Core Content Area 2: Helping you draw the line

TOPIC 2.2: Ethical Frameworks

Depthing Understanding: Ancient legal codes

In this lesson students will explore how ancient legal codes represented the ethics and values of the people of the time.

Teachers: Before You Start!

1. Familiarise yourself with the resources referred to in this lesson.

For students to explore how ancient legal codes represented the ethics and values of the people of the time, complete the following activities:

1. Investigate the content and context of legal codes across ancient history.

   a. Legal history is closely connected to the development of civilizations and is set in the wider context of social history. Investigate one legal code from ancient history to determine the ethics and values of the people of the time.

   i. Choose one code to examine from the list in Useful Resources and answer the following questions where evidence is available:

      Who wrote the code of law, why was it written and who was it written for?

      How were the laws communicated to the people? Why is it important for people to know the laws?

      What values are evident in the laws? Whose voices are present and whose are absent? Do the laws indicate that all persons were dealt with equally or did the laws discriminate against one or other group? Is the punishment proportionate to the level of crime?

   ii. Create a PMI chart from your research to share with the class.

   iii. Discuss as a class how law in a modern democratic country like Australia is similar to and different from the ancient legal codes studied in this lesson. A simple definition of democracy is given below.

      **Democracy** is a form of government in which all eligible citizens have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives. Democracy allows eligible citizens to participate equally — either directly or through elected representatives — in the proposal, development, and creation of laws. It encompasses social, economic and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practice of political self-determination.

   iv. How are contemporary cultures and values of a society aligned with its justice system and the form of government of the day? Discuss.
Ancient Legal Codes

Cuneiform law (2,350-1,400 BC)

Code of Ur-Nammu (2,380-2,360 BC)

Code of Ur-Nammu, king of Ur (ca. 2050 BC)

Laws of Eshnunna (ca. 1930 BC)

Codex of Lipit-Ishtar of Isin (ca. 1870 BC)

Code of Hammurabi (ca. 1790 BC)

Code of the Nesilim (c. 1650-1500 BC)

Hittite laws (ca. 1650–1100 BC)

Hebraic law / Hebrew Bible / Old Testament (see Mosaic Law) (later see Halakha) (9th-5th Century BC)

The Draconian constitution (7th Century BC)

Gortyn code (5th century BC)

Twelve Tables of Roman Law (451 BC).