

Court Case: Citizen Accused of Stealing an Ox

Characters: Judge Witness 2
 Witness 1 Citizen

Judge: We are here today to determine if this citizen is guilty of theft. An ox was found in his possession—an ox that may belong to his neighbor, a nobleman. Are there any witnesses to prove that the ox belongs to the nobleman?

Witness 1: *(Stands and speaks confidently.)* Yes, judge. I know the ox belongs to the nobleman. It has his mark on it, and I saw the ox on the nobleman's property the night before it disappeared. There is no doubt that the ox in question belongs to the nobleman.

Judge: *(Looks around the room.)* Are there any witnesses to speak for the citizen who is accused of stealing this ox?

Witness 2: *(Jumps to his feet and speaks forcefully.)* Judge, the citizen told me that he didn't steal the ox. He bought it from a stranger who was passing through the city. He had no idea that the ox was stolen and really belongs to his neighbor.

Judge: *(Frowns.)* Did you actually see the citizen purchase the ox from this stranger?

Witness 2: *(Looks at the floor and speaks hesitantly.)* No, but I'm sure the citizen wouldn't lie.

Judge: *(Speaks harshly.)* Citizen, do you have any witnesses to this purchase?

Citizen: *(Slowly rises to his feet and speaks sincerely.)* No, judge, I don't, but everyone in the city knows that I am an honest person.

Judge: *(Looks at the audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen of the Assembly, it is time for you to decide this case. You must decide whether the nobleman's ox was stolen and, if so, whether he shall receive compensation. You must also decide whether the citizen is guilty, and what punishment he shall receive if he is. In making your

decision, consider these laws from the Code of Hammurabi that you have before you:

1. If a person stole an ox or a sheep or an ass or a pig or a boat, and if it belonged to a church or to the state, that person shall make thirtyfold restitution (give 30 times the worth in return); if it belonged to a private citizen, that person shall make tenfold restitution. If the thief cannot pay, he shall be put to death.
2. If a person claimed that suspected stolen property found in his possession was sold to him by someone else, that person must produce witnesses to the sale. The person who claimed the property was stolen from him must also produce witnesses that support that claim. If the person in whose possession the stolen property was found cannot produce witnesses to the sale of the property, that person shall be put to death.

Judge:

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard the evidence and have read the laws. You must now judge the case.

Stop Here
& Discuss



- **What is the legal problem in this case?**
- **What was the social class of the person whose ox was stolen?**
- **How did the person who claimed the ox was stolen from him prove his ownership?**
- **How did the citizen defend himself against the charge that he stole the ox?**

Court Case: Commoner Accused of Harboring a Runaway Slave

Characters: Judge 1 Judge 2
 Witness 1 Commoner

Judge 1: We are here today to determine if this commoner is guilty of harboring a runaway slave. The commoner was found with the runaway slave. Are there any witnesses to speak for the commoner?

Witness 1: *(Slowly stands. Gestures to the commoner and speaks sincerely.)*
The commoner swore, on an oath to the Gods, that he did not help the slave escape. He said the slave came to his door and refused to give his name. The commoner believed there was no way to find out who was the rightful owner of the slave.

Judge 2: *(Points his right index finger at the commoner and raises his voice angrily.)* Commoner, did you take the slave to the palace in order to discover his rightful owner?

Commoner: *(Stands with one hand on his hip. Speaks impatiently.)*
No, I was too busy to do that.

Judge 2: *(Frowning angrily.)* Where was the missing slave found?

Commoner: *(Obviously annoyed.)* He was captured in the street while accompanying me to my house.

Judge 1: *(Looks at the audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen of the Assembly, it is time for you to decide this case. You must decide if the commoner is guilty of any crime and, if so, what the commoner's punishment shall be. In making this decision, consider these laws from the Code of Hammurabi that you have before you:

1. If a person has helped a palace slave or a commoner's slave to escape out of the city gate, that person shall be put to death.
2. If a person has harbored in his house a fugitive slave owned by the palace or owned by a commoner, and that person has not surrendered the slave at the demand of the police, that person shall be put to death.

3. If a person has captured a fugitive slave in the open country and has returned the slave to his master, the owner of the slave shall pay that person two shekels of silver.
4. If a person has captured a fugitive slave in the open country and the slave will not name his owner, that person shall take the slave to the palace and inquire into his record and then return the slave to his owner. If that person keeps the slave in his house and the slave is captured in that person's possession, that person shall be put to death.

Judge 2:

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard the evidence and have read the laws. You must now judge the case.

Stop Here
& Discuss



- **What is the legal problem in this case?**
- **How did the commoner come to possess the runaway slave?**
- **Why didn't the commoner know the real owner of the runaway slave?**
- **How could the commoner have discovered the real owner of the runaway slave?**
- **Where was the runaway slave found?**

Court Case: Commoner and Soldier Claiming the Same Piece of Land

Characters: Judge 1 Soldier
 Judge 2 Commoner

Judge 1: In our next case, the Assembly must decide how to settle a land dispute. Both this soldier and this commoner who purchased land claim to own the same piece of land.

Judge 2: I would like to ask the soldier some questions. *(Looks at the soldier.)* Did you own the land before the ownership was supposedly transferred to the commoner?

Soldier: *(Stands.)* Yes, I did.

Judge 2: I understand that you were called into the army. Did you pay anyone to take your place in the armed forces?

Soldier: *(Speaks proudly.)* No, I did not. I personally fought in the terrible battle.

Judge 2: *(Frowns and speaks angrily.)* I would like to ask the commoner some questions. Did you buy the land that belonged to the soldier while he was serving in the army?

Commoner: *(Stands and looks nervously around the room. Speaks softly.)* Yes, I did.

Judge 2: From whom did you buy the land?

Commoner: I bought it from the soldier's son. *(Holds up the contract tablet.)* I have witnesses, and here is the contract tablet that proves I bought the property legally.

Judge 1: *(Looking at the audience.)* Now, ladies and gentlemen of the Assembly, it is time for you to decide this case. Who owns the land? If the soldier owns the land, what should happen to the money the commoner paid for the land? In making your decision, consider these laws from the Code of Hammurabi that you have before you:

1. If a soldier is ordered on an errand of the king and does not go, or pays a hireling to go in his place, that soldier or constable shall be put to death, and his hireling shall take his estate.
2. The field, orchard, and house of a soldier or constable cannot be sold.
3. If a person has purchased the field, orchard, or house of a soldier or constable, his contract tablet shall be broken, and he shall forfeit his money. The field, orchard, or house shall return to its rightful owner.

Judge 2:

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard the evidence and have read the laws. You must now judge the case.

Stop Here
& Discuss



- **What is the legal problem in this case?**
- **What evidence indicates that the soldier fulfilled his responsibility to serve in the army?**
- **When did the commoner buy the soldier's land?**
- **From whom did the commoner buy the land?**
- **How did the commoner prove he bought the property legally?**

Court Case: Nobleman and Slave Involved in a Brawl

Characters: Judge 1 Nobleman
 Judge 2 Slave

Judge 1: *(Speaks with contempt.)* Our next case involves a brawl between this nobleman and this slave. You must decide the punishments for both participants in this shameful display of violence.

Judge 2: I would like to begin by questioning the nobleman. Please tell the Assembly what happened.

Nobleman: *(Rises lazily to his feet. Speaks scornfully.)* The slave threw garbage out his front door, and it hit me as I walked by. I was so angry I hit him in the face and blinded him.

Judge 2: Did you do any other damage?

Nobleman: *(Smiles as if pleased with himself.)* Well, when the slave lunged at me, I grabbed his arm and broke it.

Judge 2: To what class do you belong?

Nobleman: *(Speaks proudly.)* I am a nobleman.

Judge 2: I would like to question the slave. What happened when the nobleman attacked you?

Slave: *(Kneels. Keeps his eyes on the floor while speaking.)* When the nobleman rushed at me, I slapped him in the face to protect myself.

Judge 2: *(Looks shocked.)* And to what class do you belong?

Slave: *(Whispers.)* I am a slave.

Judge 1:

(Looks at the audience.) Enough evidence has been heard for the Assembly to give a decision. Members of the Assembly, you must decide the punishment for the nobleman and the slave. In making your decision, consider these laws from the Code of Hammurabi that you have before you:

1. If a nobleman has broken the bone or destroyed the eye of a nobleman's slave, he shall pay the other nobleman one half of the slave's value.
2. If a nobleman has knocked out another nobleman's tooth, his own tooth shall be knocked out.
3. If a nobleman has knocked out the tooth of a commoner, he shall pay the commoner one third of a mina of silver.
4. If a nobleman slaps another nobleman, he shall pay that nobleman one mina of silver.
5. If a slave slaps a nobleman, the slave shall have his ear cut off.

Judge 2:

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard the evidence and have read the laws. You must now judge the case.

Stop Here
& Discuss



- **What is the legal problem in this case?**
- **Why was the nobleman angry with the slave?**
- **What injuries did the slave suffer in the fight?**
- **What did the slave do to the nobleman?**

Court Case: Builder Accused of Faulty Construction

Characters: Judge 1 Builder
 Judge 2 Nobleman

Judge 1: The next case involves this builder who is accused of faulty construction, and this nobleman whose house collapsed.

Judge 2: Builder, would you please tell the Assembly what ~~business~~ you are in?

Builder: (*Stands and speaks proudly.*) I am a builder. I build private houses for noblemen.

Judge 2: And did you build a house for the nobleman who lives on the hill?

Builder: Yes, I did.

Judge 2: And did the nobleman seem satisfied with the house you built for him?

Builder: (*Speaks with confidence.*) Yes, he did. He paid me two shekels per square foot as the law requires.

Judge 2: (*Sneers.*) Nobleman, tell the Assembly what happened to the house you had built.

Nobleman: (*Looks at the judge. Speaks with an angry voice.*) During a heavy rainstorm, the bricks melted and the house fell down.

Judge 1: (*Frowns and speaks harshly.*) Was anything inside the house damaged?

Nobleman: (*Still angry.*) I lost all my furniture, clay pots, and clothes.

Judge 2: (*Looks sympathetically toward the nobleman.*) Was anyone injured?

Nobleman: (*Steps forward and his voice begins to shake.*) Yes, my son and one of my slaves were killed.

Judge 1:

(Looks at the audience.) It is now time for the Assembly to make a decision. You must decide if the builder is guilty of a crime and, if so, what punishment he shall receive. In making your decision, consider these laws from the Code of Hammurabi that you have before you:

1. If a builder constructed a house for a nobleman, but did not make his work strong and the house that he built collapsed and caused the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death.
2. If a builder constructed a house for a nobleman, but did not make his work strong and the house that he built collapsed and caused the death of a son of the owner of the house, the son of the builder shall be put to death.
3. If a builder constructed a house for a nobleman, but did not make his work strong and the house that he built collapsed and caused the death of a slave belonging to the owner of the house, the builder shall give another slave to the owner of the house.
4. If a builder constructed a house for a nobleman, but did not make his work strong and the house that he built collapsed and destroyed goods, the builder shall make good whatever was destroyed; also, the builder shall reconstruct the house at his own expense.

Judge 2:

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard the evidence and have read the laws. You must now judge the case.



- **What is the problem in this case?**
- **How did the builder know the nobleman was satisfied with the house he had built for him?**
- **What happened to the nobleman's house?**
- **What did the nobleman lose in his house?**
- **Who was killed in the accident?**