

# How Serious Is Plagiarism?

Scan the first paragraph of the article. What does the word *plagiarism* mean?

Recently, a biology teacher in Kansas – a state in the American Midwest – made national, and even international, news. After Christine Pelton discovered that 28 of her 118 students had plagiarized parts of a major project, she gave them failing grades. Although this was the school policy, the students' parents complained. The school board directed Ms. Pelton to change the punishment: They told her that 600 points should be taken from the offenders, rather than the entire 1,800 points. Ms. Pelton resigned in protest.



Why did this become such a significant story? Perhaps it is because so many people feel strongly about what is right and wrong. Although the incident may soon be forgotten, it raised some important questions: What is plagiarism? How serious is it?

The simplest form of plagiarism occurs when someone copies material without giving credit to the source. However, there are also more serious forms, such as when a student pays someone else to write an essay.

Some people claim that copying is necessary to do well in school. They have realized that their own words are not as good as someone else's. Another common argument is that everyone does it, so it's not a big deal. In fact, it has been learned that even some highly respected figures, including Martin Luther King, Jr., have plagiarized.

Although some people find reasons to justify plagiarism, others feel the issue is clear-cut: They feel it is morally wrong, and consider it stealing – a theft of ideas rather than money. These people believe that students who plagiarize benefit unfairly. They receive a better grade than they deserve.

So what about the incident in Kansas? Was the original punishment too severe? Do teachers have the right to tell students and parents what is right or wrong? Ms. Pelton would probably say that the job of a teacher is to do exactly that.

**A** Read the article. Then number these sentences from 1 (first event) to 6 (last event).

- ..... a. The teacher's story appeared in national news.
- ..... b. The teacher gave the students failing grades.
- ..... c. The students' parents were angry.
- ..... d. The teacher left her job.
- ..... e. The group of students cheated on an assignment.
- ..... f. The school board told the teacher to change the scores.

**B** Complete the chart.

Arguments to justify plagiarism	Arguments against plagiarism
1. ....	.....
2. ....	.....

**C Group work** Is it ever OK to copy other people's work? Why or why not? Do teachers have the right to tell students and parents what is right or wrong?