

Knowledge and Politics: Censorship and Whistleblowing

Lesson 2: Fact-Finding Task

Focus: *How do real-world examples of censorship and whistleblowing highlight tensions between ethics, power, and knowledge?*

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| Objectives | Analyze real-world cases of censorship and whistleblowing Evaluate the cases' ethical implications, power dynamics, and impact on knowledge sharing |
| Homework Preparation Task | <p>Case Study Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Divide students into small groups and assign each group a case study relating to censorship and whistleblowing. There are suggestions listed below.• Groups explore their assigned case using provided resources (articles, videos, or curated primary sources).• Students prepare a short (5–10 min) presentation in response to the following questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ What is the knowledge being censored or exposed?◦ Who controls the dominant narrative, and why?◦ What ethical justifications or challenges exist for the censorship/whistleblowing?◦ How do power structures, cultural values, or political goals shape the knowledge in this case?◦ Is the censorship or whistleblowing justifiable? Why or why not? <p>Case Study Options</p> <p>1. China's Great Firewall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus: Government-imposed internet censorship.• Task: Analyze the ethical and power dynamics of restricting access to global information and platforms.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Resources: Freedom House reports, examples of suppressed protests like Tiananmen Square, Deepseek and its implications on knowledge formation.◦ In China, the 'Great Firewall' Is Changing a Generation Human Rights Watch◦ How DeepSeek users are forcing the AI to reveal the truth about Chinese executions The Independent◦ On DeepSeek, you can watch AI navigate censorship in real time◦ Great Firewall - China Digital Space <p>2. Edward Snowden and NSA Leaks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus: Whistleblowing about government surveillance.• Task: Evaluate the ethical justifications for Snowden's actions versus the U.S. government's claims about national security.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Resources: Articles from The Guardian, interviews with Snowden, Freedom of the Press Foundation.◦ Edward Snowden: Leaks that exposed US spy programme - BBC News◦ Gabbard's dodges on whether she thinks Snowden is a traitor exacerbate questions about her confirmation chances◦ Edward Snowden Releases New Message: 'You Have Been Warned' - Newsweek <p>3. Book Bans in U.S. Schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus: Local censorship of literature due to ideological or moral concerns.• Task: Investigate how cultural values shape censorship decisions and their impact on freedom of thought.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Resources: ALA reports on banned books, Freedom to Read Foundation.◦ Banned in the USA: Beyond the Shelves - PEN America◦ New Education Department Officials Say Book Bans Are a 'Hoax.' Teachers Disagree. EdSurge News◦ Book bans increased in US school and libraries in 2022, here's why CNN |

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| | <p>4. Facebook and Myanmar Genocide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus: Social media platforms' role in censorship and propaganda. ● Task: Examine Facebook's decision to censor hate speech related to the Rohingya crisis and its ethical implications. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Resources: UN reports, Facebook's statements on content moderation. ○ Myanmar: Facebook's systems promoted violence against Rohingya; Meta owes reparations – new report - Amnesty International ○ A Genocide Incited on Facebook, With Posts From Myanmar's Military - The New York Times ○ Facebook, Genocide, and the role of Social Media in Conflict <p>5. Wikileaks and Julian Assange:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus: Whistleblowing through mass document leaks. ● Task: Explore whether Wikileaks' exposure of classified information serves the public good or compromises national security. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Resources: Wikileaks archives, Amnesty International reports. ○ Who is Wikileaks' Julian Assange and what did he do? ○ What is WikiLeaks and why did it get Julian Assange in so much trouble? Reuters ○ WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange released from prison after US plea deal Julian Assange News Al Jazeera <p>6. Turkey's Media Crackdown:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus: Censorship of journalists and media outlets. ● Task: Analyze how government censorship suppresses dissent and how whistleblowers attempt to challenge these restrictions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Resources: Reports from Human Rights Watch, Committee to Protect Journalists. ○ Turkey saw crackdown on journalists escalate in Q4, with dozens behind bars: report - Turkish Minute ○ In Turkey, Erdoğan's Crackdown on the Free Press Intensifies - Nieman Reports ○ Freedom House and partner organizations call for action as press freedom violations surge in Turkey in 2025 Freedom House |
| Activities | <p>1. Introduction (5 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recap key arguments from the Lesson 1 discussion on censorship ethics. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who decides what is censored? ○ How does censorship impact individual freedoms? ● Present the central question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "How do censorship and whistleblowing reflect ethical concerns and power structures?" <p>2. Bridge to Lesson 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explain that students will investigate examples of censorship and whistleblowing to deepen their understanding of power structures and ethics. <p>3. Presentations (30 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students present their case studies to the class. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students should take note of any useful points from other groups' presentations to use in the Kialo discussion. <p>4. Recording Findings in a Kialo discussion (20 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students use their case study and their peers' presentations to update and substantiate their arguments in their Kialo discussion "Can censorship ever be justified?" from the previous session, focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Key conflict or alignment between ethics and power. ○ Examples of bias or justification. ○ Key takeaways about censorship and whistleblowing. |

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| Reflection Questions | <p>Reflection (10 mins): Discuss the following reflection questions in open discussion or exit ticket format:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this case shape your understanding of the balance between censorship, whistleblowing, and ethical responsibility? • Are certain types of knowledge (e.g., classified information, hate speech) always justifiable to censor or expose? Why or why not? • How should societies navigate the tension between protecting individual freedoms and ensuring collective safety? • Connect the cases to TOK concepts: bias, power, perspectives, justification, and responsibility. |
| Resources | <p>Lesson slides Kialo discussions from previous lesson</p> |
| TOK Concepts | <p>Perspectives: How do whistleblowers and those enforcing censorship present different viewpoints on the ethical implications of their actions?</p> <p>Bias and Power: Who controls what knowledge is censored or exposed, and how do these decisions reflect power dynamics?</p> <p>Justification: What counts as a valid justification for censorship or whistleblowing, and how do we evaluate the reliability of these justifications?</p> <p>Responsibility: What ethical responsibilities do governments, organizations, and individuals have when censoring or exposing knowledge? Who bears accountability for the consequences of these actions?</p> |
| Critical Thinking Concepts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confronting Biases and Assumptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Identifying Authority Bias: Students evaluate how the assumption that "official narratives are correct" influences perceptions of censorship and whistleblowing. ◦ Questioning Justifications: Students analyze how ethical justifications for censorship or whistleblowing can be influenced by societal and political biases. ◦ Recognizing Cultural Bias: Reflect on how cultural norms shape what is deemed acceptable to censor or expose. • Exploring Contexts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Power and Knowledge Control: Examine how governments, corporations, and individuals use censorship and whistleblowing to maintain or challenge power. ◦ Evaluating Source Credibility: Compare whistleblower testimonies, official statements, and third-party investigations to determine the reliability of claims. ◦ Global Perspectives: Explore how censorship and whistleblowing are perceived differently across cultures and political systems (e.g., authoritarian regimes vs. democracies). • Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Refining Positions: Adjust arguments about the ethicality of censorship or whistleblowing as new evidence or perspectives emerge. ◦ Weighing Conflicting Perspectives: Critically evaluate the viewpoints of those who support censorship versus those who expose information. ◦ Recognizing Consequences: Reflect on the broader societal impact of censorship or whistleblowing, both intended and unintended. • Extrapolation and Reapplication of Principles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Applying Ethical Reasoning: Use ethical frameworks (e.g., utilitarianism, deontology) to assess the actions of whistleblowers and censors. ◦ Connecting to Modern Issues: Relate lessons from case studies to ongoing debates about free speech, privacy, and transparency in governance and media. ◦ Building Digital Literacy: Analyze how censorship and whistleblowing interact in digital spaces, focusing on the spread of misinformation and the role of platforms in controlling narratives. |