

ACTIVITY Ideas: Law & Government

Compare and Contrast

(Subject Area: *Social Studies*)

Discuss with students the role and responsibilities of the Mesopotamian king. Compare and contrast with the role and duties of the President of the United States.

What are the similarities? What are the differences?

Does the Penalty Fit the Crime?

(Subject Area: *Math*)

Many of Hammurabi's Laws listed fines for crimes, paid out in shekels, or minas, of silver. Fines varied, meaning some crimes were considered more serious than others. While we don't know the present-day monetary equivalent of the fines, Hammurabi's Laws tell us that an artisan or laborer earned about five barleycorns of silver a day. Using the table below, along with a selection of laws from Hammurabi's Collection (*see below), the class could find out how long a guilty person would have to work in order to pay fines connected with particular offenses.

After computing amounts, students could discuss whether they believe the penalty fits the crime.

180 barleycorns = 1 shekel

60 shekels = 1 mina

60 minas = 1 talent

* The best translation of Hammurabi's Laws appears in a book by Oriental Institute scholar, Roth, Martha, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995.

A Stele for the Classroom

(Subject Areas: *Social Studies, Decision Making, Cooperative Learning*)

Divide the class up into small groups. Ask each group to write down five basic rules for the classroom. Each person in the group must agree that the rules are fair. Rules could be written in the form of Hammurabi's Laws, for example: "If a student damages a textbook, then _____." List each group's rules on the chalkboard and hold a discussion—or perhaps a vote—to determine which rules are fair. Post those rules on the bulletin board as a stele that "provides justice." The stele could be decorated, or students could follow Hammurabi's example and create a drawing for the top.

Let the King Decide!

(Subject Areas: *Social Studies, Role Play, Decision Making*)

Conduct a trial based on one of the laws from Hammurabi's collection. Plaintiffs and defendants could state their cases, witnesses could appear, swear oaths by the gods, and testify. One or several students could be chosen to act as judges, or the students not taking on a role could become the citizens' assembly and vote on a verdict. Scribes could be chosen to write out the verdict on clay, and all witnesses could seal the tablet, either with cylinder seals or the "hems of their garments." If the defendant feels unfairly treated, the case could be appealed to someone chosen to act as king. Compare and contrast this trial with those we hold in the U.S. today.

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