

WorldCat or another large catalog to show that there are copies of this book available for reading. (As of this writing, per WorldCat, more than 680 libraries own the book *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life*.) You might also show the students a photograph of Viswanathan to illustrate that she was just a college student (like they are now) when this happened.

The wrap-up discussion could simply be conversation in class, but you can add to it by creating a list of “best practices to prevent plagiarism” for the students and posting it on a class website or displaying it on a poster in the classroom.

This exercise addresses ACRL Standard 5.

Exercise 22

How Plagiarism Changed a Life

Let's look at a real-life example of plagiarism.

Kaavya Viswanathan was nineteen and a freshman at Harvard when she was offered a two-book deal of \$500,000 to write “chick lit.” Viswanathan wrote a book titled *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life*. The book was published in April 2006, and it quickly became a best seller. DreamWorks bought the rights, planning to produce a film based on the book. Soon after it was published, however, reports of possible plagiarism surfaced. In the end, there were more than forty plagiarized passages identified in Viswanathan's novel. The book was pulled from store shelves April 27, 2006, and the book deal was canceled. Viswanathan apologized, saying that she “must have internalized” those details (from the other author's books) without realizing it. Viswanathan remained at Harvard despite the plagiarism event.

Read the two articles below.

Story about Viswanathan in the *Harvard Crimson*: www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=512948

Update on Viswanathan from—ye gads!—Wikipedia! http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaavya_Viswanathan

The class will be divided into small discussion groups. Each group will discuss one question. Select a moderator, recorder, and spokesperson for your group. You will have ten to fifteen minutes to discuss and record your responses to the question you received. The spokesperson for each group will report to the class on the group's answers to the questions.

Questions

Group 1: If you were the author Meg Cabot, how would you feel about your ideas being stolen by Kaavya Viswanathan and used in *Opal Mehta*? If you were Viswanathan, would you apologize to the author? Why or why not?

Group 2: Why do you think Viswanathan plagiarized passages from the other chick lit author in her novel? Do you think that this case of plagiarism was intentional? What should the consequences be for plagiarizing in the publishing world?

Group 3: One student was interviewed about the *Opal Mehta* issue and said, “What difference does it make if [Viswanathan] wrote it or not? It's still a good book.” How do you feel about this statement? What responsibility should the editor and publisher have with regard to verifying that their authors do not plagiarize?

Group 4: How are you going to be more aware of your writing and not plagiarize by citing sources in the future? What are the roles and responsibilities of a university community to ensure that students do not plagiarize for campus assignments? Is an “Honor Code and Pledge” adequate to ensure that students do not plagiarize? What should be the consequences of plagiarizing (e.g., failure of paper, failure of course, expulsion from the university)?

Group 5: If you were Viswanathan, would you have gone back to Harvard after this incident of plagiarism? Do you think Harvard should have expelled Viswanathan? Do you believe that Viswanathan's professors are going to treat her in the same respect as other students after this incident? Where do you think Kaavya Viswanathan is now, a few years after the controversy?

Adapted from an exercise created by Carrie A. Kelly, Librarian, St. George's School, Newport, Rhode Island.