

# Online Resources for Teaching Copyright

by George Pilling

School librarians are in a tough place when it comes to copyright. When you know the law, you start noticing violations every time you turn around. It is hard to avoid the “copyright cop” role. When possible, it is usually best to be the “copyright guru”—the knowing teacher—rather than an overbearing picky interferer.

Most copyright information online is aimed at college students or at teachers. Many fun videos and Flash websites have been created by students and are available, but little of this is appropriate to use with students in grades 3 through 7.

Most sites also deal with digital and video copyright, and do not discuss writing. Written copyright violations continue to be the most common in schools, just as copyright violations at the school’s copy machine far surpass violations through digital downloads.

Note that some of the sites below claim copyright for the websites, and for PDF and other printable files. Remember that the part of the files that is copyrighted is the creative part the site contributors may have added to the files. Copyright law itself is not copyrighted. Facts derived from this law cannot be copyrighted because only the execution of an idea can be copyrighted, not a fact.

## ***Grades 3–8***

### **Cyberbee Copyright Questions for Kids**

- <[www.cyberbee.com/cb\\_copyright.swf](http://www.cyberbee.com/cb_copyright.swf)>  
Pop-up students ask basic copyright questions. These eleven questions will raise many more questions that are not answered on this page. This site would be good for discussion starters on the issues when shown by a knowledgeable teacher.

## ***Grades 6 and Above***

### **Copyright**

- <<http://www.aea11.k12.ia.us/downloads/copyrightbooklet.pdf>> Heartland Area Education Agency has posted online a **handbook** aimed at students. The handbook contains excellent information and is arranged well.
- <[www.law.duke.edu/cspd/comics/digital.php](http://www.law.duke.edu/cspd/comics/digital.php)>  
The Center for the Study of the Public Domain at Duke University has a **comic book** on its website that you can download and print. This comic deals with copyright issues around documentary filmmaking.

- <[www.copyrightkids.org](http://www.copyrightkids.org)>  
The Copyright Society of the U.S.A maintains a comprehensive website with a **video and a copyright quiz** that ask and answer most questions kids have about copyright. The video covers issues with digital yearbooks, which is very helpful. In addition, the Society's main site <[www.csusa.org](http://www.csusa.org)> has other educational tools for copyright lessons. <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJn\\_jC4FND0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJn_jC4FND0)>
- The most **famous video about copyright** is the one Professor Eric Faden of Bucknell University made using short clips of Disney films to get its points across.

## ***Fair Use***

The other side of the copyright coin is fair use. Fair use includes some limited exceptions to copyright law that allow people—especially educators and students—to use copyrighted works without penalty. There are three things to remember about fair use:

- 1) **Fair use is not the law; it is only a set of accepted guidelines.** Fair use is not black and white—there are many gray areas. Whether or not something is fair use is a question for you to decide based on criteria.
- 2) **Contracts you make with EBSCO, Britannica Online, Discovery Education streaming and others supersede fair use and even copyright law.** Read and be aware of the limitations in your contract. In most cases the contract provisions are not as strict as copyright law.
- 3) **Use a checklist to determine if something is fair use or not.** One I've compiled is available at <[www.georgepilling.com/copyright/FairUseGuidelinesratingsheet.pdf](http://www.georgepilling.com/copyright/FairUseGuidelinesratingsheet.pdf)>. In general, you will find that teachers think that everything they use in the classroom is fair use (not true), while publishers say that fair use is extremely restrictive (also not true).

## **Websites on Fair Use**

- <<http://teams.lacoe.edu/documentation/classrooms/gayle/fairuse/fairuse.html>>  
This **interactive site** from the Los Angeles County Office of Education includes a fair use pretest, information about fair use, and links to sources of additional information.
- <[www.utsystem.edu/OGC/IntellectualProperty/cprtindx.htm#top](http://www.utsystem.edu/OGC/IntellectualProperty/cprtindx.htm#top)>  
This **crash course on copyright** from the University of Texas System is aimed at students in middle school and older.
- Code of **best practices for fair use** in education  
<<http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/fair-use>> This site, and the video on the front page, encourage educators to take advantage of their legal fair use privileges.

## ***Summing It Up***

My website <[www.georgepilling.com/copyright](http://www.georgepilling.com/copyright)> is up to date as of October 2010. It contains basic information about copyright, discussion questions about intellectual property issues, and links to sources of more information. I welcome your input on new resources to add to these lists.