

Discussion & Activity Guide

for Nan Cappo's *Cheating Lessons*

Cheating Lessons is a YA novel featuring a moral dilemma that most people face at some point: to cheat or not to cheat? Whether read by an entire class or by smaller groups, this story offers teachers opportunities to engage students on multiple levels.

Following is a list of suggested cross-curriculum activities.

1. Readers' Theater. *Cheating Lessons* features much dialogue. Have students choose a scene and read it aloud. (Suggested scenes: Bernadette and Nadine and Anthony in McDonald's; Mrs. Standish announcing their school's placement in the Classics Contest to Mr. Malory's class; Bernadette and Nadine arguing in the park; the Classics Bowl championship round.)
2. Creative Writing. Write a letter from one character to another. Bernadette might explain to Martha or Lori or Nadine why she must take action; Lori could tell how losing her father has made her crave academic attention; Nadine could write Bernadette saying why Vince is worth neglecting one's best friend; Martha could tell Bernadette why any loving mother would protect her daughter even if it means leaving injustice uncorrected; Mr. Malory could tell his team why learning to win is valuable. Why didn't the author use such an approach?
3. Creative Writing. Write a different ending. Could Bernadette's team win? Be disqualified? Tie? Expose the cheater?
4. Creative Writing. Using existing characters, write a new scene which could occur without changing the book's ending.
5. Essay; Ethics. List all the reasons Bernadette is tempted to allow cheating to occur. Write about a time in history, current events, or your personal life, when dishonesty seemed like the best policy.
6. Film/Book Comparison. The HBO movie Cheaters, with Jeff Daniels, was based on an actual incident similar to the situation in *Cheating Lessons*. Watch the movie and compare the differences in how real and fictional teens reacted to the temptation to cheat. **Caution:** Cheaters is R-rated for language.
7. Imagination in Plotting. Outline a sequel to *Cheating Lessons*.
8. Critical Analysis. Write a review of the book for the school paper.

9. Persuasive Writing. Draft a letter to a movie producer suggesting the book be made into a film. Consider sending it to Hollywood. (This is how *The Outsiders* became a movie.)
10. Comparing Literary Forms. Find another novel, song or poem that relates to the theme of being honest at the expense of personal loyalty. Discuss similarities between it and this novel.
11. Art. Draw a comic strip or cartoon illustrating a scene from the novel. Or, draw an alternate cover.
12. Research/Copyright. Using *Bartlett's Quotations*, explain why you think the author chose the quotations that begin each chapter. Which ones do you think she invented? Suggest other quotations you might have used. (Consider the effect of paying for permissions on her choices.)
13. Group Discussion. Conduct a small group discussion with classmates who have also read the book. Report your group's conclusions to the class.
14. Support an Opinion. Choose one character from the book and, citing examples, explain why that character did/did not appeal to you.
15. Ethics. Adults, especially parents, view Martha Terrell's advice to her daughter differently than teen readers do. Why might a reader's age affect his/her reaction to a character? How does Nadine's advice differ from Martha's? How do you imagine your parents would react if you faced Bernadette's dilemma?

Related YA Reading (moral courage, honesty):

- ♦ *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins
- ♦ *Lord of the Deep* by Graham Salisbury
- ♦ *The Summer of My German Soldier* by Bette Greene
- ♦ *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh
- ♦ *Mara, Daughter of the Nile* by Eloise Jarvis McGraw
- ♦ *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm* by Nancy Farmer

Nan Willard Cappo lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and is working on her third novel. She welcomes your comments or ideas about using *Cheating Lessons* in the classroom. Contact her via www.nancappo.com. Discounts for bulk book purchases available—contact Tadmar Press at 1-866-316-1913.