

Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier / Debate

Directions:

1. Read the background material and review the arguments for both sides of the case: Hazelwood School District and Kuhlmeier (page 2).
2. Your teacher will divide the class into two teams: Team Hazelwood and Team Kuhlmeier.
3. With your team, discuss your position on the following question:

Did Principal Reynolds' removal of portions of the Hazelwood East High School student newspaper violate students' First Amendment rights?

4. Select three speakers to represent your team. As a group, prepare to debate the case as follows:

Speaker 1 on both teams should discuss the general constitutional ideals that *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* raises:

- a. **Speaker 1 on Team Hazelwood:** Speak for two minutes defending the school district's decision to remove the articles from the school newspaper.
- b. **Speaker 1 on Team Kuhlmeier:** Speak for one minute to restate the position of Hazelwood School District while pointing out flaws in Team Hazelwood's argument and providing counterarguments. Then speak for one minute criticizing the school's decision to remove the student's articles from the school newspaper.

Speaker 2 on both teams should continue the debate citing evidence from the background provided.

- c. **Speaker 2 on Team Hazelwood:** Speak for one minute to restate the position of Kathy Kuhlmeier while pointing out flaws in Team Kuhlmeier's argument and providing counterarguments. Then speak for one-minute citing specific evidence from the background provided to support the Hazelwood position.
- d. **Speaker 2 on Team Kuhlmeier:** Speak for one minute to restate the position of Hazelwood School District while pointing out flaws in Team Hazelwood's argument and providing counterarguments. Then speak for one-minute citing specific evidence from the background provided to support the Kuhlmeier position.

Both teams should break for 5 minutes to prepare a closing argument/rebuttal speech by **Speaker 3** on both teams.

- e. **Speaker 3 on Team Kuhlmeier:** Two minutes to conclude (reinforce answer to the debate question).
- f. **Speaker 3 on Team Hazelwood:** Two minutes to conclude (reinforce answer to the debate question).

Background

In May 1983, students in a journalism class at Hazelwood East High School in St. Louis, Missouri, generated the final edition of their school paper for the year, *Spectrum*. As was customary, they submitted the paper to their adviser, who gave the principal, Robert Reynolds, the opportunity to review it prior to publication.

When Principal Reynolds reviewed the paper, he found two articles that concerned him. Reynolds wanted the students to make changes in their articles, but he was afraid they would miss the deadline for publishing *Spectrum*. Since it was the last issue of the year, there was no room for delay. He decided to delete the two pages with the questionable articles (which also had other, non-controversial articles) and publish the remainder of the paper. He informed his superiors in the school system of this decision; they supported him wholeheartedly.

Hazelwood's Argument

The Hazelwood East High School newspaper is a school-sponsored activity. The students write the newspaper articles as part of a class. The purpose of the newspaper is educational, not to report the news. The school must have control over what is taught in the classroom. This control allows the school to make certain that students learn what the class is designed to teach. Students, parents, and members of the public might believe that the school newspaper speaks for the school. If the school could be perceived as supporting the ideas in the newspaper, then the school should have the power to limit that message when it could be harmful.

Kuhlmeier's Argument

School newspapers can be both part of what is taught in the classroom and a source of news. School newspapers are written by students and made to inform the reader on what students believe. School newspapers can be read outside the school. The principal should have limited power to interfere with the newspaper, even if he does not like the articles. This type of speech should be protected because it is at the core of American democracy. The school should not be able to suppress student complaints either. The students writing the school newspaper should have had the opportunity to address the principal's concerns before he made the decision to remove the articles.