



# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL ETHICS BOWL

## Case Set for 2020-2021 Regional Competitions



COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
Parr Center for Ethics

## Contents

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### WASHINGTON STATE HIGH SCHOOL ETHICS BOWL – PLEASE NOTE:

These ten cases were chosen from the 15 distributed by the National High School Ethics Bowl and revised and edited for the Washington State High School Ethics Bowl. Each case includes study questions to help teams consider issues presented by the case, and do not necessarily represent the most important questions raised. In the scrimmages, each presentation should begin with the question or questions the team thinks are most important in considering the case (which might or might not include any of the study questions), with the remainder of the presentation addressing that question or questions.

Although teams may do factual research as part of analyzing the case and preparing the presentation, facts external to the case may not be relied upon in the presentation (as there is no way for the judges to determine the accuracy of outside factual claims).

## 1. No More Teachers, No More Books

Given the continued impacts of COVID-19, in summer 2020 schools were faced with deciding whether to reopen this fall for face-to-face instruction. It was clear that, no matter what decision was made, some individuals and groups would experience significant hardship. While many schools opted for a virtual start to the semester, many decided to begin their school year in person.

Parents are concerned about the health and safety of their children. In response to these concerns, some people claim that spread of the virus to and from children is rare. They point to studies which seem to support the conclusion that children are at low risk. The sample sizes in such studies are often small, and there is evidence that runs counter to this conclusion. In multiple states, for example, summer camps had to shut down because an overwhelming number of campers tested positive for coronavirus. Even if deaths are rare among children, we do know that it is possible for them to suffer severe organ damage, including brain damage. Moreover, some viruses have symptoms that only show themselves much later in life (e.g., childhood chickenpox producing shingles cases). Coronavirus cases might appear mild in children, but we don't yet know enough about this virus to know what might happen down the road.

Furthermore, proponents of virtual learning note that even children are at low risk, the fact remains that the virus can be spread between adults who can suffer and die from it. Bringing children back to school in the fall doesn't just involve children being together, it also involves adults together in close quarters. In many cases, teachers and staff have been given no choice regarding their educational delivery method in the fall. This includes teachers who are immunocompromised or those who have immunocompromised loved ones for whom they care. Continued employment, especially during a recession, is a compelling force. Many people can't afford to quit their jobs.

Proponents of in-person schooling point out that there is a recognized need for children to have formal education. Some argue that students have already experienced a developmental setback when classes transitioned online this past March. This burden has fallen especially on the shoulders of already vulnerable populations, such as BIPOC students and students with special needs. Younger children especially face significant challenges with virtual learning. Moreover, some people observe, before the pandemic school was one of the few safe spaces for many children. They note, for example, the increased rates of family violence over the past months. Additionally, in many cases, parents can't be full-time caregivers for their children. Some jobs can't be done from home, and parents who work those jobs need a place for their children to go where they will be safe and fed. Even people who work from home face substantial difficulties managing their job responsibilities with children at home full-time. Many of these people, who pay taxes to fund schools, are already suffering financial hardship.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Was it morally permissible to open up schools for face-to-face instruction under the circumstances?
2. Who should be or should have been involved in discussions about the reopening of schools? What principles should be used to make decisions?
3. Is there a meaningful difference between the way the decision to reopen is made by public schools as opposed to private or independent schools?

## 2. What's in a Name?

Across the United States, businesses, schools, governments, and institutions of all kinds are reckoning with racial injustice's deep roots. This is a driving factor behind renewed efforts to rename buildings on the campuses of some of the country's colleges and universities.

To cite one example, this past July the Commission on History, Race and a Way Forward at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill recommended the removal of five names from buildings ranging from residence halls to student centers. Four of the individuals for whom these buildings were named were said to occupy "high positions of influence and public trust," and the historical record reveals degrading and racist rhetoric and decisive action in support of white supremacist violence and subordination. One of those individuals, a chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court, is said by one legal scholar to have presided over "the coldest and starkest defense of the physical violence inherent in slavery that ever appeared in an American judicial opinion" in the case of *State v. Mann* (1829). Some of these individuals actively worked to disenfranchise black voters and uphold the regime of Jim Crow segregation.

Some people argue that these men were products of their racist times. They played a prominent role in advancing racist and unjust systems, but the difference between them and their contemporaries was a difference in degree, not a difference in kind. The Commission at UNC thinks otherwise, claiming that these men "were not simply men of their times...they wielded power, wealth, and influence to define the historical moments in which they lived." Moreover, the presence of these names on college campuses presents many difficulties. Some have said that the very sight of racist names on campus buildings is demoralizing, dehumanizing, and psychologically burdensome for members of marginalized groups. Building names might also express positive endorsement and valorization of their namesakes and the ideals they espoused, or a willingness to overlook serious wrongdoing for college benefactors or alumni.

But others wonder whether we can meaningfully distinguish between good and bad actors in history in this way. Does the removal of some names rather than others imply that the names of those who remain are free from moral impunity? If it were the case that we should remove the names of all those who faltered morally, then it would be best to avoid human namesakes altogether. It is also striking how quickly our verdicts about past actors change over time. If our moral standards a decade ago differ so much from our standards today, is there any hope for making lasting decisions about building names? Moreover, what is the morally correct way to judge people who, although influenced by the mores of their times to hold views we now consider immoral or offensive, contributed in other significant ways to the country?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As task forces across the country continue to deliberate about the best way forward, what principles should guide their decisions to remove names?
2. What is the moral significance of building naming and renaming? Does it matter whether the buildings are publicly or privately owned? Does it matter what sort of institution to which the name is attached?
3. Are building names like public monuments and memorials? How about other 'named' features of the academic world, such as labs, fellowships, prizes, and endowed chairs?

### 3. Dining Out During a Pandemic

In early March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States economy began shutting down. To control the spread of the virus, states limited the operation of businesses deemed non-essential, and instructed their citizens to not leave their homes unless absolutely necessary. One of the major industries affected by these shutdowns was the restaurant and bar industry. By April, restaurants and bars had lost 5.9 million jobs, and this number was surely an undercount, as it did not include undocumented employees or the many more who filed for unemployment since this data was collected in mid-April. In May, states began easing restrictions and allowing restaurants to open, but many were forced to close again just weeks later as surges in cases were attributed to bars reopening. By the summer, most states allowed outdoor dining and some limited indoor dining. But for many businesses, this came too late. Many had closed their doors for good before the reopening even started.

Before the pandemic, Megan and Andy loved going out to eat and exploring new restaurants. When the shutdown began, they tried to support some of their favorite places by ordering takeout and buying gift cards, but they knew it was a drop in the bucket. What's more, they really missed going out! They enjoyed cooking out home, but it wasn't the same experience. When the reopening started, they were eager to visit one of their local favorites. It felt strange to be back after so long, but they felt more or less comfortable and safe, and they followed all of the appropriate safety rules. After they ordered, Megan asked Andy if he thought that it was right of them to be dining out. She was comfortable with the risk of possibly catching the virus herself, but if she did catch it, would she spread it to others? What about the staff at the restaurant? Even with the best safety protocols in place, the staff were being put at much higher risk than any of the patrons—and what about their family members?

Andy noted that people need work, especially amidst ballooning unemployment rates. Andy and Megan knew that some restaurant staff were very happy to finally be back working. Though unemployment benefits were available, many, such as undocumented workers, did not qualify. A lot of the staff needed to be able to earn an income again, and they could supplement that by leaving a big tip. The restaurants need to do business. If a place closes its doors forever, what looks like temporary unemployment for workers becomes permanent.

It was obvious, Megan thought, that businesses and their employees were struggling, and if they took safety seriously the risk was probably low. But what if the staff don't actually feel safe, but felt like they had to work anyway? With so many unemployed, maybe they feel compelled to work. She wondered: Are we doing more harm than good by going out and being around strangers? Are we putting our enjoyment above the health and safety of others?

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it ethical to dine-in at restaurants in the midst of a pandemic such as COVID-19?
2. What responsibilities do Andy and Megan have to protect the health of others, especially if those others chose to put themselves at risk?
3. How should decisions balancing the support of the economy and the protection of people's physical health be made during a pandemic?

## 4. The Korean Pop Industrial Complex

Within the past decade, Korean Pop, more commonly known as K-Pop, has become a global sensation. South Korean artists have hit the Billboard Hot 100 chart at least eight times. In 2019, BTS became the first K-Pop group to be nominated for a Grammy. Adored due to its distinctive blend of catchy tunes, clean choreography, and glamorous idols, the K-Pop industry has grown along with the rise of Hallyu, a Chinese term which describes the popularity of South Korean culture internationally. Via Korean pop, drama, skincare regimens, and more, South Korea has become a fixture in popular culture worldwide.

In an increasingly globalized society, many think that the rise of K-Pop is a force of moral good. Cultural globalization allows people from all parts of the world to understand one another and appreciate different ideas and values, which fosters the ability to empathize with others, no matter where they are from. K-Pop is also a way for South Korea to develop its “soft power” – the “intangible power a country wields through its image,” as opposed to its “hard force” such as military or economic power.

The K-Pop industry exists to meet and cater to the demands of a hungry fanbase, who are consistently demanding new content. Fans are often criticized for propagating a system which treats its artists poorly. The journey to fame for K-Pop performers is a grueling one. Exploitative contracts, demanding beauty ideals, and even human rights violations are mainstay in the industry. K-Pop performers work long hours that are often undercompensated, as the money their content earns is often funneled back into corporate hands or toward chipping away at debt. Plastic surgery, too, is an open secret in the industry. Many trainees are expected to go under the knife, with the most common procedures designed to achieve coveted features like double eyelids or a straighter nose. Moreover, sexual exploitation is a quiet phenomenon and a common truth for women in Korean entertainment. Young performers are often taken advantage of by power brokers behind closed doors. In a culture that stigmatizes sexuality, these scandals are obscured from public view.

Still, many people assert that K-Pop is a net good. Although the exploitative habits of the industry are suspect, performers voluntarily enter their contracts. Additionally, Korean culture emphasizes work ethic. According to the OECD, “South Koreans work more hours per week on average than all but one other country, and almost 50% more than famously industrious Germany.” To criticize the K-Pop industry based on the dedication of performers, some argue, would be oblivious of differing cultural values.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do listeners have a moral obligation to stop supporting the K-Pop industry if they know that performers are mistreated?
2. If people voluntarily enter contracts, does it matter if the terms of the contract are exploitative or otherwise unethical? How can we distinguish between coercion and voluntary agreement?
3. Is the entertainment industry inherently exploitative?

## 5. Who Gets to Be Fashionable?

Shopping and fashion have long been favorite American pastimes. Sadly, this love of buying clothes can lead to significant negative environmental consequences. In 2017 alone, the EPA estimated that 11.2 million tons of clothing and textiles ended up in landfills, which accounted for 8% of all landfill waste. One of the main sources of this problem is the industry known as “fast fashion.”

Fast fashion generally refers to large retailers of clothing that produce trendy, low cost items, such as H&M, Gap, and Forever 21. Fast fashion retailers often borrow styles and looks from expensive designer brands and make pieces quickly and affordably by producing lower quality and less durable items. There is, moreover, immense pressure to keep up with ever-changing trends, some of which is generated by the companies themselves. Critics of fast fashion note that Americans now discard clothing at striking rates. They also point out that fast fashion is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental damage. Moreover, some of the brands have been accused of making their clothing in sweatshop-like conditions in developing countries.

Defenders of fast fashion respond that brands like these make nice clothing available to many who otherwise would not be able to afford it. Even if one doesn't buy designer brands, more durable and sustainable clothing can be prohibitively expensive. A recent Cosmopolitan poll found that two-thirds of respondents don't buy from sustainable fashion brands, and 80% say that it is because the clothing is too expensive. Additionally, discovering which brands are ethical and sustainable can take a great deal of time and research. It can be difficult to know if clothing's higher cost is because the brand is truly more sustainable, or because sellers believe people will pay a premium for what is perceived as a more ethical choice. The solution, some argue, is not to reduce affordable options, but to improve the recycling and re-use of unwanted clothing. Clothes can be donated instead of discarded, and some brands such as H&M offer recycling programs for old clothes to keep them out of landfills. It should not be a mark of privilege, some argue, to be able to dress well and make sustainable decisions about clothing.

But recycled and donated clothes don't always follow the path we might envision. Because the U.S. secondhand clothing market is flooded with donations, much gets shipped to developing nations, where the sale of such clothing potentially competes with the local economy or ultimately ends up being burned or dumped. Unfortunately, the same fate awaits much of the clothing dropped into a recycling bin. Proponents of fast fashion claim that improving the reuse of clothing might still be better than forcing up the price of all clothes. Not everyone can afford to buy more sustainably.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it unethical to buy fast fashion clothing? What if those are the only brands that one can afford?
2. Does wealth allow a person to make more ethical choices?
3. Do corporations in the fast fashion industry have a responsibility to make their clothing more sustainable, even if it means making their prices too high for some of their market?



## 6. Wholesome Discipline

The aim of punishment is often framed in terms of retribution for past wrongdoing and deterrence of future wrongdoing. A rapidly spreading alternative to these traditional conceptions of punishment is known as restorative justice, which does not primarily aim to “inflict punishment on the offender, but rather, to restore all parties to a prior state of ‘wholeness.’”

In response to dissatisfaction with zero-tolerance policies in schools and their disproportionate impact on disadvantaged students, many educational leaders have turned to restorative discipline. Many use mediation – between victims and offenders, among a group of offenders, or between the community and the offender – as a vehicle for healing and growth. For example, if a student is guilty of bullying, school leaders might facilitate a conversation between the bully and victim(s) or a discussion among a group of bullies in order to unearth their motivations, educate them on the harms of bullying, and repair injuries caused. While a more punitive model of discipline in schools would use familiar modes of punishment (detention, suspension, shaming, legal citations), restorative practices aim for reconciliation, reform on the part of wrongdoers, and collaborative problem-solving to address infractions and their causes.

Advocates argue that such restorative practices lead to increased accountability, more supportive school environments, positive social and emotional learning, and a more equitable distribution of punishment in schools, and have educational value. Restorative practices present opportunities for students to learn the sorts of social skills and character traits necessary for students to flourish as adults. However, the effects of restorative practices in schools are not yet well documented by researchers. One study found that restorative practices in Pittsburgh public schools improved school climate and decreased the average suspension rate, but also that those same programs led to a worsening of academic and disciplinary outcomes. Another study found that restorative intervention “did not yield significant changes in the treatment schools,” but self-reports by participants showed signs of potential positive impacts on the school climate for the future. Yet another study found that “students attending schools with collaborative climates and less punitive approaches to discipline have lower risk of being suspended and better academic outcomes.”

Critics of this practice worry that leniency in punishment does not sufficiently penalize students who misbehave and fails to deter future misbehavior. Some also see restorative practices as a way of artificially driving the number of reported school suspensions down, thereby papering over underlying problems among students and within schools. When minor behavioral problems are ignored, they may turn into serious infractions, thereby exacerbating the school-to-prison pipeline. They point out that the damage to victims is not always repaired by restorative justice. Some see widespread support for this practice, in the absence of a solid body of research, as a sign that moral sentiment has moved ahead of demonstrable results.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is there a morally significant difference between the use of restorative disciplinary practices on young children in schools as opposed to adult offenders?
2. What obligations do victims (whether individuals or communities) have to offenders? What obligations do communities have to victims?

## 7. Contraceptive Controversy

Jeremy and Ayla are involved with the Parent Teacher Association at the school that their two children attend. At a recent PTA meeting, a major topic of discussion involved a pregnant student. In discussing how to prevent teenage pregnancies in the future, a number of suggestions were made. There was a clear push to better educate students about contraceptive measures and to move away from abstinence-only education in their health classes. One parent suggested that they should start giving out free condoms in the school bathrooms, as many university campuses do.

On the drive home, Jeremy and Ayla discussed the issue. Ayla dislikes the shame that the pregnant student faces at school and thinks that distributing free condoms is a good way to destigmatize sex and help students feel more comfortable asking questions about it. She says that the important thing is to ensure that they are doing so safely, so as to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Ayla thinks that offering condoms in bathrooms is a good way of making sure that contraceptives are accessible to all students, even those whose parents do not support birth control, and to educate all students about safe sex. Remembering her high school friends, Ayla reasons that there is no way to prevent teenagers from having sex altogether. Though she strongly disapproves of either of her children having sex while in high school, the idea of one of them becoming pregnant or getting an STI is a much scarier proposition for Ayla.

Jeremy disagrees. He thinks that giving out free condoms encourages students to have sex, and results in teenagers having sex earlier than they otherwise might or should. Jeremy, too, thinks back to his own experiences in high school, and remembers that for a lot of his peers, not having access to contraceptives did prevent them from having sex or at least played a role in their decisions to wait. Making condoms available at school, Jeremy reasons, would make it easier for younger students to access them in a way that they couldn't otherwise. Many juniors and seniors can drive themselves to a store to buy contraceptives with money earned from summer and seasonal jobs, but most first and second year students cannot purchase condoms without the help of someone older. Jeremy supports better education in classrooms about various contraceptive methods but thinks that teenagers should still wait until adulthood to become sexually active. He believes the school has an obligation to do as much as they can to discourage students from having sex too early.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When, if ever, is it appropriate for a school to implement policies that directly contradict parents' values or preferences?
2. How much of the responsibility for educating teenagers about contraceptives and safe sex lies in the hands of schools and communities, and how much lies in the hands of parents?
3. How, if at all, is the responsibility for an unplanned teenage pregnancy shared between multiple people, and who shares it?



## 8. Harper's Bizarre

*Harper's Magazine* recently published an open letter cautioning that “the free exchange of information and ideas, the lifeblood of a liberal society, is daily becoming more constricted” by a set of “moral attitudes and political commitments that tend to weaken our norms of open debate and toleration of differences in favor of ideological conformity.” *Harper's* “Letter on Justice and Open Debate” was signed by 153 public figures from various walks of life, including journalist Fareed Zakaria, novelist Margaret Atwood, historian Malcolm Gladwell, feminist icon Gloria Steinem, and J.K. Rowling of *Harry Potter* fame. The letter condemns the rise of a social climate characterized by the stifling of dissenting voices, the suppression of unpopular ideas, and social ostracism “for perceived transgressions of speech and thought.”

Worries about so-called “callout” or “cancel culture” are not new to American social and political life. Treatments of the issue have emerged from all political quarters in the last few years. *Rolling Stone* editor Matt Taibbi, *New York Magazine* columnist Andrew Sullivan, and *The Atlantic's* Yascha Mounk have all recently penned statements expressing similar worries. The premise is a reasonable one on its face, given unprecedented attacks on the free press in the U.S., the proliferation of anti-democratic autocracy around the world, and the persistence of a convoluted information environment filled with fake news and conspiracy theories. Signatories of the *Harper's* letter contend that free speech, thought, and expression are the cornerstone of a democratic society, and they suggest that the restriction of unbridled debate will harm those who seek to bring about justice and will end up undermining democratic participation for all. In a contemporary deployment of John Stuart Mill's views on the freedom of speech, they argue that no-holds-barred debate is a key tool in defeating ideas that threaten human dignity and equality. Others worry about the practical effects of “cancellation” for those targeted for their purportedly divergent views: from online shaming and abuse to social ostracism, to lost followers, business, and careers. They observe that these effects serve to silence many people from expressing ideas that would enrich the collective dialogue by being aired.

Others argue that some ideas are so wrong or harmful that they should never be voiced. If and when they are articulated, the consequences for doing so should be sufficiently severe to deter their continued expression. Calling out these ideas, some argue, is central to changing social and political norms. As one writer puts it, such a culture “might seem harsh, especially to those who have fallen foul of it, but it's a necessary part of creating the best possible spaces we can.” They worry that ‘absolutist’ defenses of free speech and expression often emerge where those in power seek to shield themselves against criticism and the consequences of real-life harms their speech may cause. It is no accident, they say, that signatories of the *Harper's* letter are among the most powerful in their respective fields.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If we take seriously the idea that some ideas are beyond the pale of reasonable expression, how do we distinguish those ideas? What ideas are worthy of “cancellation?” Who decides?
2. Is the freedom of speech intrinsically valuable? Can it be overridden by other competing values?

## 9. (De)funding the Police

In summer 2020, protests erupted across the United States in response to the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by police officers, and to continued trends of police violence against Black Americans more generally. More recently, many activists have begun calling for state and local governments to “defund the police.” However, as Matthew Yglesias of Vox notes: “A three-word slogan is not a detailed policy agenda, and not everyone using the slogan agrees on the details.”

The most radical proposal associated with the slogan conceives proposes “defunding” as a literal goal and advocates for the abolition of policing, at least as the institution currently exists. As one activist argues, American policing wasn’t always around. Its early days are associated with enforcing slavery and rebuffing labor activism. This checkered history, coupled with ever-increasing militarization in police equipment and tactics, which studies have shown disproportionately affect Black Americans, motivates some activists to contend that Americans once lived without this kind of policing and can and should do so again.

Others advocate divesting some funds from police departments and reallocating them to other public initiatives, such as education, employment resources, social work, and mental health services. Police, after all, are often called to respond to issues ranging from cats in trees to mental health crises and domestic violence. Studies have shown that up to 9 in 10 calls for emergency service involve non-violent offenses, although this doesn’t mean that the resolution of such calls will remain non-violent. Many activists insist that police officers often worsen outcomes by arriving armed and using escalatory engagement tactics. They point to studies showing no correlation between increases in police funding and decreases in crime, and to consistent research indicating educational and employment equity, not increased policing, more effectively reduces crime.

Many Americans, however, remain skeptical of proposals to defund, divest from, or otherwise alter the basic structure of American policing, citing concerns about their personal safety and the safety of their communities, as well as the lack of clear alternatives for responding to crimes when they are committed. Many members of vulnerable demographic groups advocate for the police presence in their neighborhoods to stay the same, rather than decreasing or refocusing.

While a FiveThirtyEight poll indicates that a majority of Americans oppose “defunding the police” (58% to 31% on average), many municipalities are making changes consistent with the movement—from banning particular engagement tactics, to adjusting hiring priorities, to restructuring entire departments. While a strategy pursuing “reallocation” may be more palatable to many, advocacy for “defunding” is already having an impact on policing across the United States.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does the racially oppressive history of American policing mean the institution is, as some activists suggest, incapable of reform?
2. Are activists obligated to make their demands (more) palatable to the public in order to achieve their goals?
3. Why do we have police forces? Are they essential to public safety, or are there better methods of creating and sustaining safe communities?

## 10. American Dirt

*American Dirt*, a novel by Jeannine Cummins, centers on the perilous journey that a Mexican mother, Lydia, and her son, Lucas, undertake in order to seek refuge in the United States. The book is fast-paced and engrossing, and received widespread interest and acclaim leading up to its release in January 2020. Cummins took seven years to do extensive research and write the book. She received a seven-figure advance from her publisher; the book was optioned for a film adaptation prior to its release; Oprah picked up the title for her book club.

Immediately following its release, however, there was a massive backlash against the novel and Cummins. Critics maintain that the book is rife with problematic stereotypes and does little to address some of the biggest challenges facing immigrants from Latin America. In an influential review, Parul Seghal of the *New York Times* says that the book, despite its topic, is “determinedly apolitical. The deep roots of these forced migrations are never interrogated; the American reader can read without fear of uncomfortable self-reproach. It asks us only to accept that ‘these people are people,’ while giving us the saintly to root for and the barbarous to deplore—and then congratulating us for caring.”

Cummins is white (though she has some Latinx heritage) and is not an immigrant. Some people have asked why Cummins’s voice should get so much uptake, when people who are part of these demographics aren’t receiving comparable attention. Others question how accurately a white, non-immigrant woman can represent struggles that she herself has never faced, leading to charges of racial and cultural appropriation. The ensuing threats against Cummins led to the publisher cancelling the last part of her book tour, citing concerns for her safety.

Others disagree. Many point out that the history of literature is full of authors writing about characters and situations outside of their own experiences, and they defend the artist’s right to take on any subject. Sandra Cisneros, a well-known Mexican American author, endorsed the book and has publicly supported it after the backlash. The likely reader, wrote Cisneros, is “going to be someone who wants to be entertained, and the story is going to enter like a Trojan horse and change minds. It’s going to change the minds that, perhaps, I can’t change.”

Cummins stands by her novel. She says: “Not everyone has to love my book. I endeavored to be incredibly culturally sensitive. I did the work. I did five years of research. The whole intention in my heart when I wrote this book was to try to upend the stereotypes that I saw being very prevalent in our national dialogue. And I felt like there was room ... for us to examine the humanity of the people involved.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do we have a duty to refrain from telling certain stories, even if these stories are fictional?
2. To what extent does who we are govern the sorts of stories we can and should tell?
3. Parul Seghal criticizes the book for being “determinedly apolitical”. What is the purpose of fiction? What is the proper place of fictional stories, ethically? Politically?
4. Do the artist’s intentions matter when judging the quality of the artist’s creation? Is the artist’s moral character relevant to the quality of the art that artist creates?
5. Cummins maintains that she “did the work” and desired to “upend the stereotypes that I saw.” Was writing the novel morally blameworthy (or praiseworthy)?