The Emperor's Club

Activity 6-1

Format: Large Group

Time Frame: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Description
This activity provides students with an opportunity to identify, evaluate, and discuss the ethical dilemmas faced by a professor and his students as depicted in the movie *The Emperor's Club*.

Materials
- One copy of *The Emperor's Club* (Universal Pictures, 2002)
    - To abide by current U.S. copyright law, the instructor must own the copy he or she shows in class.
- Projection equipment appropriate to display format
    - Television or projection screen
    - Speakers
    - Laptop, DVD player, Blu-ray player

Instructions
1. Advise students of 17 U.S. Code § 110 – Limitations on exclusive rights: Exemption of certain performance and displays.
    - Display the code language and citation on a PowerPoint slide at the beginning of this activity.
2. Provide a brief overview of the film's premise.
3. Show identified segments of the film.
4. Between segments, initiate a group discussion using the questions provided.

Discussion Facilitation Guide

Film Summary

The Emperor's Club stars Kevin Kline as Professor William Hundert, a passionate and principled teacher of classical history at St. Benedict's School for Boys. Beloved and respected by all, Mr. Hundert finds his tightly controlled world shaken when a new student, Sedgewick Bell, joins his class. The two are in strong conflict early on, but this conflict eventually diminishes as Hundert and Bell form a close student-teacher relationship.

Throughout the school year Mr. Hundert guides Bell, helping him prosper and prepare for the annual Mr. Julius Caesar competition. Only the top three students may enter the competition and after Bell comes in a very close fourth, Mr. Hundert changes one of Bell's test scores so that he can qualify.

On the day of the competition, Mr. Hundert suspects that Bell is cheating. Mr. Hundreth asks him a final question not specifically related to the previous material. Bell is unable to answer and another student, Deepak Mehta, wins the title of Mr. Julius Caesar. After the competition Mr. Hundert confronts Bell who admits to cheating. Following the competition Bell returns to his belligerent ways and Mr. Hundert must deal with his decision.

Twenty-five years later, Bell asks Mr. Hundert to emcee a rematch of the Mr. Julius Caesar competition. Although Mr. Hundert is pleased to participate, the reunion forces him to reexamine his previous decision and places him in the midst of another ethical dilemma.

Main Characters

Actor	Role	Significance
Kevin Kline	William Hundert	Professor
Emile Hirsch	Sedgewick Bell	Student
Embeth Davidtz	Elizabeth	Friend and love interest of Mr. Hundert
Rob Morrow	James Ellerby	Professor
Edward Herrmann	Headmaster Woodbridge	Headmaster
Harris Yulin	Senator Bell	Sedgewick's father
Paul Dano	Martin Blythe	Student
Rishi Mehta	Deepak Mehta	Student
Jesse Eisenberg	Louis Masoudi	Student

Scene Selections

Scenes are identified by the DVD chapter times.

Chapters 3-4 (7:17 – 11:53)

- What are your initial impressions of Mr. Hundert?
- What do you think of his teaching style and philosophy?
- Reflect on the quote: "A man's character is his fate."
    - What does that mean to you?
- What is Mr. Hundert trying to accomplish when he has the students read the plaque the first day of class?
- What do you observe about the classroom environment and atmosphere?

Chapter 4-5 (15:20 – 22:14)

- How does Mr. Hundert react to Sedgewick's arrival?
- How does the rest of the class react to Sedgewick's arrival?
- How does Mr. Hundert react to and deal with Sedgewick's attitude in class?
- Sedgewick challenges Mr. Hundert's authority in the classroom.
    - Do you think Sedgewick is a positive or negative influence on the other students?
    - Why are the other students so drawn to Sedgewick?
    - What is happening to the level of respect for Mr. Hundert?

Chapter 7-13 (28:40 – 1:03:38)

- Why did Mr. Hundert lecture Sedgewick ("stupid lasts forever") in front of the class? (Stop film at 31:11 to discuss)
    - What did Mr. Hundert's ridicule do?
    - What point was he trying to prove?
- Mr. Hundert travels to Washington DC to visit Senator Bell.
    - What impressions do you get of Sedgewick's father?
    - Does Senator Bell's attitude explain Sedgewick's behavior?
    - What do you think of Senator Bell's reaction to Mr. Hundert's concerns about Sedgewick?
    - What do you think of Senator's Bell's statement regarding Mr. Hundert's roll in molding versus teaching his son?
    - Are teachers supposed to teach the material only, or are they supposed to shape and lead the character of their students?
- Sedgewick's attitude changes after receiving the phone call from his father.
    - How does Mr. Hundert react?
    - Why does he give Sedgewick his old textbook?
- How does Mr. Hundert motivate his students?
- When Sedgewick tries to check the reserved book out of the library, Mr. Hundert vouches for his character.

    - What does this say?
    - How does Sedgewick react?
    - Why did Mr. Hundert do this?
- What did the baseball game with Mr. Hundert accomplish?
    - Was this a bonding experience?
    - How and why?
- During the final Mr. Julius Caesar application test, what do you observe about the relationship between Mr. Hundert and Sedgewick?
- Why did Mr. Hundert change Sedgewick's test score to place him in third and enable to participate in the competition?
    - Was his decision ethically moral?
    - What would you have done in his position?
    - Do you think Mr. Hundert considered how his decision would affect the other students, especially Martin Blythe?
    - Does it make a difference that it was only a one-point margin separating Sedgewick and Martin?
    - What if it was a 10-point difference?
- During the Mr. Julius Caesar competition, Mr. Hundert suspects Sedgewick of cheating and tells the headmaster
    - Why does the headmaster react the way he does?
    - Is his response ethical?
    - What do you think of how Mr. Hundert handles the situation?
    - Was the change up in questions ethical?
- Mr. Hundert confronts Sedgewick after the competition.
    - Why does Sedgewick react the way he does during that discussion?
    - Why do you think he cheated?

Chapter 17-18 (1:23 – 1:36:09 or 1:37:53 following the discussion with Martin Blythe)

- Why doesn't Mr. Hundert "out" Sedgewick when he suspects him of cheating during the rematch?
- What would you have done in this situation?
- Do you think people can change?
- What do you think about Sedgewick's speech regarding Mr. Hundert and the statement "Your virtue is a beacon of light"?
- After the rematch, Sedgewick announces his run for political office.
    - Can you believe what he says?
    - If you were Mr. Hundert, what would you do in this situation?
    - Why is Sedgewick manipulating Mr. Hundert?
- What do you think of the conversation between Mr. Hundert and Sedgewick in the bathroom? Compare their values.
- Mr. Hundert tells Martin Blythe the truth about the original competition.
    - What do you think of Martin's reaction?

- Would you have told him if you were Mr. Hundert?

Chapter 19 (1:38 – 1:45)

- When the students present Mr. Hundert with the plaque, do you think he realizes the actual impact he had on his students?
- Do you think Mr. Hundert failed Sedgewick as a teacher?
- What lessons did Mr. Hundert learn?
- What does it say about Martin Blythe that he sends his son to St. Benedict's?
- Is Mr. Hundert's ethical decision coming full circle?
- Do you think Mr. Hundert would make the same decision if he could do it all over again?
- What would you have done?