

**CONNECTICUT BAR FOUNDATION
JAMES W. COOPER FELLOWS
QUINTIN JOHNSTONE
2023-2024 STATEWIDE HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST TOPIC**

“Battle of the Bytes: AI vs. Academic Integrity”*
**title generated by ChatGPT*

As Ms. Grady is returning the class’s graded essay assignment, Olivia waits with bated breath. A high school student at the end of her junior year, Olivia is already preparing for early admission to several elite colleges. She excels in her classwork, and has done community service every summer and even after school when she is not starring on the lacrosse field. Ever since the news that they did away with legacy admissions at the colleges to which she’s applying, she really needs to keep the pressure on herself. She’s no longer a shoo-in.

Across the classroom sits Zeke: an arrogant, stereotypical basketball star, too cool to put in any real work. At least that’s the image he desperately tries to portray. The truth is, no one from Zeke’s family has finished high school, much less made it to college. His college goals would be crushed if he couldn’t keep his grades up so that he could receive scholarships. There is no money for college. The only way he can attend is if the school wants him enough to pay for him to be there. Sports might help a bit, but he’s a big fish in a little pond and he knows it. His best shot is academics. When he’s not playing basketball, he’s working after school to help his family. He has no time – and couldn’t afford – to be a volunteer.

Zeke eyes Olivia across the room. He seethes with emotions he can’t identify – anger? jealousy? She’s got it all: she’s athletic and brilliant and popular. Olivia doesn’t need it, but she’s in line for all the same scholarships and admissions at the same schools as Zeke.

Ms. Grady makes her way to Olivia and hands her the paper without the usual look of admiration on her face. Instead, the look could be pity, or even concern. There it is, in bright red letters on the top of the first page of the assignment: SEE ME. There’s no grade. No A+. No “Excellent work, as usual!” Just “SEE ME.” What the heck is this all about?

Zeke is watching Olivia’s face turn beet red. He’s surprised and slightly relieved. Olivia couldn’t have received another perfect score, not with that reaction. He’s a little disappointed for her too, though. She’s nice and she works hard. Those red cheeks and watery eyes tell Zeke something is wrong and he knows just how she must be feeling. At least he thinks he does, until Ms. Grady makes her way to him. Zeke is stunned to read “See me after class” on his paper. It’s like a punch in the gut. He can’t catch a break.

Olivia and Zeke soon find themselves sitting on the chairs outside of Ms. Grady’s cubicle. While they are waiting, a teacher’s aide hands them each the Student Handbook** with the section regarding Plagiarism highlighted. Handwritten in the column are two letters: “AI?” Olivia exclaims aloud to herself, “Plagiarism?! It’s a research tool, what’s the big deal?” Zeke replies, “We use it for all of our research papers. I don’t get it. What’s different about this one?” They give each other a sideways glance and return to silence.

Olivia is called to Ms. Grady first. Her office is just a cubicle, without 4 walls or a door. Although they speak in hushed tones, Zeke can hear everything they are saying. Olivia did, in fact, use AI to write her essay. She looked at Wikipedia and some other sources for her work. She Googled the topic to see what else she could find. Once she had completed her research, she went to ChatGPT to help her come up with some ideas on how to phrase things for her essay. Although she incorporated the AI-generated phrases in several instances, she insisted the substantive work and ideas were hers. Ms. Grady accepts this explanation and, knowing Olivia's potential, grades her 10 points off her original work.

Zeke, feeling a little less pressure knowing the punishment Olivia received, takes the seat next to Ms. Grady's desk as Olivia heads back to class. Ms. Grady asks Zeke about his essay. He indicates that he wrote the essay himself. He used ChatGPT as a research tool along with Google and Siri. These search bots led him to other materials and information that he read and used to formulate his thoughts and ideas to write the essay. Once he finished his draft, he ran his essay through Grammarly, which improved some of his grammar. He assures Ms. Grady that the substantive work was all his. He researched it, wrote it, and only after putting all of his own ideas onto paper did he run the essay through Grammarly.

Ms. Grady contemplates what Zeke said. She considers this use of AI to be more egregious than Olivia's and grades him more harshly. Zeke is stunned to hear he would have 20 points taken off his essay. That score would significantly lower his final grade for the class, which would likely put him out of the running for early college admission – especially with his lack of volunteer work. He argues back that he could provide earlier drafts of his essay to demonstrate that he didn't plagiarize any work – he didn't use any phrasing or ideas from any source that hadn't been cited. He requests that he be allowed to provide an earlier draft (before he utilized Grammarly) as his submission instead, confident that his work would speak for itself. His request is denied.

As the grading quarter was coming to an end, an appeal was made by Zeke's parents to change his grade. Because the issue was so new to the school, the situation was referred to the Board of Education. In his argument to the school and then the school board, Zeke mentioned Olivia's disparate treatment because it appeared that she had used AI-generated phrases verbatim.

Neither student cited ChatGPT or Grammarly as sources in their papers.

You are the attorney for the Board of Education. Draft an opinion letter advising the Board on the grading of both essays.

- **If the essay(s) was/were original ideas, should any points be taken off?**
- **Is it considered plagiarism to use AI to correct grammar?**
- **Is it plagiarism to utilize phrases directly from a program?**

** Excerpt from the Student Handbook:

Plagiarism

Maintaining academic integrity is a student's responsibility; therefore, all students are expected to meet the district's high standards in scholarship and personal integrity without plagiarizing the work of others. Acts by a student that constitute plagiarism include intentionally or unintentionally:

- Presenting another person's work as their own

- Using direct quotes, paraphrases, and specific ideas of another person without explicit citation
- Obtaining and submitting work from the Internet as their own
- Supplying their work to another student
- Inventing counterfeit sources
- Purchasing or copying pre-written papers