

## COPYRIGHT ASSIGNMENT

*Definition of Copyright: The exclusive legal right granted to a writer, editor, composer, publisher, or distributor to publish, produce, sell, or distribute an artistic work.*

Copyright affects your life just about every day, whether you know it or not. If you have ever downloaded songs off the Internet; or if you've ever used a newspaper photo on your own personal website, you have used copyrighted material—perhaps even illegally. Remember Napster? Napster was sued by the music industry, which claimed that peer-to-peer file sharing infringed on its copyrights.

Copyright law has expanded dramatically in the past two decades, giving copyright owners (usually corporations) more and more power over how cultural works may be used. Over the next few days, we will look at where copyright came from and how it has changed. We'll also consider the arguments for these changes, both for and against.

As an introduction to these arguments, consider the following situations. How do you think copyright *should* be enforced in these cases? (Don't be too concerned with how it actually *is* enforced at this point.) Be sure to consider this issue from at least two perspectives:

- a) What is best for the copyright owner(s)?
- b) What is best for the public at large?

1. A rap group would like to sample bits from TV shows, movies, songs, or other copyrighted material. Should it be required to get permission from the copyright holder? (Asking permission requires finding the copyright owner, writing a letter, and—usually—paying a fee.) What factors influence your decision?
2. Should a school teacher be allowed to photocopy pages from a book for use in class without asking permission from the publisher? (Again, asking permission requires locating the publisher, writing a letter, and—usually—paying a fee.) Why or why not?
3. Should you be allowed to make a t-shirt with *Star Wars* characters for yourself and a few friends? Should you be allowed to sell the t-shirts? What do you think Steven Spielberg would have to say about that? Would he be right or wrong? Why?
4. If you shoot a video with your friends, should you be allowed to use a popular (copyrighted) song in the background? What about if you plan to sell the video? What about if you hold a public screening at school, but not for money? What if you're just showing it to your friends?