

## Explore More—Hammurabi’s Code

**Directions:** Listen to your teacher talk about the significance of Hammurabi’s Code. Refer to the maps in your Explore Geography Picture Dictionary to locate the places your teacher mentions. Circle any words you don’t understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

### Hammurabi—A Mesopotamian King

Hammurabi came to power in Babylonia about 1792 B.C.

*Point to this date on your class time line.*

In the fifth year of his reign, he set out to gain control of neighboring kingdoms. He conquered lands to the east and south. After his army defeated invaders in 1760 B.C., Hammurabi decided to lead his army north, extending his power over all of Mesopotamia.

*Point out this area on your world map.*

Hammurabi’s kingdom included 24 cities. He kept tight control over the empire by establishing a strong central government, appointing governors to all the lands, and sending out judges, tax collectors, and military leaders. One of Hammurabi’s most important achievements was to order the collection of all the laws of the land. This comprehensive list of laws was carved into stone. It has become known as the Code of Hammurabi.

### Hammurabi’s Code

The Code of Hammurabi has 282 parts. Each part addresses a different aspect of life during that time. Many of the laws were concerned with business, banking, and landlord-tenant relations. This shows how important trade and commerce were to Mesopotamian society. There also were laws regarding stealing, kidnapping, and helping a slave escape. Not all people were considered equal. Slaves had limited, if any, rights. Men had more freedom and rights than women. Breaking the laws in the Code of Hammurabi could result in severe punishments, including death.

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## **The Code's Significance**

The Code of Hammurabi is not the earliest list of written laws. But it is one of the best-preserved sets of laws. The Code of Hammurabi has allowed historians to learn much about life in ancient Mesopotamia. The Code of Hammurabi is considered the basis for many systems of laws developed throughout the history of Western civilization. Many of the laws in the Code of Hammurabi were reflected in later Hebrew law. The Code of Hammurabi also has been linked to the legal systems of ancient Greece and Rome, and to English Common Law, which is the basis of the legal system in the United States. ❖



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**Questions for further discussion:**

- What would you like to know more about in terms of Hammurabi's Code? Frame questions that you can answer by historical study and research. Conduct this research and discuss your findings.
- How do you think combining all the written Mesopotamian laws into one code affected the governance and control of the empire? What are benefits of having written set of laws? Are there any negative consequences?
- Reread the excerpt of the Code of Hammurabi from the historical anthology. Is the excerpt a primary or secondary source? What conclusions can you draw about life in the Mesopotamian empire during Hammurabi's reign? What conclusions can you make about the values important to the Mesopotamian people?