

Tribal Council: Creating the Rules of a Village Society

Lesson Overview

Essential Question:

How do societies decide rules for survival, fairness, and belonging when circumstances change?

For most of human history, people lived as **nomadic hunter-gatherers**. Over time, environmental pressures, population growth, and technological changes led some groups to settle into **permanent villages**. This transition required the creation of rules, norms, and expectations to maintain order and survival.

In this lesson, students participate in a **Tribal Council simulation**, where they collectively decide how their society will function as it transitions from a nomadic lifestyle to a village-based one. Through discussion and debate, students confront the challenges of lawmaking, resource distribution, social roles, and cultural norms.

Grade Level

- 7–10 (adaptable)
- Best suited for:
 - Geography
 - World History
 - Early Civilization Studies
 - Civics / Social Organization

Estimated Time

- One full class period (45–70 minutes)
- Can be extended into a written reflection or comparison lesson

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain why early human societies developed rules and norms
- Analyze how environmental and social changes shape political structures
- Evaluate competing values such as fairness, survival, tradition, and equality
- Participate in civil discussion and consensus-building
- Connect early societies to modern governments and laws

Setting the Scenario (Teacher Script)

Have students sit in a **circle**, emphasizing equality and shared responsibility.

Read or paraphrase:

*We are a tribal group of people who have lived for generations as nomadic hunters and gatherers. We moved often, followed animals, and relied on cooperation to survive.

Things have changed. Food sources are more reliable here. We are settling into a village.

This new way of life brings new problems. To survive, we must now decide on rules — not for one person, but for everyone.*

Make clear:

- There is no textbook answer
- Students must think like early humans
- Decisions should be justified



The Tribal Council Simulation

Council Rules (Establish First)

- One speaker at a time
- Everyone's voice matters
- Disagreement is expected
- Decisions must be explained

You may:

- Act as **moderator**, not decision-maker
- Take notes on the board
- Push students to explain *why*



Council Topics & Guiding Questions

1 Marriage & Family Rules

Questions for the Council:

- Can tribe members marry people from outside the tribe?
- If someone marries outside the tribe:
 - Do they join the other tribe?
 - Does the outsider join this tribe?
- Do marriage rules differ for men and women?
- Why might a society want marriage rules?

Teacher prompts:

- Population growth
- Alliances
- Cultural identity
- Inheritance

2 Food & Resource Distribution

Questions for the Council:

- Who gets food first?
- Should hunters receive more food than others?
- Should pregnant women receive extra food?
- What about children?
- What happens during food shortages?

Teacher prompts:

- Survival vs. fairness
- Incentives for work
- Group responsibility

3 Elderly, Sick, and Infirm Members

Questions for the Council:

- What happens when someone can no longer hunt or work?
- Do elders receive food even if they cannot contribute physically?
- Are elders valuable in other ways?
- What responsibilities does the tribe have toward them?

Teacher prompts:

- Knowledge vs. productivity
- Compassion vs. survival
- Long-term thinking

4 Roles, Jobs, and Expectations

Questions for the Council:

- Does everyone have a role?
- Can roles change?
- Are some roles more important than others?
- Who decides who does what?

Teacher prompts:

- Specialization
- Social hierarchy
- Gender roles

5 Behavior & Interpersonal Conflict

Questions for the Council:

- What behaviors are unacceptable in the village?
- What happens if someone steals food?
- What if someone refuses to follow the rules?
- Who enforces decisions?

Teacher prompts:

- Authority
- Punishment
- Restorative vs. punitive justice



Recording Decisions (Optional but Recommended)

As decisions are made, record them under headings such as:

- Marriage Rules
- Food Distribution
- Elder Care
- Roles & Jobs
- Conflict Resolution

This creates a **proto-constitution** for the tribe.



Debrief & Reflection (Critical Step)

After the council ends, shift students out of role.

Discuss:

- Which decisions were hardest?
- Where did disagreements come from?
- Did survival or fairness matter more?
- How did this feel compared to modern laws?

Assessment Options

Written Reflection (Student Prompt)

Which rule your tribe created do you think was the most important? Why? How does it compare to rules in modern societies?

Alternative Assessments

- Exit ticket
- Journal entry
- Group summary
- Compare with real early civilizations (Mesopotamia, Indus, Nile)