

Discussion Guide

A Thin Line: An Interactive Narrative

A Thin Line was designed to stimulate reflection on issues related to academic integrity. The following questions are meant to supplement that experience. Ideally, a facilitator will use them to generate discussion among students. The questions (they come in sets) can be read aloud to participants. (One question at a time usually works best.) Facilitators, however, should avoid reciting the 'points you might touch on' verbatim. Instead, take note of these points when preparing, and try to weave them into the discussion. Where possible, extract these points from the students' own observations and comments, and highlight them. - The Morality Play team

Question 1: Should you give Ryan your problem set?

In one scene, Ryan asks if he can borrow your work for a course he is taking. Has a classmate ever made a similar request of you? Does such sharing 'cross the line'? Give an example of work-sharing that is problematic. Give an example of work-sharing that's probably OK. What's the key difference between the two cases?

Points You Might Touch On in Discussion

- Sharing notes is generally OK, but it depends on the syllabus.
- Sharing problem sets is usually not OK. If sharing your work gives a classmate an unfair advantage, or saves him/her from having to do expected work, it may be a violation.
- When in doubt, check with the professor.
- Consider the argument: 'My work is my intellectual property, so I can share it with a classmate if I want to.' Is this a good argument? Why or why not? (Answer: No, because it can provide an unfair advantage.)

Question 2: Did Priya plagiarize?

In another scene, Cat finds that Priya plans to turn in work she found online, and decides that that could be plagiarism. When is it OK to use someone else's work? When is it not?

Points You Might Touch On in Discussion

- Don't take credit for work that isn't yours.
- Need to use or build on someone else's work? Give them credit.
- Computer code, and other fruits of creative processes (art, music, poetry, etc) are like prose text.
- General knowledge can often be used without attribution, but when in doubt, attribute.

Question 3: Is it OK for Ryan to study from an old exam?

Near the end of *A Thin Line*, Ryan reveals that he has obtained a copy of an exam once used in a course he is taking. If you had a chance to preview such an exam,

would you take that chance? Why might this be considered an academic integrity violation? Why is it OK to prep for the S.A.T. by practicing on old S.A.T. tests?

Points You Might Touch On in Discussion

- If access to an old exam gives you an unfair advantage, you probably shouldn't use it.
- Practicing on old S.A.T. tests is importantly different, because they are made available to all, and such use is openly encouraged.

Question 4: Why does integrity matter?

Why is academic integrity important to CMU as a community? Why is it important for you personally?

Points You Might Touch On in Discussion

- CMU needs to uphold academic integrity standards to fulfill its mission.
- We all have a role to play in upholding these standards.
- How do you feel about others who cheat? Would you want others to feel that way about you?
- When you compromise your integrity, you damage your own character.
- The disciplinary process sucks. It's not worth it.

Question 5: How can I stay out of trouble?

What are some good strategies for making sure you don't "cross the line" and violate an academic integrity norm?

Points You Might Touch On in Discussion

- Stress and time pressure make you more likely to cheat: manage your time responsibly so you don't end up cutting corners.
- Get enough rest and exercise so that, come crunch time, you can make good decisions.
- Understand your professor's expectations.
- When in doubt, check the syllabus, or check with the prof.
- Don't just follow the letter of course policy; observe its spirit too.
- Do your own work.
- Don't take credit for work that isn't yours.
- Want to build on someone else's work? Give them credit!
- Don't help yourself to unauthorized forms of assistance.
- Find yourself rationalizing or cutting corners? Pause and reflect. Is it worth it?