

Think First

JEA
press rights
commission

Free expression
through
responsible
journalism

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Constant Vigilance

Overview and Rationale:

Although the risk of high school journalists being sued for libel is small, a thorough grounding in libel is essential to the practice of responsible journalism. This lesson is designed to help students learn about libel, its ramifications and how they should be in a state of constant vigilance (as Mad-Eye Moody of "Harry Potter" fame would advocate) to guard against it.

Goals for Understanding:

Essential question:

How vulnerable is our publication to libel claims?

Critical engagement questions:

What "red flags" indicate potential libel?

What steps can we take to prevent libel from happening?

How do we want to address complaints from sources and readers?

Overviews and Timeline:

Activity 1 (one class or meeting period)

Students will gain a basic understanding of libel through the instructor's presentation of the Student Press Law Center's libel PowerPoint.

Activity 2 (one class or meeting period)

Students will examine past issues and/or analyze story budgets for upcoming issues to determine possible libel "red flags," using the list in Law of the Student Press.

Activity 3 (two classes or meeting periods)

Students will develop an action plan to help them handle complaints from sources and readers. The plan will include a checklist for reporters and editors to use during the reporting, writing and editing stages so they can identify and resolve potential issues. It also will include a corrections policy.

Activity 4 (two classes or meeting periods)

Students will select a classmate to handle feedback from sources and readers. Through role-playing exercises, they will help their classmate to become

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comfortable with resolving potential conflicts.

Assessment:

The action plan will be posted in the classroom. Checklists will be used for all future stories. Grading will be based on participation in class discussions and demonstrated ability to analyze situations in a mature, logical fashion.

References:

Student Press Law Center libel PowerPoint

Law of the Student Press



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