Justice in Stone

Assess the power and limits of Hammurabi's Code

AWH.C.2.5 "Assess the influence and legacy of Hammurabi, including the basic principles of justice associated with Hammurabi's Code."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline two ways the code could shape justice, circle two limits on fair or equal justice, and write 1 beside a sentence that describes its legacy.

A King's Rules in Stone

1 Imagine a stone pillar meant to stand where people could see a king's rules. In the eighteenth century BCE, Hammurabi ruled Babylon and much of Mesopotamia. During his reign, more than 280 legal provisions were carved into a stone monument called a stele. Its top showed Hammurabi before a god, presenting royal authority as linked to divine approval. The text addressed disputes about property, trade, family life, and injuries. Setting laws in lasting form made the ruler's idea of justice visible, although many people could not read the writing. Readers could encounter a lasting statement of royal ideals.

2 Some provisions used a principle often summarized as "an eye for an eye": a penalty could mirror the harm done. Other rules required payment instead of physical punishment. The code also treated people differently according to social rank and gender. For example, an injury to a person of higher rank could bring a different penalty from an injury to a person of lower rank. These differences limit any claim that the code promised equal justice. At the same time, spelling out penalties offered a standard that could restrain decisions made only on a powerful person's whim.

3 Hammurabi did not invent written law; earlier Mesopotamian rulers had issued law collections. His code became famous partly because so much of its text survived. Historians do not know how often judges used its provisions in actual cases, so a carved rule is not proof that everyone experienced it. Its legacy lies in a durable example of a ruler publicly linking authority to stated rules and a vision of justice. Modern legal systems also publish laws, but similarity does not prove they copied Hammurabi. His monument invites two judgments: what written standards might improve, and whom unequal penalties might leave unprotected.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How might carving laws on a stele have strengthened Hammurabi's authority, even though many people could not read it?

2. How do penalties that mirror harm and penalties that differ by social rank reflect different ideas about justice?

3. Why would it be misleading to say Hammurabi invented written law or that judges always followed his code?

4. What is one lasting significance of the code, and what claim about modern law does the passage caution you not to make?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A school council proposes the same detention for a student who scratches a desk and a student who destroys one. In four or five sentences, assess the proposal using Hammurabi's ideas and their limits, suggest a fairer rule, and explain why a similar rule would not prove the school copied his code.

ANSWER KEY

Justice in Stone

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.2.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline two ways the code could shape justice, circle two limits on fair or equal justice, and write 1 beside a sentence that describes its legacy. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How might carving laws on a stele have strengthened Hammurabi's authority, even though many people could not read it?	**The lasting monument made his rules visible and connected his authority to divine approval.**
2	How do penalties that mirror harm and penalties that differ by social rank reflect different ideas about justice?	**A penalty that mirrors harm focuses on the injury, while a rank-based penalty treats similar injuries differently depending on who was hurt.**
3	Why would it be misleading to say Hammurabi invented written law or that judges always followed his code?	**Earlier rulers issued law collections, and historians do not know how often judges used Hammurabi's provisions.**
4	What is one lasting significance of the code, and what claim about modern law does the passage caution you not to make?	**It is a lasting example of a ruler stating rules publicly, but shared features do not prove modern laws copied it.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The council should reject identical penalties for very different damage because a response should reflect the harm done. It could publish a rule requiring students to help repair damage, with a more substantial consequence for more serious harm. The rule should apply equally to students regardless of social status, unlike Hammurabi's unequal treatment by rank. Publishing a rule resembles his public statement of standards, but that resemblance alone does not prove the school copied his code.

Accept supported judgments that distinguish the code's stated ideals from proof of how judges applied it. For Part 3, look for a workable rule that considers the degree of harm without adopting unequal treatment by status.