**Ancient Laws**

**Selections from the Code of Hammurabi**

*Hammurabi, king of ancient Babylonia, is best remembered for organizing the laws of his kingdom into a single code. That code contained two types of laws: those stating punishments for injuring people of the upper class and those stating payments for damaging property or injuring someone of the lower classes. As you read, note similarities and differences between Hammurabi’s laws and our laws today.*

If a fire has broken out in a man’s house, and a man who has gone to extinguish it has taken the property of the owner of the house, that man shall be thrown into the fire.

If a son has struck his father, they shall cut off the son’s hand.

If a man has destroyed the eye of a man of the “gentleman” [upper] class, they shall destroy his eye. If he has broken a gentleman’s bone, they shall break his bone. If he has destroyed the eye of a commoner or broken the bone of a commoner, he shall pay one mina of silver. If he has destroyed the eye of a gentleman’s slave, or broken the bone of a gentleman’s slave, he shall pay half the slave’s price.

If a gentleman strikes a gentleman in a free fight and inflicts an injury on him, that man shall swear “I did not strike him deliberately,” and he shall pay only the surgeon.

If a surgeon has made a cut in a gentleman with a bronze knife,….he shall receive ten shekels of silver. If the patient is a commoner, he shall receive five shekels of silver. If the patient is a gentleman’s slave, the slave’s master shall pay the surgeon two shekels of silver.

If the surgeon has made a cut in a gentleman with a bronze knife, and has thereby caused the gentleman to die,….they shall cut off the surgeon’s hand.

If a builder has made a house for a man but has not made his work strong, so that the house he made falls down and causes the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death. If it causes the death of the son of the owner of the house, they shall kill the son of that builder….

To the end of days, forever, may the king who happens to be in the land observe the words of justice which I [Hammurabi] have inscribed on my stele [stone slab];…and let that stele show him the accustomed way, the way to follow, the land’s judgments which I have judged and the land’s decisions which I have decided.

**Thinking about the Reading**

1. How do the laws in the Code of Hammurabi differ from our laws today? Are there any ways in which they are similar? Explain.
2. Reread the last paragraph of the selection. How did Hammurabi’s view of his laws differ from the way the framers viewed our Constitution?