ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING
By Marina Hendricks

Overview and Rationale:
Before students explore social media and map out a social media plan for their news organization, they may need practice with reconciling differences of opinion and achieving consensus. This lesson gives students an overview of ethical philosophies and introduces them to an approach for using those philosophies to resolve ethical dilemmas.

Goals for Understanding:
Essential question:
How can we use the Potter Box to resolve ethical dilemmas?

Critical engagement questions:
What is the Potter Box and how does it work?
What ethical philosophies can be used with it?
What situations might call for the Potter Box approach?

Overviews and Timeline:
Activity 1 (one 50-minute class)
The instructor will present an overview of ethical philosophies (see Resources). Students will reflect on their past journalism experiences – as both consumers and producers – to identify ethical dilemmas where the philosophies could have been applied. To aid in this discussion, the instructor should provide back issues of the school publication, plus a representative sample of publications the students read on a regular basis.

Activity 2 (one or two 50-minute classes)
The instructor will present the Potter Box approach to resolving ethical dilemmas (see Potter). In small groups (three to four students each), students will use the Potter Box to work through the following coverage dilemmas (the instructor will assign one to each group):
- A teacher accused of having an affair with a student
- The arrest of a student
- Several pregnancies among the student body
- A student wanting to bring a same-sex date to the prom
- Accusations of "fixed" tryouts or auditions

Because this is the introductory lesson in a unit about social media, the instructor should remind students to consider how social media might play a role in each situation. The instructor will encourage students to use creative approaches as they work through the Potter Box, such as role-playing and multimedia.

Activity 3 (one or two 50-minute classes)
The instructor will recruit a panel of judges (editors, teachers, local media professionals) to help evaluate the Potter Box presentations. Groups will give their presentations. Judges will share their observations in a constructive critique session. For homework, students will write short essays (300 to 500 words) on what they learned from the process.

Assessment (one 50-minute class):
Students will share their essays. Led by an editor, students will brainstorm on a list of possible ethical situations involving social media use in their news organization. They will discuss how the Potter Box might be used to resolve these situations. Grading will be based on participation in class discussions and small-group work, and demonstrated ability to analyze situations in a mature, logical fashion.

References:
"How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living" by Rushworth M. Kidder, pp. 24, 70-71, 120-121,127-133, 146-147,154-163.

"Media Ethics: Issues and Cases" by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins, pp. 4-5, 7-16, 100-102.

Resources:
ETHICAL PHILOSOPHIES

The Golden Mean – Aristotle
Virtue lies at the mean (middle) between two extremes of excess and deficiency.
- Cowardice and foolhardiness (mean – courage)
- Shamelessness and bashfulness (mean – modesty)
- Stinginess and wastefulness (mean – generosity)

The Categorical Imperative – Immanuel Kant
Act so that your choices could become universal law. Act so that you treat humanity always as an end and never as a means only.
- Strict duties: negative … not to harm (don't murder, don't break promises, don't lie)
- Meritorious duties: positive … to render aid (to assist others, to develop your talents, to show gratitude)

Utilitarianism – John Stuart Mill
An act's rightness is determined by its contribution to a desirable end.
- Investigative reporting: The results may harm individuals in the hope of providing a greater societal good.

Pluralistic Theory of Value – William David Ross
There is often more than one ethical value simultaneously competing for preeminence in ethical decision-making. These competing ethical claims, or duties, are equal (fidelity, reparation, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, not injuring others; "Media Ethics" also suggests veracity and nurture).
- Prima facie duties: seem to be right because of the nature of the act itself
- Duty proper or actual duties: paramount given specific circumstances

Communitarianism – Amitai Etzioni et al
When issues are political and social, community trumps individuals but does not trample them. Social justice is the predominant moral value.
- Good process can produce bad outcomes.

Sissela Bok's Model
We must have empathy for the people involved in ethical decisions. Maintaining social trust is a fundamental goal.

> The steps:
> 1. Check your conscience. How do you feel about the action?
> 2. Ask the experts. What are the alternatives? Is there another way to achieve the same goal that will not raise ethical issues?
> 3. Seek feedback from those directly and indirectly involved. How will others respond to the proposed act?

– From "Media Ethics: Issues and Cases" by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins

The Potter Box

Developed by Harvard theologian Ralph Potter

Uses four steps to arrive at an ethical judgment:

1. Understanding the **facts**
2. Outlining the **values** inherent in the decision
3. Applying relevant philosophical **principles**
4. Articulating **loyalties**

FACTS	LOYALTIES
VALUES	PRINCIPLES

Example:

You are the editor of the local daily newspaper. Your paper does not reveal the names of rape victims, but it does report where such assaults occurred, the circumstances surrounding the attacks and descriptions of the assailants, if police can provide them.

In the early hours of yesterday morning, a 25-year-old woman was raped on the roof of the downtown bus station. The woman went willingly with her attacker. She resides in a group home for the mentally challenged and is one of seven women living in the facility. She cannot describe her assailant. The police have no suspects.

Step 1 – FACTS. You have the information. How much of it are you going to publish?

Step 2 – VALUES. Do you value truth above all? Then you must sometimes be willing to give up privacy. In this case, you would print every detail because you value truth. But that risks invading the privacy of a person who in some ways unable to defend herself. If you value both truth and privacy, then you may be willing to give up some truth, the publication of every detail, to attempt to preserve the victim's privacy.

Step 3 – PRINCIPLES. What serves the greatest good? Is there a middle ground between publishing and not publishing? What would we want others to do in this situation? How would we feel if we were the victim?

Step 4 – LOYALTIES. What are they? Telling the truth? Alerting the community to a potential danger? Protecting the victim's privacy? Being a good journalist? Do these loyalties conflict?
Discussion of loyalties may lead to new facts that necessitate following the four steps again. If you decide to publish the victim's name, then anything that might happen to her (embarrassment, fear of retaliation) is another fact for the box. If you decide not to publish her name, then the fallout the paper will have to deal with (loss of credibility) is another fact for the box. Go through the box again to determine if your decision remains the same.

-- From "Media Ethics: Issues and Cases" by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins

Note: This lesson was adapted from ones originally created for Kent State University's Ethics of Mass Communication online course in fall 2009.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects
http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (grades 6-12)

Text Types and Purposes
1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
Production and Distribution of Writing
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
Research to Build and Present Knowledge
8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
Range of Writing
10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (grades 6-12)

Comprehension and Collaboration
1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (grades 6-12)

Conventions of Standard English
1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
Knowledge of Language
3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.