers on literature is not about gathering information; it is about thinking. Sometimes, however, a literary work contains an unfamiliar factual reference that is a key to understanding it fully. We encourage you to look up such references but NOT to seek others’ interpretations of them. The following example makes this distinction clear.

Suppose your teacher has assigned you to read Karl Shapiro’s poem “The Fly” and write an essay about it. The first stanza reads as follows:

O hideous little bat, the size of snot,
With polyhedral eye and shabby clothes,
To populate the stinking cat you walk
The promontory of the dead man’s nose,
Climb with the fine leg of a Duncan-Phyfe
The smoking mountains of my food...

You get the drift of this description but do not know some of the vocabulary and are puzzled by the reference to “a Duncan-Phyfe.”

What We Encourage You To Do:

We encourage you to look up “Duncan Phyfe” and learn that he was a famous furniture maker in early 19th-century America. A web site or encyclopedia entry devoted to Phyfe and his furniture might show pictures of tables and chairs, the legs of which have a distinctive curved shape, similar to that of a fly’s leg. You are entitled to use this information in your essay, and we encourage you to do so if it is relevant to your interpretation of the poem.

We expect you to footnote the information you take from web sites and print sources.

You might also use a printed or on-line dictionary to look up words like “polyhedral” and “promontory.” We do not expect you to footnote references to dictionaries.

What You May Not Do:

You may not look up critical analysis of “The Fly” or of any literature you are studying. The analysis is the work that your English teacher wants you to do—the work that will sharpen your own skills and understanding.

You may not use any source that summarizes the plot of a literary work for you. Figuring out for yourself what happens is also part of your learning process.

We also strongly suggest that you not waste homework time seeking biographical information about authors. Such information is often irrelevant and, if relevant, may spill over into interpretation, leading you to violate our integrity policy. If biography is useful on a particular assignment, you can count on your teacher to give it to you or direct you to it.
SOME COMMON SENSE ADVICE

Time Management

Most students run afoul of regulations when they are pressed for time. Staring down deadlines, even the most ethical student can panic and make the foolish decision of using someone else’s work. Therefore, the issue of time management is fundamentally linked to the issue of plagiarism.

Because Milton students may ask for an extension on any major piece of work done outside the classroom, time pressure is not an excuse for cheating. Students should plan their work in advance and remember that if they do ask for an extension they must do so no later than the day before the paper is due.

Help from a Parent or Dorm Parent?

Discussion with parents or dorm parents of one’s general ideas for an assignment would probably not trouble any Milton teacher. However, asking someone else—parent, dorm parent, older sibling, roommate—to go over an assignment and make corrections or supply phrasing would. As any teacher would note, a student cannot expect to learn skills if someone else is doing the real work.

No Re-Cycling, Please

When a teacher gives you an assignment, you can safely assume that person means for you do work for his/her class, not submit work you may have done for another class that year or in a previous year. Submitting such work, with the benefit of another teacher’s corrections and suggestions, would be unethical and would deprive the student of the learning that results from doing a new piece of work.

Tutoring

If a student engages the regular help of a tutor, it is important for the tutor to cooperate closely with the teacher of the course. The student is responsible for letting the teacher know about the tutorial and for arranging an early contact between teacher and tutor.
WHAT TO DO WHEN SECONDARY SOURCES ARE PERMITTED

Though the mechanics of citation can be complex, the writer who has used secondary material establishes his good faith by adhering to these simple premises:

1) Always footnote a direct quote from any source.

2) Footnote a thesis, a fundamental interpretive line, if it is not your own.

3) Footnote all summaries and paraphrases of source material.

4) Footnote any information that was obscure enough so that you had to look it up.

In deciding whether or not to cite, you should err on the side of too many citations rather than too few. If you are unsure whether a citation is necessary and you cannot, for some reason, ask your teacher, a sensible solution is to cite the source.

IN CONCLUSION

Milton is an academic community, first and foremost. Dishonesty in academic matters, therefore, undermines Milton’s very purpose; and, as a result, the administration, faculty, and student government view with extreme gravity any infringement on the community’s shared notions of intellectual integrity.

Though the English teacher will make every effort to explain appropriate procedure, the ultimate burden of responsibility lies on the individual student. When a student is in doubt about the correct step to take, that student should ask for guidance from the teacher. We live and work together closely at Milton. Ample opportunity exists for a student to seek help in clearing up confusion about appropriate academic behavior.
Late-Paper Policy

Each teacher may decide when, on the day work is due, students should submit the paper: at the beginning of the class period, at the end of the class period, at the end of the day, whatever time seems best.

If a student does not submit the essay at the assigned time, the paper is late and subject to a penalty of one full grade—e.g., from a B to a C. At the moment the lateness occurs, the teacher and student will negotiate a suitable time for a later submission. Assumption: the new deadline will be reasonable and realistic, given the task at hand, and may vary accordingly, from the next class period to a week later.

If the student does not meet the new deadline, the work cannot receive a grade higher than E (55). The teacher and student negotiate a third deadline at that time, and, if the student does not meet that deadline, the grade for the work automatically falls to zero.

If the teacher feels the work is of major significance, essential to fulfilling the overall objectives of the course, the student must complete the work, even though it already has received—and will receive—a zero. If the student does not then complete the work, the student will receive an incomplete grade for the term or, if the case applies, for the year, thereby rendering the student unpromotional or, if the faculty decides otherwise, promotional as an unclassified student.

Further guidelines: In advance—and only in advance—of the due date, a student may negotiate for permission to hand in work late. Such negotiation is not acceptable on the day work is due. Excused absences, such as for illness, are, of course, acceptable reasons for handing in late work.
Avoiding the Panic That Often Leads to Plagiarism
by John Charles Smith

For many students, the most daunting part of essay writing is the blank computer screen that greets them when they first sit down to write.

In that moment, they often do something foolish and turn to secondary sources simply to fill up four or five of those blank spaces.

Remembering three simple things about critical essays can take a student about 75% of the way to a completed paper with no outside help.

1. *Critical essays are not mysterious entities that require magical skills to create.* When you finish a book or play, ask yourselves this question: Did I like this book/play? Then, ask yourselves the next, logical question: Why or why not? The moment you start answering that question, you have begun thinking critically. The characters were extremely well drawn, you might say, or the absence of a resolution at the end made the story powerfully realistic. These things are excellent content for a critical essay about the work. *How* does the author create such impressive characterization? *Why* does the author leave the story unresolved? In answering these questions, *analyzing passages from the work*, you are proving something about both the work and your skills as a critic.

2. *If you learn four or five templates of argumentation, you will be able to see what structure best serves your content.* In a critical essay, you are arguing a point, not telling what happens in the work. Before you start typing, make a simple drawing of your argument. Will you be writing a comparison/contrast of two works? If so, your essay will likely have an introduction, Part A on the first work, Part B on the second, and a conclusion. In Part A, you will look at points 1, 2, and 3, and in Part B look at those same points in the second work. If you visualize those four parts, you can see the template that your analysis will fit into. Several other basic structures of argumentation are the classification/division essay (the five-paragraph or six-paragraph, or seven-paragraph, etc. paper in which you divide a topic into sub-topics). Those of you who have watched a debate know that concession/assertion is another very fine method of arguing. You anticipate your reader's objections to your interpretation, address them in the first body paragraph, and then drive home your own interpretation by proving your argument is better, examining the same points you made in the concession. Sometimes, an old-fashioned definition essay is the best approach. Why does a particular play best represent Romanticism, for example? You may find other basic templates of argumentation, but these four will serve you well for most works.

3. Fill that blank screen by *letting your text do the work for you.* This suggestion doesn't mean to place little snippets of text in all your sentences. That approach is like putting bows on all your sentences and standing back to say, "Isn't this cute?" You shouldn't err in the opposite direction, either, heaving huge chunks of text into a paragraph and leaving it there untouched. You will need time to master this technique, but, once you have, you will be a good critic and see that much of a critical essay is rolling up your sleeves and
working with text. For example, don’t say a play is good because the dialogue is so pungent. Let those characters speak for themselves. Find a particularly memorable exchange, introduce it by a topic sentence in which you might write, “Much of the power of Miller’s play lies in his ear for memorable dialogue. In Act II, for example, as X and Y confront their mutual hatred of Z, Miller writes one of the most memorable exchanges in the play.” Then, quote the exchange of dialogue. Finally, step back from the passage and take it apart, looking at diction, tone of voice, slang, etc.—whatever has made the dialogue represent the point you were trying to make.

If students understand these three basic elements of writing a critical essay, they shouldn’t be daunted by a blank computer screen. They are 75% of the way to a completed essay by following these three steps and can then edit carefully for the other 25%, the actual expression of their ideas.
After duplicated words, words of apology

Harvard writer says she ‘internalized’ an earlier novel

By David Mehegan
GLOBE STAFF

Kaavya Viswanathan, the Harvard sophomore accused of plagiarism in her debut novel, acknowledged yesterday that she used portions of another writer’s book, but insisted the act was unconscious and unintentional. In a statement released by publisher Little, Brown & Co., Viswanathan apologized and said future printings will be revised to eliminate the similarities.

Viswanathan, 19, who had received a two-book contract worth $600,000, was accused of closely paralleling and in some cases copying almost verbatim sentences from “Sloppy Firsts,” a young-adult novel published in 2001.

“When I was in high school,” Viswanathan said in her statement, “I read and loved two wonderful novels by Megan McCafferty, ‘Sloppy Firsts’ and ‘Second Helpings,’ which spoke to me in a way few other books did. Recently, I was very surprised and upset to learn that there are similarities between some passages in my novel, ‘How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life,’ and passages in these books.”

“I froze, unsure of (a) what he was talking about and (b) what I was supposed to do about it.”
How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life

“So I froze, not knowing whether I should (a) laugh, (b) say something, or (c) ignore him and keep on walking.”
Sloppy Firsts
VISWANATHAN
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While the plot of her book differs from McCafferty's, she said, "I wasn't aware of how much I may have internalized Ms. McCafferty's words... I can honestly say that any phrasing similarities between her works and mine were completely unintentional and unconscious... I sincerely apologize to Megan McCafferty."

In a separate statement, Little, Brown publisher and senior vice president Michael Pietsch said: "We consider this a serious matter and we are investigating it immediately." He added that Viswanathan is "a decent, serious, incredibly hard-working writer and student; and I am confident that we will learn that any similarities in phrasings were unintentional."

The accusation, first reported Sunday on the Harvard Crimson's Web edition, came to light when one of McCafferty's readers contacted her and she contacted her publisher, Crown. "After reading the book in question, and finding passages, characters, and plot points in common, I am hoping this can be resolved in a timely and responsible manner," McCafferty said yesterday. Stuart Applebaum, spokesman for Random House, the parent of Crown, said lawyers for both publishers are in discussions.

Viswanathan's agent, Jennifer Rudolph Walsh of the William Morris Agency, said yesterday that any plagiarism was not deliberate.

"I think she read books as a teenager and a fan, absorbed whatever she read over time," Walsh said. The passages "became her own, unintentionally, she assumed they rightly belonged to her in her own mind. As a former teenager myself, I recall that sponge-like ability to take popular culture and incorporate it into your own lexicon."

Viswanathan and her novel, which arrived in stores this month, have been the talk of the publishing world, partly because of the size of the contract for so young a writer — she was 17 when she got it — but also for the role a book packager played in developing the plot of a novel. Packagers are normally employed in specialized nonfiction books such as nature guides and picture books, and sometimes actually deliver finished books that bear a publisher's name under as a distributor.

In this case, Viswanathan's agent referred her to Alloy Entertainment because her original idea for a novel was considered too dark. The semicomical plot involves parents trying to develop a girl's social life so she'll get into Harvard. While Viswanathan said she was her idea, she acknowledged in a February interview with the Globe that Alloy had played a major role in fleshing out the concept.

Leslie Morgenstein, president of Alloy, which holds the copyright along with her, said by e-mail yesterday that his firm did not help Viswanathan with any of the actual writing. "We helped Kaavya conceptualize and plot the book," he said. "We are looking into the serious allegations before commenting further."

A few literary agents contacted yesterday by the Globe raised eyebrows at the packager's active role in conceptualizing the novel. "We would never recommend to an author that they share copyright for something as minor as refining a concept," said Boston-area literary agent Don Cooper.

While the remedy in this case will depend on the extent of the duplication, and the degree to which both publishers accept Viswanathan's explanation, Boston copyright lawyer Joseph Steinfield called it "a serious mistake, for sure. Publishers can do little but take an author's word for the authenticity and accuracy of a work. They rely on authors to be truthful and behave ethically, and if [Viswanathan] fell short in that regard, there will be a price to pay at least in terms of public criticism."

Harvard students were buzzing about the case yesterday. "She is a great girl; her book is phenomenal, and everyone looks up to her and likes her," said sophomore Jayne Wolfson, a friend of the author.

Others were less supportive. "If you have integrity as an author, why let a company put your book together?" said senior Luke Bailey.

"It seems so tainted to allow yourself to be steered like that."

Some wondered about the pressure of a big contract for an unfinished book, which Viswanathan received a month after arriving in Cambridge as a freshman. "It's a high-pressure situation," said sophomore Kelly Faircloth. "You give someone all this money and there's all this pressure to develop this book. But that's not to say it's an excuse for plagiarism."

Said junior Victoria Chang: "There are lots of people at Harvard under a lot of stress. Moral choices don't have to do with stress you are under."

Globe correspondent Catherine Elton contributed to this report. David Mehegan can be reached at mehegan@globe.com.
In many ways, parallels in ‘Opal,’ ‘Sloppy Firsts’ are striking

Two novels have a teenage heroine, similar encounters

By Lisa Wangsness
GLOBE STAFF

At first glance, Kaavya Viswanathan’s debut novel, “How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life,” seems like a completely different tale of teen angst from “Sloppy Firsts,” Megan McCafferty’s 2001 first novel. “Opal” is about an Indian-American girl who, in a quest to get into Harvard, endeavors to become a social success. “Sloppy Firsts” follows the travails of an adolescent athlete struggling to cope with losing her best friend, who has moved away.

But, in addition to numerous places where “Opal” contains strings of words and phrases that also appear in “Sloppy Firsts,” some of Viswanathan’s characters also mirror McCafferty’s first novel, as well as her second installment in the series, “Second Helpings.” Yesterday, Viswanathan acknowledged she “read and loved” both of McCafferty’s books while she was in high school and “may have internalized her work” — and clearly, the parallels are striking.

Opal Mehta and McCafferty’s heroine, Jessica Darling, are first-person narrators, both superachievers from New Jersey who fall head over heels for a boy whose troublemaker exterior hides his keen intelligence.

Both heroines refer to the in-crowd at their school as the “Upper Crust” and low-lifers as “dregs.” The clique of girls in both heroines’ lives includes a former elementary school friend of the heroine, a buxom flirt, and an Italian-American with a penchant for tanning. Both bad-boy love interests have tried “shrooms,” play the guitar, and wear faded Vans sneakers and shirts emblazoned with a day of the week.

Many of these characters are clichés of the teen angst genre, familiar figures to anyone who has seen the movies “Mean Girls,” “Clueless,” or “The Breakfast Club.” But similarities between some of the passages in Viswanathan’s newly published first novel and McCafferty’s work seem to underscore their parallels.

Mehta’s mother, for example, convinced that her studious daughter will be rejected from Harvard unless she takes the advice of an admissions officer and gets a life, uses a digital camera to take pictures of popular students, so she can give her daughter the perfect makeover. Darling’s father spices together videos of her defeats at track meets and replays them obsessively to show her how to improve her performance.

Mehta’s crush, Sean, smells “sweet and woody and spicy, like the sandalwood key chains sold as souvenirs in India.” Darling’s love interest, Marcus, smells “sweet and woody, like cedar shavings.”

In “Second Helpings,” McCafferty writes of the Italian-American
details about her discussions with Marcus: “For 1 hour and 47 minutes, we proved him right. Here, an incomplete list of topics from tonight’s convo: pregnant chads; the Olsen Twins; the AIDS epidemic in Africa; fake tattoos; Igpay Atinlay; the universe’s unseen dimensions; cloning; clichéd guitar-Gods in leather pants; year-round schooling; plastic surgery; junkies; Napster.”

Mehta, meanwhile, relates: “[We] kept talking. In fact, we talked for another forty-nine minutes about the following topics: stem-cell research, how expensive a new amp for his guitar would be, the state of the Vatican, old Hollywood actresses dating men young enough to be their sons, over-priced white T-shirts at Neiman Marcus, constitutional amendments against gay marriage, and iPod nanos.”

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A member of Darling’s clique: “Tanning was the closest that Sara came to having a hobby, other than gossiping or surfing pro-ana websites, that is... Even the webbing between her fingers was the color of coffee without cream.”

Viswanathan’s Stacie, a member of Mehta’s clique who is also of Italian heritage, flaunts the same look: “It was obvious that next to casual hookups, tanning was her extracurricular activity of choice. Every visible inch of skin matched the color and texture of her Louis Vuitton backpack.”

There are also numerous passages where the rhythm and structure of Viswanathan’s prose, if not the words themselves, closely resemble McCafferty’s — almost as if Mehta momentarily channeled Darling’s voice.

At one point in “Sloppy Firsts,” for example, Darling describes her conversations with Marcus as being “like a shot of Schnapps with a Tabasco sauce chaser. Short, sweet, and strange, as well as capable of making me hot, wobbly, and confused.”

Mehta says her talks with Sean are “like eating sev mixture, the Indian equivalent to Chez Party Mix, sharp and sweet and spicy all at once, with every bite containing a new mixture of ingredients.”

A bit later, Darling gives more
Opal Mehta: The Sequel

Shortly after Viswanathan's plagiarism was exposed, Little, Brown & Co. removed all copies of the novel from bookstore shelves and terminated its two-book, $500,000 contract with the writer.
Plagiarism and the Internet

Today's internet provides students with a staggering array of secondary sources—interpretive, biographical, historical—on most of the texts we teach in English courses. The temptation to use websites is great, especially when a student lets the writing of an essay slide until the last minute. Recent Discipline Committee cases involving plagiarism/academic dishonesty reveal a popular scenario. The night before an essay is due, the student surfs the net to find information on a writer or text. The search turns up a professional essay on a topic similar to the one assigned the student. Bingo—with the class less than eight hours away, the student makes a bad decision.

In one case, a student in a Film and Moving Image class was assigned a take home test on three different films, the completed test to be e-mailed to the teacher. At 1:00 AM, she researched the internet for online film analyses to get ideas for her last answer. Discovering a relevant passage of 2-3 paragraphs, she pasted those paragraphs in an answer, intending to create her own response around them. However, the student, soon exhausted, deleted what she had written and decided to send on to her teacher the entire copied text, with only minor word changes.

In the above case, the teacher happened to be familiar with the plagiarized passages. Such is not always the case, but teachers, most of the time, can distinguish between a student essay and a professional one, especially when the teacher is familiar with the student's writing. How can the C+ student suddenly write like a renowned literary scholar? In another plagiarism case, an English class was assigned a "reaction" paper on a summer reading book. The student, who had put off writing the paper until the night before it was due, searched the internet for pertinent material and, having found a relevant two page article, submitted the piece as his own. Unfamiliar with the student's writing so early in the year, the teacher did not question the piece, but as subsequent less insightful and less polished essays arrived, the teacher wondered about the authenticity of the student's "reaction" piece on the summer reading. The teacher eventually found the article on the internet and confronted the student.

These examples should confirm that poor time management too easily leads to plagiarism; that teachers can easily see the differences between student and professional work; and that teachers are much more adept at using the internet than students think. Ironically, the same technology that enables students to plagiarize also enables teachers to discover those plagiarizers.