

DELINEATING ARGUMENTS: CASE STUDY

Tweeting About a Pop Quiz

ISSUE

Justin has Spanish class during first period. When the bell rings Monday morning, the teacher announces that there will be a pop quiz. Justin studied over the weekend, so he's confident he did well on the quiz. His friend Mark, however, told Justin on the ride to school that he didn't study at all. Mark has Spanish with the same teacher during third period. Justin decides to tweet a warning to Mark about the pop quiz so that Mark will have second period to study. Mark sees the tweet and he studies during his History class.

His grade on the pop quiz is much higher than his average grade for the course, so the teacher becomes suspicious. The teacher eventually finds out that Justin tweeted a warning to Mark about the quiz. The teacher calls a meeting with Justin and the school principal to inform Justin that the tweet was cheating and he would be penalized as such. Justin argues that the tweet isn't cheating and he shouldn't be punished for letting Mark know about the quiz.

PERSPECTIVES

THE TEACHER

The teacher has been at the school for more than 20 years. During that time, she has earned a reputation as a hard but fair grader. She has been nominated for teacher of the year several times. She has a policy in her class that cell phones are not allowed to be on.

The teacher explains why she considers the tweet to be cheating:

When I decide to give a pop quiz, I want to evaluate whether my students are keeping up with the ideas and homework in my course. These quizzes need to be surprises in order to evaluate students' commitment to my course. I don't announce these quizzes ahead of time because this will just encourage students to study at the last minute. This doesn't provide the insight I want into students' performance. Because Justin sent that message to his friend, there was an opportunity for his friend and anyone else who heard about this message to prepare for the quiz. This is an unfair advantage and the grades for the third period quizzes will almost certainly be higher. This isn't fair to my first period students. In addition to undermining my quiz, Justin has also created extra work for me. I'll have to redo the quiz at another surprise point in the course. I am going to have to deal with complaints from students who did well on the quiz, but will have to take a replacement.

JUSTIN

Justin is a good student. His GPA is a 3.7 and he takes a couple of AP courses. He is also involved in the Speech and Debate team and the Chess club. He glazes hams for extra money on the weekend. He and Mark have been friends for five years, though they aren't best friends. Mark moved to Justin's street so they often see one another over the weekend. Justin knows that Mark struggles with school.

Justin defends his decision to tweet with the following statement:

Sending a tweet isn't cheating because I didn't tell Mark or anyone else who saw the tweet what was on the quiz. I just said there we had a quiz so they might have a quiz. I had no idea if the teacher was going to have a quiz for the third period class. I can't read her mind. What I did isn't different from the other students who told their friends about the quiz in person. Besides, couldn't Mark have thought there might be a quiz even if he hadn't seen the tweet? At the end of the day, Mark studied and did well, so I don't see what the problem is. It doesn't matter what I tweeted or what he thought. What matters is that he spent time preparing for the quiz and he earned his grade.

OTHER PERSPECTIVES:

Other students, the principal, the teacher's colleagues