

The Code of Hammurabi

Level 1

Words to Know list, Reading Selection, and Reading Comprehension questions

Level 2 ■ ■

Words to Know list, Reading Selection, and Reading Comprehension questions

Level 3 ■ ■ ■

Words to Know list, Reading Selection, and Reading Comprehension questions

Assemble the Unit

Reproduce and distribute one copy for each student.

- Visual Literacy page: An Ancient Law Code, page 11
 - Level 1, 2, or 3 Reading Selection and Reading Comprehension page and the corresponding Words to Know list
 - Graphic Organizer of your choosing, provided on pages 180–186
 - Writing Form: The Code of Hammurabi, page 12

Introduce the Topic

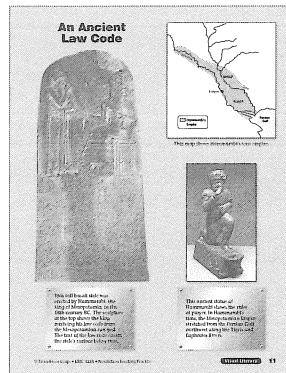
Read aloud and discuss the text and photos on the Visual Literacy page titled “An Ancient Law Code.” Explain that Hammurabi was one of the first rulers to codify a set of laws and put them into effect throughout a large region.

Read and Respond

Form leveled groups and review the Words to Know lists with each group of students. Instruct each group to read their selection individually, in pairs, or as a group. Have students complete the Reading Comprehension page for their selection.

Write About the Topic

Read aloud the leveled writing prompt for each group. Tell students to use the Graphic Organizer to plan their writing. Direct students to use their Writing Form to respond to their prompt.



Visual Literacy

Note _____

The Code of Hammurabi

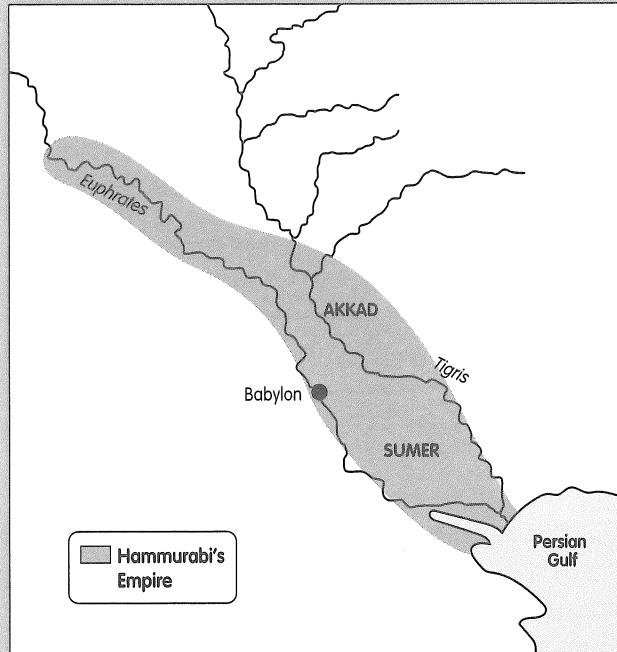


Writing Form

An Ancient Law Code



This tall basalt stele was erected by Hammurabi, the king of Mesopotamia, in the 18th century BC. The sculpture at the top shows the king receiving his law code from the Mesopotamian sun god. The text of the law code covers the stele's surface below that.



This map shows Hammurabi's vast empire.



This ancient statue of Hammurabi shows the ruler at prayer. In Hammurabi's time, the Mesopotamian Empire stretched from the Persian Gulf northwest along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

The Code of Hammurabi



Words to Know

An Eye for an Eye

Hammurabi

Mesopotamia

empire

cultures

agents

commissioned

authority

tolerant

prostrates

creditor

debt-tablet

evidence

evildoers

Words to Know

Hammurabi's 282 Laws

Hammurabi

Mesopotamia

subjects

efficiently

infraction

judicial

prohibitions

officials

retribution

minimum wage

culprit

Words to Know

282 Highly Specific Laws

Mesopotamia

Hammurabi

accordingly

situation

subjects

authority

maxim

The Code of Hammurabi ■

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An Eye for an Eye

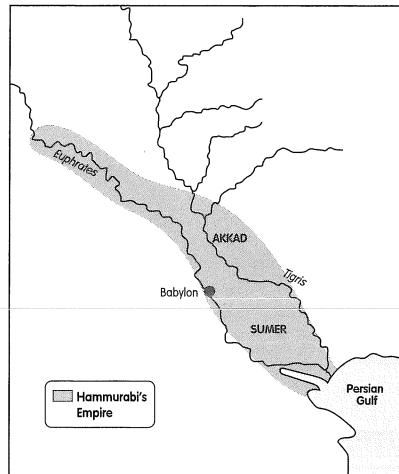
Have you ever heard the saying “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”? Ancient law codes were based upon this idea.

About 3,700 years ago, King Hammurabi ruled Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). His empire was huge, and people of different cultures lived there. Hammurabi decided that laws in all parts of his empire should be the same. His agents collected the laws from all parts, and he chose 282 of them.

Written in Stone

Hammurabi had his laws written in stone.

A picture of him was carved at the top of a large stone pillar, called a stele (STEEL). It showed him speaking with a god who commissioned him to write the laws. This was meant to show that he had received his authority from the gods themselves. All of the 282 laws were carved into the stone. Each law was very specific and described a situation or a crime. Each one began with the word “if.” It ended by describing the punishment. The laws are known as the Code of Hammurabi.



A Window on an Ancient Society

Hammurabi’s Code tells us about Mesopotamian society. Laws dealt with such things as marriage, slavery, business, and farming. They also had to do with crimes of injury, robbery, or murder. Many of those laws called for punishment that seems very harsh and unreasonable to us today. For example, if someone were caught stealing from a burning house, he would be punished by fire. This type of punishment is known as “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”

Yet, some of Hammurabi’s laws seem tolerant, and they were meant to protect the unfortunate: “If anyone owe a debt for a loan, and a storm prostrates the grain (forces it to the ground), or the harvest fail, or the grain does not grow for lack of water, in that year he need not give his creditor any grain; he washes his debt-tablet in water and pays no rent for this year.”

The laws did not deal equally with different classes of people. If someone put out the eye of a man of the upper class, the punishment was to have his own eye put out. However, if the victim belonged to a lower class, the punishment was only to pay a fine.

Modern Laws

Although many things about Hammurabi’s Code seem unfair or cruel to us today, his code is important in the history of laws. As in today’s system of justice, evidence was needed to prove someone guilty. Hammurabi’s laws were intended to “...destroy the wicked and the evildoers, so that the strong should not harm the weak...”

An Eye for an Eye

Fill in the circle by the correct answer. Then answer questions 3, 4, and 5.

1. Which is a pair of synonyms?
 - (A) stele, law
 - (B) harsh, cruel
 - (C) unreasonable, specific
 - (D) creditor, debtor

2. The author believes that _____.
 - (A) all of Hammurabi's laws seem ridiculous to us
 - (B) Hammurabi's laws are important to historians
 - (C) none of Hammurabi's laws seem reasonable
 - (D) none of Hammurabi's laws are tolerant

3. What does the author mean by "very harsh and unreasonable" (paragraph 4)?

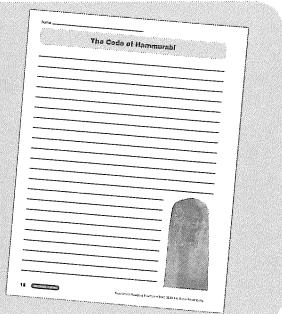
4. In the last paragraph, what principle of law does the author cite?

5. Explain what "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" means.

Write About the Topic

Use the Writing Form to write about what you read.

Choose one of the laws that appears in "An Eye for an Eye."
Write it in your own words, explaining if it seems fair, and why.



Hammurabi's 282 Laws

The United States has thousands of federal laws, and every U.S. state has thousands more. About 3,700 years ago, in ancient Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), a ruler named Hammurabi collected 282 laws. He made sure his subjects knew exactly what each one said.

Hammurabi ruled a vast empire; he realized that he could not allow laws in one part of his empire to differ from laws in another part. If there were one set of laws for all, courts could work more efficiently. People would know what was legal and illegal; they would know the penalty for each infraction.

Hammurabi's laws fell into several different categories. These included social structures such as marriage and slavery, and economic structures such as buying and selling goods and renting farmland. Many laws had to do with crimes such as robbery and murder; others explained judicial rules such as prohibitions against falsely accusing others in court.

Pros and Cons of Hammurabi's Code

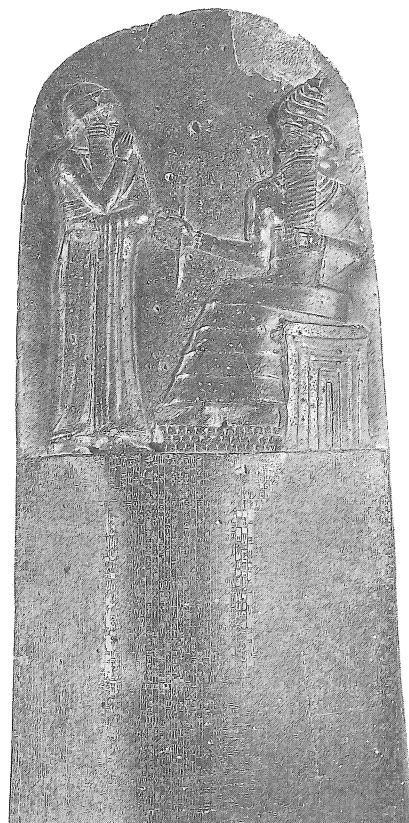
Hammurabi's Code is a window on ancient Mesopotamian society. The laws protected widows, orphans, and others who could be easily harmed. However, many punishments were what we would consider harsh and cruel today. For example, if someone entered a burning house and stole something, officials were supposed to push the thief into that same fire. This sort of retribution is known as "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

Some of Hammurabi's laws seem more modern. Just as we have minimum-wage laws in the U.S., Hammurabi spelled out exactly how much pay workers should receive for certain jobs. For example: "If a man hire a sailor, he shall pay him six gur of corn per year."

Hammurabi's laws were not "one size fits all." If someone committed a serious crime against a high-class person, the penalty was usually death. But, if a lawbreaker committed the exact same crime against a slave, the culprit might only have to pay a fine.

The Stele in the Louvre

If you visit the Louvre Museum in Paris, France, you can view Hammurabi's laws. You will not be able to read them, though. Written in Akkadian, an ancient language, the laws are engraved on a tall, black stone pillar called a stele. In 1901, French archaeologists dug up the stele on the site of the ancient city of Susa, in present-day Iran.



Hammurabi's 282 Laws

Fill in the circle by the correct answer. Then answer questions 3, 4, and 5.

1. Which is a pair of synonyms?
 - (A) infraction, penalty
 - (B) prohibitions, crimes
 - (C) lawbreaker, culprit
 - (D) Akkadian, French

2. In paragraph 4, the word "retribution" is defined as _____.
 - (A) an eye for an eye
 - (B) easily harmed
 - (C) harsh
 - (D) protected

3. How did Hammurabi ensure that his subjects knew what his law code said?

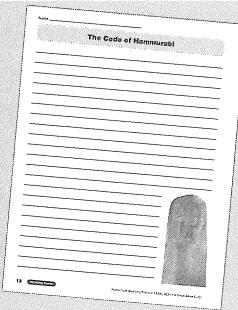
4. What does the writer mean by "one size fits all" in paragraph 6?

5. Why do you think the writer introduces the topic by mentioning modern U.S. laws?

Write About the Topic

Use the Writing Form to write about what you read.

Write in your own words the reasons for making one code of laws. Tell whether you think this is a good idea, and why.



282 Highly Specific Laws

About 3,700 years ago in ancient Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), King Hammurabi ruled a vast empire; this was a complicated responsibility. Hammurabi decided that it would be inefficient if laws in one part of his empire differed from laws in another part. Accordingly, he collected 282 laws, each of which was very specific. Each law described a situation and explained the rules regarding that situation; in fact, each law began with the word "if."

Written in Stone

When we say something is "written in stone" we mean it is not changeable. Hammurabi had his code of laws written in stone. At the top of a stone pillar called a stele, was a carved picture of Hammurabi speaking with the god who had commissioned him to write the laws. This told his subjects that the king received his authority from the gods themselves. The stele listed all of the laws with their punishments, and it stood in a public place for all to see.

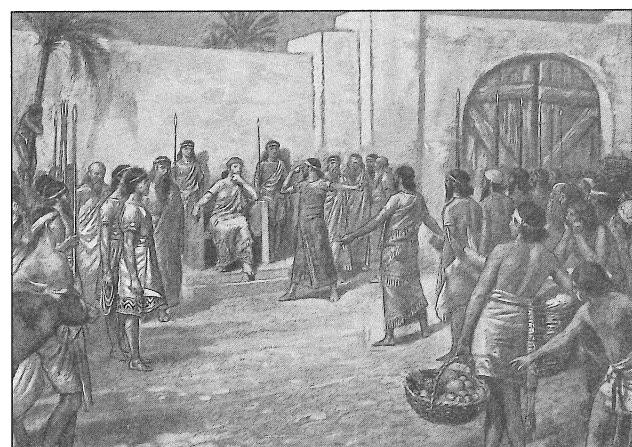
An Ancient Society

Hammurabi's Code is a window on ancient Mesopotamian society. His code protected widows, orphans, and others who could be easily harmed. All people were not considered equal. There were three different social classes—slaves, common people, and the upper class—and the laws differed for the classes. The code described different punishments for the same crimes, according to the class of the victim or the lawbreaker.

An Eye for an Eye

Have you heard the maxim, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"? This phrase comes from Hammurabi's Code, where punishments for injuring someone were often as cruel or harsh as the crime. If someone put out the eye of a man of the upper class, the punishment was to have his own eye put out. However, if the victim was a person of the lower class, the guilty person paid a fine. And if the victim was a slave, the guilty person paid half the price of the slave.

Although many laws in Hammurabi's Code seem unfair or cruel to us today, it is an important code in the history of laws. As in today's justice system, Hammurabi's Code said evidence was needed to prove someone guilty. Accusing someone falsely meant punishment for the accuser. The laws were intended to protect those who could not protect themselves against evildoers.



A surgeon on trial in front of Hammurabi. Accused of causing a member of the upper class to lose an eye because of an unskillful operation, the surgeon would have his hands amputated if found guilty.