



SECOND PLACE RECIPIENT

The True Test of Ethics

Christian Okafor HELIX HIGH SCHOOL

“Begin”

That one word plunged the room into silence, along with the occasional click of a computer button. The air was heavy with concentration, and students hunched over their desks, furrowing their brows at their laptops. I sat in my seat, racking my brain for any information I could.

I looked up from my screen and saw that one of my classmates' screens was split. Their eyes darted nervously around the room, fingers twitching as they subtly shifted out of the testing window into another document filled with jumbled words I could not understand. My face soon contorted into disgust as I realized he had a screen full of answers. I turned my gaze back to my test, and lingering unease weighed heavy on my heart. What should I do? That phrase kept repeating in my head, over and over. But, I remembered the values and beliefs my parents taught me regarding lying and cheating. I knew that staying silent about what I saw was even worse than cheating myself. So, after the test, I shuffled towards my teacher and informed him of the cheating. However, I was told that I should “let it go” by an educator who was supposed to uphold the values of academic honesty. After he uttered those words, I struggled to understand what I had just heard.

At home, as I lay in bed, I wondered if telling the teacher about the cheating in this situation was wrong. The answer: absolutely not. I realized that it is necessary to be aware that others may not share your values, which impacts your interactions with people.

While friends, family, and society will try to instill different ethical beliefs they believe to be honorable, it is ultimately my decision to create and refine the morals I stand by. Being ethical does not mean confining myself to a predefined moral code; it requires me to reflect on experiences that I might face and overcome these dilemmas to live by the morals I am proud of. Being ethical means using life experiences to reassess and reshape my principles, ensuring they align with the ideals I want to uphold. Being ethical means staying open to new perspectives, understanding that moral codes are dynamic, and adapting your values based on the situation.

Ultimately, this dilemma taught me that everyone is different and there isn't a happy ending to every problem. But I am proud that I had the courage to voice my concerns even though the teacher did not act on them. Instead of asking, “What can I do?” I will now always ask, “What should I do?” because I am determined to stand by my code of ethics and morals throughout my life.