



Leader's Guide

Copyright, Plagiarism, and Ineligibility Issues

DISCLAIMER: This section is not legal advice and is intended for general information purposes only. Legal advice depends on the specific facts and circumstances that are brought to the attention of qualified legal counsel. Anyone seeking specific legal assistance or advice should contact an attorney.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own.

What is copyright infringement?

Copyright infringement occurs when a copyrighted work is reproduced, distributed, performed, publicly displayed, or made into a derivative work without the permission of the copyright owner.

What is the difference between plagiarism and copyright infringement?

Plagiarism is claiming credit for a work you did not author, or using someone else's work without proper credit. Copyright infringement is using someone else's work without first getting their permission.

Preventing Violations

PTA Reflections participants are responsible for educating themselves on plagiarism and copyright issues. The entrant and PTA can still be held liable for copyright violations even if they didn't think they were violating another person's rights. Copying a protected image without permission is not always intentional, but it is unlawful.

Tips for Students

Be cautious. If you question whether a submission violates the copyrights of another, fall on the side of caution and do not submit that work.

Cite all sources, even from the Public Domain, whether it's protected by copyright or not. Uncited works are considered plagiarized. This includes works found in the Public Domain even if the copyrights have expired. The student's work could be a copyright violation if copied from a copyrightable photograph or reproduction of the original.

Be original. Even if the submission was cited correctly and Fair Use applies, PTA Reflections judges would view the work unfavorably if it is not original.

Identify Violations

Before participating in the Reflections program, each student, and his or her parent/guardian, signs the Student Entry Form, accepting and agreeing to the National PTA Reflections Official Rules for participation. If the PTA has reason to believe, or evidence that a submission violates the participation terms, the student submission will be disqualified. In this event, the PTA may refuse or revoke the award and related prizes of an award, and take such other measures, including the recall or removal of the awarded work, as the PTA deems appropriate. Bear in mind that this policy is in the interest of both the student and the PTA, since the display or distribution of an infringing submission could result in financial liability for both the student and the PTA.



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Use of copyrighted material is prohibited in the Literature, Music Composition, Photography, and Visual Arts categories. This includes the use of copyrighted cartoon characters, copyrighted material from the Internet, advertisements or advertising ideas, musical themes from existing copyrighted compositions, copyrighted recorded music, and copyrighted photographs or stock images. Use of copyrighted music in Dance Choreography and Film Production entries is acceptable when the title, composer, and performer of any music in the submission are cited on the Student Entry Form.

Film Production, Photography, and Visual Arts entries may include public places, well-known products, trademarks, or other copyrighted material if that copyrighted material is incidental to the subject matter of the piece and/or is a smaller element of the whole. Visual Arts collages may include portions of existing copyrighted works, such as portions of photos, magazine clippings, Internet images, and type cut out of a newspaper if those pieces of copyrighted works are used to create a completely new and different work of art. A collage should be judged for its whole - not its parts - and its creativity as an original work of art. Misuse of the above materials constitutes plagiarism.

Tips for PTA Leaders

- Utilize your Reflections committee to review artwork prior to judging. Use online resources and search databases (e.g. Google Image Search) and other available software to investigate all work considered for awards.
- Train your judges with program rules and criteria describing the importance of originality. Ask judges to report plagiarized/copyrighted works to the Reflections committee. Your committee will ultimately determine if a work is plagiarized or in violation of copyrights. Do not make this decision on your own.
- Develop a policy/protocol for your PTA to follow when issuing a disqualification/consequence.

Addressing Student Ineligibility

Occasionally, entries submitted to the Reflections program are ineligible. One reason for ineligibility is that the local PTA is not in good standing. It is very important that you check with your PTA president to ensure your PTA is in good standing with the state. Other common reasons for ineligibility are plagiarism, copyright infringement, and resubmission.

The following recommended procedures apply to entries with copyright infringement, plagiarism, or entries which are resubmissions:

- Consult with your council, region, or state Reflections specialist before talking with the parents or student.
- Talk with appropriate school personnel, such as school counselors, the principal, or teachers about ways to address the seriousness of copying someone else's work or re-submitting artwork.
- Return ineligible pieces to students and explain why they are being returned.
- If ineligibility is confirmed AFTER judging, determine whether awards and prizes should be returned.