

# Caught Cheating



an ABC PrimeTime Thursday special program with Charles Gibson

**Subjects:** Social Studies and Language Arts

**Grade Levels:** 6–12

**Product:** 77C26VL00

**Running Time:** 42:42



## Synopsis

ABC's Charles Gibson travels to high schools, colleges, and Ivy League universities around the United States to investigate cheating in schools. In a six-month study, he discovers exactly how students are cheating, and why many of them think they're justified in doing so. The program highlights high-tech cheating methods, Internet-assisted plagiarism, and "academic guns for hire," ghostwriters who crank out research papers at x dollars a page.

The DVD contains the following chapters. You might use any or all chapters as part of a social studies or language arts unit focussing on ethics, critical thinking, drawing conclusions, and identifying facts and opinions.

abc NEWS  
**Classroom Edition**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction/High Tech Cheating

In the past students prepared “cheat sheets” in teeny tiny handwriting and copied paragraphs out of encyclopedias, but today’s cheaters have access to more sophisticated tools. Some students download handy material onto their graphing calculators or handheld computers (devices that some instructors allow students to use during tests). Others use cell phones to photograph notes or shoot answers from friend to friend via text-messaging. Some cheaters use two-way pagers to gain Internet access and IM (“Instant Message”) helpful pals during exams.

## Chapter 2: Why Cheat?

When Charles Gibson asks students why they cheat, some mention negative role models such as President Clinton, who lied about his involvement with Monica Lewinsky, and corporate cheaters such as Enron executives. Others protest that since everyone else cheats, honest test-takers suffer when an instructor grades on a curve. Students also point out the pressure they are under to earn high grades so they can get into college or land good jobs. One high school student worried, “Grades can determine your future, and if you fail... then you’re not going on to college. You’re going to work at McDonald’s and live out of a car.”

Kids blame rigid course requirements for their attitude about cheating, too. Schools force them to learn boring, irrelevant information that they’re never going to use in real life, students contend, and this justifies cheating in order to pass.

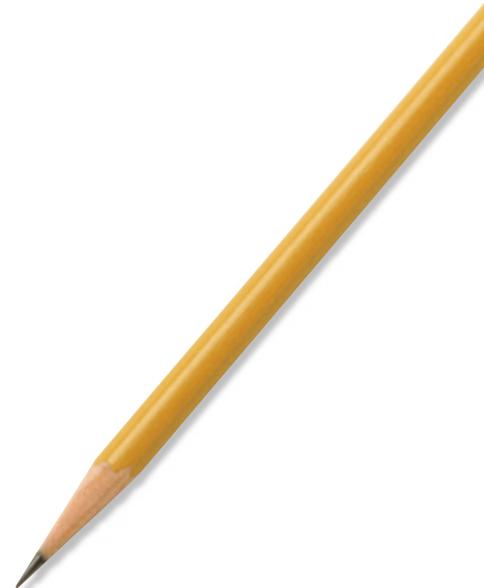
## Chapter 3: Plagiarism

In the old days, plagiarism could be almost as time consuming as writing original work, but today it’s quick and easy to copy and paste text from the Internet. Plus, there are numerous websites that sell term papers or even give them away for free. These include Papers4Less.com, Cheathouse.com and Schoolsucks.com.

Luckily, instructors have high tech options for fighting back. Educators’ most effective weapon against Internet plagiarism may be Turnitin.com, a service that crosschecks turns of phrase in student essays with language in its gargantuan database (made up of previously submitted essays, as well as text from the Internet). Says Turnitin.com founder John Barrie, “It’s typically thirty percent of all the papers submitted that have significant levels of plagiarism.”

## Chapter 4: An Academic Gun for Hire/Summing Up

Finally, Charles Gibson visits with “Andy,” an unrepentant—in fact, boastful—ghostwriter who cranks out college papers for hefty fees. Andy believes that his services make everybody happy: parents, professors, his “clients,” and especially him (he’s grinning all the way to the bank). Andy also ghostwrites medical school essays for applicants to top schools. And he aspires to be a doctor himself—not a very comforting prospect.



## Objectives

### The student will:

- explore ethical issues regarding cheating in school, including high tech methods such as Internet plagiarism;
- use critical thinking to detect faulty logic and distinguish between fact and opinion;
- determine whether to accept others' opinions as valid, based on their credentials and the kinds of evidence they present;
- draw upon historical knowledge during the examination of social and ethical issues;

## Background Information

### Charles Gibson

ABCNEWS co-anchor Charles Gibson was born in Evanston, Illinois, and grew up in Washington, D.C. A Princeton University graduate, Mr. Gibson was news director for the University's radio station. When ABCNEWS hired him in 1975, he was already a seasoned radio and television journalist. Mr. Gibson has worked as a reporter and co-anchor on many different ABCNEWS programs, including *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*, *Nightline*, *20/20*, *World News This Morning*, *PrimeTime Thursday*, and *Good Morning America*, a show he has co-anchored with Diane Sawyer since 1999. During his career Mr. Gibson has covered such events as the Academy Awards, the Democratic and Republican national conventions, the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, and the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado. He has interviewed a wide variety of celebrities and politicians, including President Bill Clinton, Yasir Arafat, Elton John, Whoopi Goldberg, and Jodie Foster.

## Recent Statistics on Cheating Among High School and College Students

[Source: *plagiarism.org*, sponsored by *Turnitin.com*]

- An article titled "The State of Americans: This Generation and the Next" (*Free Press*, July 1996) says that while 58.3 percent of high school students allowed classmates to copy their work in 1969, by 1989 this figure had risen to 97.5 percent.
- In a study, The Center for Academic Integrity determined that almost 80 percent of college students say that they have cheated at least once.
- A survey conducted by *The Psychological Record* found that 36 percent of undergraduate students admit to plagiarizing others' written work.



- When *Education Week* conducted a national survey on cheating, it found that 54 percent of students admitted to plagiarizing text from the Internet. In addition, 74 percent of students said that they had done some “serious cheating” on at least one occasion during the previous school year. Finally, 47 percent of students think that teachers sometimes purposefully ignore students who are engaged in cheating.
- *US News & World Report* conducted a poll that shows 90 percent of students believe that most cheaters either escape detection or have never received appropriate punishment.

## Preview Questions

### Ask these questions prior to viewing Chapter 1: Introduction/High Tech Cheating.

1. Can you think of some ways that high tech devices allow students to cheat on tests? What are some of the devices that students use to cheat?
2. Do you think that cheating in school is becoming “the norm”?

### Ask these questions prior to viewing Chapter 2: Why Cheat?

3. Why do you think some high school and college students cheat on exams and term papers? Do you think cheating is justified sometimes? Explain your answer.

### Ask these questions prior to viewing Chapter 3: Plagiarism.

4. What is plagiarism? Why do you think it is easier to plagiarize others’ writing these days than it was thirty years ago?
5. If a student turns in a plagiarized essay, does her teacher have any way to prove that the student cheated?

### Ask these questions prior to viewing Chapter 4: An Academic Gun for Hire/Summing Up.

6. Let’s say a college student doesn’t have time to write a paper. His deadline is approaching fast. He doesn’t want to take a zero grade for the essay, but he is afraid to plagiarize due to strict rules against that. Are there any other cheating methods open to him? What are they?
7. Have you ever heard of “paper mills” such as Papers4Less.com? How do these organizations work?

## Postviewing Questions

### Ask these questions after viewing Chapter 1: Introduction/High Tech Cheating.

1. What are some of the high tech devices that some students use to cheat? How do they use these devices to “ace” tests?
2. How do the students whom Charles Gibson interviews seem to feel about cheating? What do you think of these students’ attitudes?

### Ask these questions after viewing Chapter 2: Why Cheat?

3. What reasons do the students in the show use to justify cheating? Do any of them seem ashamed of cheating? Do you think they *should* be ashamed, or did their reasons for cheating make sense to you?
4. Are there any circumstances that justify cheating, in your opinion? What are those circumstances?

### Ask these questions after viewing Chapter 3: Plagiarism.

5. How did the people who created this show use suspense to interest viewers in plagiarism?

6. Before you viewed the DVD, had you ever heard of Turnitin.com? Do you think it is fair for teachers to turn in student papers to this service within warning the students first?
7. When you found out who had plagiarized text from the Internet, were you surprised? What do you think of the high school students' reasons for plagiarizing?
8. Specifically, what is plagiarism and why is it wrong? (If you disagree that it is wrong, explain your thinking.)
9. If you copy something from the Internet and completely rewrite it, but keep the ideas in the same order, without adding any ideas of your own, is this plagiarism? Explain why or why not.

**Ask these questions after viewing Chapter 4: An Academic Gun for Hire/Summing Up.**

10. What are some of "Andy's" justifications for ghostwriting papers for other students?
11. What techniques does Andy use to write papers for others? Does he plagiarize text from the Internet? Explain why you think so.
12. Do you think Andy will become a doctor? Do you think he'll make a good one? Explain your opinion.
13. Do you think that students who study hard in high school and college are "dorks"? Explain why you think so.
14. One of Charles Gibson's interviewees says that "what you learn in college is how to learn." What does this statement mean? Do you agree or disagree with it? Explain why or why not.

## Suggested Activities

1. Prior to viewing *Caught Cheating*, distribute copies of the Response Chart at the end of this Guide. Have students fill in the chart as they watch the DVD. Then invite them to share and discuss their opinions, feelings, and questions about the issues that the program raises. If some students disagree with conclusions that Charles Gibson and his interviewees draw, encourage them to explain why.
2. Read aloud the following statements from *Caught Cheating* one by one. Ask students to tell who makes the statement, and what the speaker means by it.
  - "You're going to work at McDonald's and live out of a car."
  - "Like calculus, like derivatives—when am I ever going to use that? Never!"
  - "Sometimes they're proud, like: 'You got away with *that*?'"
  - "So now I have all the answers and I'm going to ace my exam!"
  - As soon as...you have a high enough percentage of students like him on a campus, everybody feels they have to cheat and you've lost the battle. The whole campus goes."
  - "Business students are either first or second."
  - "You're just learning to learn the system."
  - "It's typically thirty percent of all the papers submitted."
  - "Personally, I'd rather have the honor."
  - "It's only an embarrassment...if you get caught."
  - "I don't see them as cheaters because to me it's a business opportunity."
  - "And every party involved is happy in some way, or content."
  - "We need to promote integrity...because they can beat the system."
  - "What you learn in college is how to learn."
  - "Do you think we're bad people?"

3. Have students list unfamiliar and/or specialized vocabulary words that Charles Gibson and his interviewees use in *Caught Cheating*. Then have them use a dictionary to create “word families” based on the words they collected (see the examples below). Have students define each word and use it in a strong context sentence.

- **graphing calculator:** *graph, photograph, pictograph, graphite, graphic, calculate, calculus, incalculable, recalculate*
- **text-messaging:** *textual, context, message, messenger*
- **wireless Internet access:** *wire, wiry, wired, wiring, international, interdependent, intersect, accessible, inaccessible*
- **integrity:** *integrate, school integration, disintegrate, disintegration*
- **ethics:** *ethical, unethical, ethicist, ethically*
- **sanctioning:** *sanction, sanctuary, unsanctioned*
- **submitted:** *submission, submit, resubmit*
- **honor:** *honorable, honorary, honorarium, dishonorable, dishonor*
- **compromised:** *compromise, uncompromising*
- **business opportunity:** *businesslike, doing business, big business, opportune, opportunist, inopportune, photo op*

4. Have students collect and read current and archived newspaper and magazine articles on high tech cheating and Internet plagiarism in schools. Then have students form groups and report on the topics in the following ways:

- a. Present factual information on the issues, trying to be as objective as possible.
- b. Hold debates on the following questions: 1) *Does the fact that lots of others cheat make cheating more acceptable?* 2) *Is it OK to cheat in required classes that are not at all relevant to your future?* 3) *If some adults cheat, does it mean that teens should be able to do so, too?* 4) *Can cheating be a valid form of protesting unfairness in schools?*

- c. Make predictions regarding future effects that cheating in schools may have on society’s ethical values.

5. Interested students can read one of the books on cheating listed below. Then they can hold a book talk in which they summarize the information they learned from the book and discuss their opinions and feelings about the issues that the author presents. Ask students to read aloud passages from the book that they feel are especially well written, important, convincing, or unconvincing.

### Fiction

- *Winning* by C.S. Adler (Clarion Books, 1999)
- *Cheating Lessons* by Nan Willard Cappel (Simon & Schuster, 2002)
- *The Cheat* by Amy Goldman Koss (Puffin, 2004)

### Nonfiction

- *Cheating on Tests (Gallup Youth Survey, Major Issues)* by Hal Marcovitz (Mason Crest Publishers, 2005)
- *Cheating on Tests: How to Do It, Detect It and Prevent It* by Gregory H. Cizek (Lea, 1999)
- *Learning Right from Wrong in the Digital Age* by Doug Johnson (Linworth Publishing, 2003)
- *Student Cheating and Plagiarism in the Internet Era: A Wake-Up Call* by Ann Lathrop and Kathleen Foss (Libraries Unlimited, 2000)

### Activities to accompany Chapter 1: Introduction/High Tech Cheating

6. Have students create a confidential questionnaire on cheating, photocopy it, and distribute it among their schoolmates. Respondents can deposit their completed, folded questionnaires in a taped-shut box with a slot cut into the lid. A sample questionnaire follows:

# Questionnaire about Cheating on Tests

*(This is a confidential questionnaire. Please don't write your name on it!)*

1. Have you ever cheated on a test? (Even a little bit?)  
 yes                       no
2. In your opinion, about what percent of students in our school have cheated on a test at least once? (If you don't know, estimate or guess.)  
 0 to 15 percent               45 to 60 percent  
 15 to 30 percent               60 to 75 percent  
 30 to 45 percent               over 75 percent
3. If you have cheated on a test at least once, check the method(s) you used.  
 handwritten or typed "cheat sheet"  
 copied friends' answers  
 downloaded information onto a graphing calculator  
 used a handheld computer or other electronic device to store notes  
 used a cell phone to text-message friends  
 other method: \_\_\_\_\_
4. If you have ever been caught cheating, how did you feel about it?  
 very ashamed of myself  
 embarrassed, but only because I was caught  
 I didn't care very much.  
 I didn't care at all.
5. If you have cheated but have never been caught, which best describes your feeling about it?  
 I feel so guilty about it that I'll never do it again.  
 I don't feel great about it, but I'll probably do it again just to survive in school.  
 I don't have any strong feelings about it—you gotta do what you gotta do to get through school.  
 I think it's fine to cheat. If teachers are going to force us to learn stuff that's boring and irrelevant to our real lives, what do they expect?

Before they look at the completed questionnaires, students should write hypotheses that predict what their research will reveal. Have them create bar graphs and write short essays to sum up the data that they collect.

7. Have students find out what your school's policy is on cheating. Encourage them to discuss and debate whether the policy seems fair and reasonable. If your school has an honor code, discuss that, too. If it does not have such a code, students may want to write one and submit it to the principal for consideration.

### Activities to accompany Chapter 2: Why Cheat?

8. Have students list the reasons that Gibson's interviewees give for cheating. Lead a discussion on each reason, one by one. Have students tell whether they think each justification is valid and/or how it might be challenged. Reasons include the following:
  - Everyone else cheats, so I'll be at a disadvantage if I don't cheat, too.
  - I don't want to study all the time and seem like a "dork," so I'm sometimes unprepared for tests.
  - I play sports, so I don't have time to study. I have to cheat because I don't know the material.
  - I have too many assignments due at once—I've got to cheat on some of them.
  - If I don't cheat I won't get good enough grades to get into college.
  - My teachers don't care if we cheat.
  - School requirements force me to study boring information that I'll never use. I refuse to learn this stuff, so I have to cheat in order to pass.
9. Have students choose one of the cheaters whom Gibson interviews and write a paragraph explaining what they think of the cheater's

attitude and behavior. If students can empathize with the cheater, they might share an anecdote that explains why.

### Activities to accompany Chapter 3: Plagiarism.

10. The next time students have a short essay due, they might try writing it three different ways in order to experience the difference between plagiarizing and writing original work:
  - a. Do an Internet search on the topic, and find a few paragraphs that seem to fit. Copy and paste these into a word-processing document and print the document out. Read this through and imagine turning it in as your own work.
  - b. Do an Internet search on the topic, find relevant information on more than one website, and copy and paste the text into a word-processing document. Next, reword each sentence so that it will sound a little different than it originally did. Move the paragraphs around if it seems necessary. Print out the document, read it through, and imagine turning it in as your own work.
  - c. Do Internet and/or library research on the topic, and take notes or copy and paste notes. Read over your notes, then type the essay "from scratch," using your own ideas. If you use text from a book or the Internet, cite each source in parentheses or via a footnote. Edit and proofread your essay for errors, print it out, read it through, and turn it in.

After students try this experiment, have them explain what each process was like, and how they felt after they completed it. Ask which process was most difficult and what they learned from comparing the three. Make sure students understand that Option b. does constitute plagiarism, even though software

such as that used by Turnitin.com might not be able to detect it.

11. Have students do Internet and/or library research to find out exactly what plagiarism is and isn't. They can create a classroom poster to help remind classmates not to plagiarize others' work. Sources might include a website called plagiarism.org, which is sponsored by Turnitin.com.
12. Have students discuss the following question: *How can teachers create writing assignments that are impossible to complete via plagiarism?* Work with the group to come up with a few such writing assignments. Then have students complete one of them.

### Activities to accompany Chapter 4: An Academic Gun for Hire/Summing Up.

13. Have students imagine that "Andy" has asked them to write him a letter of recommendation for medical school. The letter is supposed to be a "character reference" that explains why Andy would or would not make a good medical student and physician. Tell them to address their letters to Dean \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ Medical School. Students may wish to read their letters aloud.
14. Have students visit, evaluate, and contrast the following websites and webpages on cheating:
  - Cheathouse.com  
<<http://www.cheathouse.com/>>
  - Cheating: Here, There, and Everywhere (from PBS Kids)  
<<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/school/cheating/>>
  - "Ethics: Cheating and Plagiarism," a transcript from *In the Mix* on PBS  
<[http://www.pbs.org/inthemix/shows/transcript\\_ethics.html](http://www.pbs.org/inthemix/shows/transcript_ethics.html)>

Encourage students to summarize the sites' purposes and tell how they reacted to each one. Also ask students to read aloud passages

from the sites that they feel are especially interesting or surprising. Have them tell which site they like best, and why.

15. Make available to students the statements listed in Activity #2 above. Have them choose one or more quotes and use them as the basis for a personal essay on cheating. They might discuss information that they learned from *Caught Cheating* and also describe their own experiences and feelings about cheating.

## Resources

*If you have access to the Internet, here are some sources of information on issues that Charles Gibson and his interviewees discuss on the DVD. Note that some websites are recommended for teachers' use rather than students*

### **Caught Cheating—a Partial Transcript of the PrimeTime Thursday Special**

<[http://abcnews.go.com/sections/Primetime/US/cheating\\_040429-1.html](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/Primetime/US/cheating_040429-1.html)>

### **"Downloadable Term Papers: What's a Prof. to Do?" by Tom Rocklin of the University of Iowa**

A webpage article on student cheaters and ways to shoo them back to the straight and narrow. More interesting to teachers than students, though some students can learn from it.

<<http://www.uiowa.edu/~centeach/resources/ideas/term-paper-download.html>>

### **Plagiarism.org (sponsored by Turnitin.com)**

Defines plagiarism for students and teachers, and helps them to avoid it.

<<http://plagiarism.org>>

### **Schoolsucks.com (for teachers only)**

A term paper mill with a few interesting twists, the website's "About Us" message reads: "It all began six years and a few thousand homework assignments ago. Word got out quickly. Nervous teachers.

Phone calls and faxes. The media showed up. Students came and stayed. Our answers surprised all—if we wanted students to plagiarize, we'd charge for the papers. They're free for everyone—students and teachers—to read. And we don't rate them—you could be downloading garbage. That garbage is the result of the education system. In a way, teachers write these papers too." Hmm. <<http://schoolsucks.com>>

# Activity #1: Response Chart

As you watch the DVD, use the second column of the chart to record your reactions to the information Stossel reports, as well as the opinions and conclusions that he and others express. Also jot down any questions that come into your mind as you view the show.

Topic	Your Own Opinions, Feelings, and Questions
Using high tech devices to cheat	
Reasons for cheating	
Using the Internet to commit plagiarism	
Hiring someone else to write your term papers	