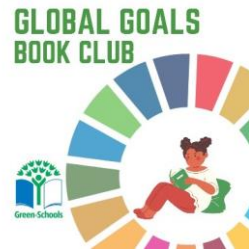


Goal 16 Peace, Justice, & Strong Institutions

Activity sheet.

Brehon Law:
Honour price & compensation.



For Global Goal 16, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions we are going to take a trip back in history to pre-Christian Ireland. It was a time when an ancient set of laws governed the land, the Brehon Laws.

The Brehon Law was a very sophisticated law system that was upheld in Ireland for thousands of years. These were known as “the laws of the land” or “the laws of the neighbourhood” This ancient set of laws existed in Ireland well before other countries had any such system of law. The “old wisdom” was known word for word by the Brehon, or judges, who would recite it in poetic style. The Brehon, studied up to 20 years before they would be allowed to make a ‘judgement’ on a conflict. Both male and female judges existed.

The Laws were honour and compensation based and were means tested, for example those who had the highest standing in the community had to pay higher fines. This was known as your ‘honour price’.

The Brehons were the keepers of these laws, which dealt with every aspect of living in a community. There were lots of rights for women and laws to protect animals, birds and trees. Cattle, pigs and horses were all units of currency under Brehon law with milking cows being the most prized. However along with cattle, the Brehons devoted much value to bees. According to Brehon law, “any bumble bee – ‘bumbóg’ in Irish – taking nectar from plants on a neighbour’s land could be accused of grazing trespass in the same way a cow or sheep would be if they strayed onto a neighbour’s land.”

Bees are a little harder to fence in than cattle and sheep, so the law granted a beekeeper “three years of freedom during which time his bees were allowed free reign but on the fourth year the first swarm to issue from the hive had to be given to the neighbour as payment.” Bee stings were also covered. Victims were entitled to a meal of honey from the bee’s keeper. If, however, they died as a result of the sting, two hives were paid in compensation to their family. This ruling was null and void, however, if the victim killed the bee in retaliation.

All aspects of community life were considered including the importance of nature and trees. The ancient Irish knew the importance of trees in the community and had a strict law system regarding cutting, felling and using trees and shrubs. For cutting of a noble tree without permission; there was a fine of 2 milk cows and a 3-year-old heifer.

So now it’s over to you, to be the judges.....

Goal 16 Peace, Justice, & Strong Institutions

Activity sheet.

GLOBAL GOALS
BOOK CLUB



THEATRIX OF LAW

Imagine that you are the Brehon in a community, the wisdom holders. You must agree to the law and on a fair way of restoring justice and peace.

In small groups discuss first what Brehon laws you think might work today for your school or local community? What is important to protect? How would honour price and compensation work? (remember non-money compensation)

It's now your turn to decide the law. What is important, beyond money that could be exchanged and help bring about peace.

To get started, pick from some of the suggestions below. Pick some people to act out the role of the people seeking justice or in conflict. The rest of the class sit in court as the Brehons who decide on fair justice to restore the peace. When you get the hang of that, feel free to write your own scenarios on small pieces of paper and put them in a hat.

Example scenarios, to be judged:

A. Three neighbours and one cat.

One neighbour claims that a cat has been killing songbirds in their garden and feel that it's very unfair. Another neighbour claims they like to feed the cat but it is not theirs. The other neighbour feels they are no longer the owner of the cat as it spends just as much time in both the other neighbours' houses. Give the actors a few minutes to chat between themselves before bringing their matter before the Brehons. The Brehons ask questions and listen and take time to deliberate a fair law.

B. 2 gardeners and a thief.

The two gardeners have noticed food going missing from their veggie patch every day for a month until one day they caught the thief in action. The thief claims that they have a family to feed and are hungry and have no place to grow their own food. The Brehons listen and then take just action.

C. An elderly couple, a wood cutter and a timber company owner.

The elderly couple have been living beside an old ancient woodland since as long as they can remember. They have watched these trees grow and the forest thicken. Then many of the trees have been cut down, without warning. However the woodland is on common land. The wood cutter needs the timber to exchange for food and take care of their dog and was only following orders from the company owner. The company owner explains its all about profits, enriching the community and sure more trees can be planted. What will the Brehons decide?

Get the idea? You can choose real events or completely made up ones depending on the age group and interest of the group.