



IN THE CLASSROOM: AN ETHICS LEARNING RESOURCE

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What It Is:

Used in tandem with the film, the two-DVD **Citizen McCaw in the Classroom Ethics Learning Resource** guides teachers and students to a deeper understanding of some of the most pressing Constitutional and ethical issues facing our democracy. The study guide is designed as a road map to help teachers and students use the Santa Barbara News-Press case study to understand the larger journalism issues the film explores. The study guide helps teachers integrate the larger issues—First Amendment, media ethics and bias, the future of newspapers—into lectures, discussions and assignments.

How to Present the Material:

The two-DVD Ethics Learning Resource and companion study guide provide narrative summaries of each chapter, and include discussion points and suggestions for additional reading and assignments.



DVD #1: An overview of the larger issues “Citizen McCaw” illustrates and the film itself, divided into three

acts. The study guide explains each act, including a short summary, discussion points and suggestions for additional reading and assignments.



DVD #2: Seven chapters exploring how professional news organizations apply the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics. The study guide explains each chapter with a short summary, providing discussion points and suggestions for additional reading and assignments. Also includes case studies from the film, exploring media and owner bias, freedom of the press and the future of newspapers. Drawing on interviews with a dozen journalism experts and luminaries, the study guide provides concrete guidance for teachers and students.

Suggestions on Teaching Methods:

After reviewing the film with your students, use the discussion points in the study guide to promote shared inquiry. Shared inquiry begins with an open-ended question about the meaning of a selection.

Teachers should require students to use evidence and examples to support their responses, thus reinforcing critical thinking skills. To help guide the discussions, teachers ask follow up questions that encourage students to develop ideas. Shared inquiry is related to Socratic discussion, but allows—and encourages—teachers to ask questions for which they may not have answers.

Important Themes Covered:

“Citizen McCaw” tells the story of what happens when local news vanishes, and in doing so, presents a cautionary tale of what could occur anywhere in America. With clear, stunning examples, “Citizen McCaw” places the current changes in journalism against a historical backdrop that shows vividly how important a free news media is to democracy. The questions and discussions the film provokes will help students begin unraveling the Gordian knot that awaits them when they graduate: An unprecedented economic crisis, coupled with the erosion of journalistic values, principles and ethics, has contributed to

“a steady degeneration of the press,” argues journalist Sidney Blumenthal, and a “willful self-destruction of hard-won credibility.”



DVD #1: THE FILM—“CITIZEN McCAW”

Chapter 1: “The Lessons of Citizen McCaw” | Chapter 2: “Finding Middle Ground” | Chapter 3: “Citizen McCaw: The Film Presented in Three Acts” | Chapter 4: “A UC Berkeley Critique” | Chapter 5: “McCaw Defamed”

Chapter 1: “The Lessons of Citizen McCaw”

A USC Professor argues what happened at the News-Press is a case study encapsulating the most pressing problems facing journalism today.

More Info From the Chapter:

Diane Winston of the Annenberg School of Communications identifies journalism’s complicated questions.



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ What is the role of a community news organization?
- ⇒ What happens when corporations divest themselves from the business of journalism?
- ⇒ What responsibility do local owners have to their communities and to ethics?
- ⇒ How do owners balance their own financial needs against the ideals of their reporters?



Assignments:

1. Assign students to analyze ownership of their local news organization and answer the following questions: 1. Who owns your local newspaper? A public corporation? A private corporation? A family? 2. When was the last time your local newspaper changed ownership? Who owned it prior to its current owner?

2. Invite to class a local newspaper reporter, editor and/or top ranking business executive to discuss the questions Professor Winston raises: What responsibility do local owners have to their communities and to ethics? How do owners balance their own financial needs against the ideals of their reporters?



Additional Reading:

The Organization of Newspapers

<http://www.accd.edu/sac/j-p/COMM%20handouts/14-newspaper.html>

Editor and Publisher Market Guide

Chapter 2: “Finding Middle Ground”

Former News-Press Editor Jerry Roberts outlines a conflict of values.

More Info From the Chapter:

News-Press owner Wendy McCaw maintains a newspaper owner has absolute power to dictate news content. But reporter, writer and author Ann Louise Bardach, disagrees, insisting a newspaper is a sacred public trust whose mission goes beyond the narrow financial and political interests of its owner.



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ What is the purpose of a newspaper?
- ⇒ AJ Liebling once famously remarked: “Freedom of the press belongs to those who own one.” What does that mean to you?
- ⇒ Who do you think is right? Ann Louise Bardach? Or AJ Liebling? Why?



Assignments:

1. Research AJ Liebling and write a paragraph describing who he was, when he lived, and what he meant when he said: “Freedom of the press belongs to those who own one.”
2. Invite to class a professional reporter or editor to discuss what guidelines and/or principles are used in the newsroom to guide ethical decision-making.



Additional Reading:

SPJ Code of Ethics: <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

Chapter 3: “Citizen McCaw”—The Film Presented in Three Acts

Act 1: “This is War.” Wendy McCaw uses her newspaper to reward her friends, punish her enemies and further her Libertarian and animal rights agenda, as professional editors and reporters attempt to defend The Wall separating the news room from editorial and commercial interests.

More Info From Act 1: When police arrest McCaw’s chief newsroom enforcer for drunk driving, she suppresses the story of his sentencing. She then punishes reporters and editors for publishing a land use story about celebrity Rob Lowe. When she gives the editorial page editor control over the paper’s newsroom, top editors resign in protest. McCaw promises retaliation against employees who discuss the controversy publicly.



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ What do reporters and editors mean when they refer to The Wall?
- ⇒ Who is Citizen Kane? What similarities do you see between Citizen Kane and Citizen McCaw?
- ⇒ How did McCaw use her power to reward movie star Rob Lowe?
- ⇒ What does it mean to “Report the news without fear or favor of friend or foe?”
- ⇒ What does Jerry Roberts mean when he says: “We’re in the truth business. The single most important asset of any newspaper is its credibility.”
- ⇒ Identify examples of McCaw furthering her Libertarian and animal rights agendas on the news pages. Why is it acceptable to further her personal and political agenda on the editorial page, but not in the news pages?
- ⇒ Ben Bradlee remarks: “There are a lot of people trying to keep things out of the paper and there should be a lot of time spent trying to get them in the paper.” Why are reporters and editors spending less and less time and resources uncovering malfeasance?



Assignments:

1. Watch the movies “Citizen Kane” and “All The Presidents Men.” In a 500-800 word essay describe similarities and differences between the press baron in Citizen Kane and Ms. McCaw. In “All the President’s Men,” Washington Post Editor Ben Bradlee tells reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein: “Nothing’s riding on this except the First Amendment, freedom of the press and the future of the country.” How does that statement apply to the actions the reporters and editors took in “Citizen McCaw?”
2. Ben Bradlee contends journalists must “uncover the truth” and honor “no sacred cows.” Research Ben Bradlee and write a 500-800 word essay describing how he applied those principles to Watergate coverage.
3. The founder of the News-Press, Thomas Storke, won a 1962 Pulitzer Prize for exposing the John Birch Society. Write a paragraph defining the John Birch Society and explain why you think Thomas Storke investigated it.

Act 2: “The Whole World is Watching.” In Act 2, the journalists’ resignations reverberate around the world.

More Info From Act 2: Mergers, buyouts and financial sleights of hand “are making a shipwreck of journalism,” argues Bill Moyers. “Public minded newspapers are being dumped for wads of cash or crippled by cost-cutting.” At the News-Press, McCaw fires all those who refuse to submit to her will, using the courts to cudgel those who defy or stand up to her, launching a public smear campaign against former editor Jerry Roberts.



Discussion Points:

⇒ “People who are journalists are not journalists because of a paycheck, they’re journalists because they feel committed to what they’re doing,” says Harvard’s Alex Jones. In your experience, how true is Professor Jones’s assertion? Use facts to support your argument.

⇒ Ms. McCaw and her attorneys allege the News-Press reporters and editors are using journalistic ethics and principles as “a smokescreen to hide their personal agendas.” What facts does McCaw’s use to support her opinion?

⇒ What is a bully pulpit? How does McCaw use her bully pulpit to further her personal agenda?

⇒ How does McCaw use the courts to further her personal agenda? Why and how is she better able to sway public and judicial opinion than those without personal wealth as large as her own?

⇒ Insisting a “cease and desist letter is a form of dialogue,” McCaw’s lawyers threaten or file lawsuits against those exercising their free speech rights. Cite examples where McCaw’s lawyers attempt to restrict the free speech rights of ordinary citizens and journalists.

⇒ What legal rights do business owners have to restrict the free speech and actions of their employees?



Assignments:

1. Research Bill Moyers and write a 500-word profile of him.
2. What does Moyers mean when he says “mergers, buyouts and other financial legerdemain are making a shipwreck of journalism?” Research and write a paragraph explaining, and be ready to defend your point with facts and evidence in class.
3. Research personal wealth in America. What percentage of United States citizens has fortunes as large as Wendy McCaw?
4. The First Amendment states, in part, “Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech, or of the press.” Wendy McCaw and her editorial page editor argue that private companies are legally allowed to restrict their employees’ free speech rights even though the government is not. Write a 500-

word essay using facts and evidence to support or oppose their opinion.

5. Jerry Roberts maintains “A local newspaper is the glue that holds a community together.” Analyze the content of your local newspaper for one week, then invite an editor and/or a reporter from the paper to discuss how well your paper fulfills its mission.

Act 3: “Have You No Sense of Decency?” In Act 3, McCaw resorts to unscrupulous tactics to discredit Roberts’ reputation. She attacks reporters organizing a union and sues Roberts for \$25 million. Despite mounting legal bills and a cancer diagnosis, Roberts remain sanguine.

More Info From Act 3: In a front page story with no byline, the News-Press insinuates that Roberts downloaded child pornography on his computer at work. Roberts and his staff win myriad journalism and ethics awards for their courageous stand against McCaw.



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ What is the NLRB and what role does it play in the News-Press controversy?
- ⇒ Except for the press, the founders afforded no other private enterprise Constitutional protection. In exchange for that right, news organizations bear a unique responsibility, many journalists argue. What is that responsibility?
- ⇒ The distinction between an owner’s ability to buy a newspaper and buy the news eluded McCaw, says Ann Bardach. What is the difference between buying a newspaper and buying the news, and why do you suppose someone as wealthy and powerful as McCaw failed to understand the difference?
- ⇒ How can students keep journalism honest?



Assignments:

1. Write a short essay explaining how Joseph McCarthy used innuendo to smear his opponents and compare his tactics to the strategy Wendy McCaw used to attack Jerry Roberts and her opponents.
2. In myriad decisions, the Supreme Court has affirmed the rights of media owners to dictate news coverage and suppress news they find objectionable, according to McCaw’s attorney. Identify

the Supreme Court decision that gives owners the right to dictate coverage, and explain the premise of that decision in 500 words or less.

Chapter 4: “A UC Berkeley Critique”

Film maker Sam Tyler joins Jerry Roberts, journalism professor Cynthia Gorney and San Francisco Chronicle editorial page editor John Diaz to discuss changes in the news business.



Discussion Points:

⇒ If the First Amendment principally protects owners of news organizations, why should owners respect the rights of journalists to “tell the truth and shame the devil,” as Walter Lippmann once said?



Additional Reading:

“Journalism and its Discontents” by Sidney Blumenthal

http://www.salon.com/opinion/blumenthal/2007/10/25/walter_lippmann/

Chapter 5: “McCaw Defamed”

McCaw accuses the film makers of defaming her.



Discussion Points:

⇒ If you were working in the News-Press newsroom, how would you have reacted to McCaw’s orders and dictates?

⇒ How successful do you think McCaw would be if she sued the film makers for defamation?



Additional Reading

“Defamation and the First Amendment”

<http://www.freedomforum.org/packages/first/defamationandfirstamendment/index.htm>



DVD #2: The SPJ Code of Ethics, Applied

Chapter 1: “SPJ Code of Ethics” | Chapter 2: “Ethics in Real Life” | Chapter 3: “Seek the Truth and Report it” | Chapter 4: “Minimize Harm” | Chapter 5: “Act Independently” | Chapter 6: “Be Accountable.” | Chapter 7: Resigning on Principle.”

Chapter 1: “The SPJ Code”

Jerry Roberts discusses the Society of Professional Journalists code of ethics, first created in 1926 and revised in 1996.

More Info From the Chapter:

Guiding principles include: a.) “Seek the truth and report it.” b.) “Minimize harm.” c.) “Act independently.” d.) “Be accountable.”



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ When Roberts advises, “Always make the extra call,” what does he mean?
- ⇒ How would you conduct yourself when interviewing a minor or a homeless person?
- ⇒ If you worked for a news organization and you were required to sell advertisements to sources, what would you do?



Assignments:

1. “Credibility depends on covering yourself with the same level of scrutiny and skepticism that you use with everyone else,” says Roberts. Using the New York Times as an example, identify an instance of the newspaper exposing its own mistakes.
2. Identify an example of your local news organization covering itself with scrutiny and skepticism. Write a 500-word essay.

Chapter 2: “Ethics in Real Life”

The News-Press publishers made a series of decisions that violated the SPJ code of ethics, prompting nine professional journalists to resign within days of each other.

More Info From the Chapter:

After 32 years as a professional journalist, Roberts had no choice but to resign, he says. “The clear ethical principles guiding our work had been compromised,” he said, “and I couldn’t live with that.”



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ Why do you think news of the resignations of nine journalists from a small daily in California reverberated around the world?
- ⇒ What special treatment did the News-Press publishers want to afford a celebrity?
- ⇒ What special treatment did the News-Press publishers want to afford their own opinions page editor?
- ⇒ Why does special treatment for a chosen few put a news organization on “a slippery slope?”



Assignments:

1. Using real life examples, write a 500 word essay explaining how Aristotelian ethics can be applied to journalism.

Chapter 3: “Seek the Truth and Report it”

Using McCarthy-esque tactics, the News-Press launches a smear campaign against Roberts, insinuating the he downloaded child pornography on his computer at work.

More Info From the Chapter:

The News-Press publishes an anonymous story with no concrete evidence on the front page about Roberts and child porn. No one attempts to contact Roberts for comment. The story carries no byline.



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ How did the story about Roberts insinuate that he had violated the law?
- ⇒ What facts did the story use to support its allegations?
- ⇒ How did the News-Press twist the facts to engineer its campaign against Roberts?



Assignments:

1. Review the SPJ Code of Ethics and explain how publishing the story about Roberts violated every tenet of the code.
2. Roberts called the News-Press story false, defamatory and malicious. Provide the legal definitions of defamatory and malicious. Why would Roberts face a costly, uphill legal battle if he decided to sue the News-Press for libel?
3. In order to justify its actions, Wendy McCaw pledged “to uncover and expose former and current employees” who download child pornography. Do a content analysis of the News Press. How many stories has the News-Press published exposing former and current employees who traffic in child porn since 2007?



Additional Reading

Santa Barbara News-Press

<http://www.newspress.com/Top/index.jsp>

Chapter 4: “Minimize Harm”

Using the News-Press case as an example, Lou Cannon and Ann Bardach discuss why people dislike journalists.



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ Using examples from the movie or your own observations, explain why the public often dislikes journalists.
- ⇒ What advice does Bardach offer to minimize harm?
- ⇒ How might you apply that advice to your own reporting assignments?



Assignments:

1. Watch the movie “Absence of Malice” and identify an incident when the reporter fails to minimize the harm she inflicts on a key source. Why does the source run from porch to porch in the early morning retrieving newspapers from doorsteps?

Chapter 5: “Act Independently”

After editors publish a news story that includes the address of celebrity Rob Lowe’s vacant lot, Wendy McCaw reprimands reporters and editors

for violating a policy against publishing celebrity addresses “that had heretofore not existed,” says former News-Press staffer Michael Todd.

More Info From the Chapter:

Police arrest editorial page editor Travis Armstrong for drunk driving, and the publisher kills the story of his sentencing.



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ While the Constitution prohibits government regulation of news organizations, the public expects the news to be fair, accurate and unbiased, argues Professor Lou Ureneck. Why do you agree or disagree with Ureneck? Use evidence to support your argument.
- ⇒ “Wendy McCaw is a newspaper owner. But she has no clue what a newspaper does,” says Ann Bardach. How is it possible that someone with no experience is able to run a news organization?
- ⇒ Why would someone with no journalism experience want to own a news organization?



Assignments:

1. Identify the passage in the Constitution that prohibits press regulation. Write a paragraph explaining how that passage guarantees the United States a vigorous, free and independent press.
2. Identify the passage in the Constitution that requires news organizations to serve the public and not the owner.
3. Research the five largest news organizations in the United States (print or broadcast.) How many owners had journalism experience before they bought their businesses?



Additional Reading

“The United States Constitution”

<http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html>

Chapter 6: “Be Accountable”

Accountability means putting the public’s interest before the financial interests of the news organization. Editors and academics offer case studies from the Washington Post, the San Francisco Chronicle and the New York Times.

More Info From the Chapter:

When newspaper owners practice accountability, they enhance their credibility and the public's trust.



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ What is credibility?
- ⇒ How does accountability enhance credibility?
- ⇒ Why does practicing credibility promote a news organization's own interests?
- ⇒ Ben Bradlee argues: "A newspaper that loses its credibility might as well go out of business." What role does loss of credibility play in the recent shutdown of so many dailies in America?



Assignments:

1. Research the ownership structure of the New York Times and the Washington Post. Who owns those papers? Who owns the 10 largest news organizations in the United States: Families? Publicly traded corporations? Privately held corporations? What's the difference? Write a 500-750 word essay.
2. Read the articles "The Sound of Silence" and "I Can Explain" in the American Journalism Review. Compare the various approaches news organizations take to transparency: Why did the San Francisco Chronicle's decision to publish graphic photos without explanation hurt its credibility, while explaining the decision-making process enhanced the San Jose Mercury News' credibility? Write a 500-750 essay using evidence and examples to support your argument.



Additional Reading

Sound of Silence

http://www.ajr.org/article_printable.asp?id=4227

I Can Explain

http://www.ajr.org/article_printable.asp?id=1489

Journalism.org Project for Excellence in Journalism

<http://www.journalism.org/>

Chapter 7: "Resigning on Principle"

When Wendy McCaw violated journalistic principles, myriad New Press reporters and editors resigned, illustrating the fundamental importance of the values professional journalists embrace.

More Info From the Chapter:

Even as more than 150 news organizations from India to Jackson, Miss., published stories detailing the mass resignations, News-Press managers replaced their story with a front page piece by the editorial page editor.



Discussion Points:

- ⇒ “Journalists should be free of any and all obligations except the public’s right to know,” Roberts says. What does he mean?
- ⇒ In the film, Wendy McCaw attributes the motives of those who resigned to bias, a vendetta against her and their refusal to cover local news. In fact, Roberts asserts, the journalists resigned over ethics. He challenges readers to review the coverage and the code of ethics and decide for themselves. From the evidence you’ve reviewed, why did they resign? What evidence does McCaw use to support her views?



Assignments:

1. What is the difference between advocacy and news reporting? Cite examples from the film.
2. When business managers (called “the front office” in the film) are allowed to make news decisions, it puts the news organization on a “slippery slope.” Using examples from the film explain why and how.

Cases and Discussion Starters

Cases

Chapter 1: “What Happened in Santa Barbara?” | Chapter 2: “The Wall” | Chapter 3: “Whose Bias, What Bias?” | Chapter 4: Getting the Story,” | Chapter 5: “The Future of Newspapers” | Chapter 6: “The Gag Order” | Chapter 7: Travis Armstrong: Attack Editor

Chapter 1: “What Happened in Santa Barbara?”

Reporters and editors, defying their financial interests and acting on principle, resign rather than compromise their values.



Discussion Point:

⇒ What would you do if you found yourself in similar circumstances?

Chapter 2: “The Wall”

The barrier that separates advocacy from reporting.



Discussion Point:

⇒ What’s the difference between advocacy and reporting?

Chapter 3: “Whose Bias, What Bias?”

Reporting is fact-finding, not opinion-mongering. “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts,” Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said.



Discussion Point:

⇒ What does Moynihan mean?

Chapter 4: “Getting the Story”

A television reporter endures insults to make sure Wendy McCaw’s views are included in her report. Eventually, her persistence pays off.



Discussion Point:

⇒ How does her persistence result in a better story?

Chapter 5: “The Future of Newspapers”

Selling news and information will always make a profit, but distributing news on newsprint will not. Though audiences have splintered, the high cost of professional reporting and editing remains the same.



Discussion Point:

⇒ Why is reporting and editing expensive?

Chapter 6: “The Gag Order”

Reporters bind their mouths with duct tape as a symbol of their employer’s order to remain silent about the turmoil engulfing their newsroom.



Discussion Point:

⇒ What does the gag order scene mean to you?

Chapter 7: “Attack Editorialist”

City officials accuse editorial page editor Travis Armstrong of using lies and innuendo to discredit those he opposes.



Discussion Point:

⇒ What is the role of an “attack editorialist” in a democracy?

Discussion Starters:

1. “Why a hometown newspaper?”

Diane Winston examines how and why a hometown newspaper is the heart and soul of a community.

2. “My way or the highway.”

Drawing on historical examples, Alex Jones discusses the ethical dilemma journalists face when they work for owners who use their news pages as propaganda to promote narrow political and financial interests.

3. “Different approaches to ownership.”

Using case studies (McCaw's News-Press and Brian Tierneys' Philadelphia Inquirer), the film makers explore different approaches to news ownership.

4. "There are two walls."

Professor Lou Ureneck discusses the meaning of credibility. News organizations assure credibility when professional standards, unfettered by the owner's interference, guide decisions. Two metaphorical walls divide the newsroom from the rest of the news organization: One separates news from commercial interests, and the other from editorial page influence.

5. "Navigating ethics."

The Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics is the road map professional journalists use to make decisions.

6. "Nobody there to make the tackle."

The tinier news staffs become, the greater the need to uphold traditional standards.

7. "Truth teller, truth seeker."

There are no sacred cows in the news business, up to and including the publisher herself, argues Ben Bradlee.

8. "Holy Smoke, are you right?"

Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham not only called the newsroom from dinner parties with tips, she challenged reporters and editors to triple vet a story's veracity.

9. "We don't have to take your call."

At the Santa Barbara Independent, editor Nick Welsh violates every SPJ rule Wendy McCaw violates, he says. He challenges journalists to "tear down the wall," but remain accountable to readers. "If readers feel sucker-punched, they can call me and I will take their call," he says. "At the News-Press, there's nobody to talk to."

10. "The press has been intimidated in this country."

When George Bush used weapons of mass destruction as a bogus excuse to wage war on Iraq, reporters and editors responded with timid questions, says Sander Vanocur. "This has to stop."

11. "Send in the lawyers."

Lawyers lobby for their well-heeled clients, hostilely and aggressively. Make sure the story is factual or you'll lose in court, warns Ann Louise Bardach

12. "Shine the spotlight, make a difference."

Journalism is not a business to make money, friends, or settle scores. "But it's a great life," says Bardach. She challenges students to: "Shine a spotlight on hidden areas, and make a difference."