



## SIMON'S DEATH AND THE PURPOSE OF CRIMINAL LAW

Piggy and Ralph have somewhat differing views about the death of Simon. Ralph described it as a murder. Piggy claimed it was an accident.

How could the question of whether or not Simon's death was a "murder" or an "accident" be resolved? How could it be determined who was responsible? In Canada, these types of questions would be dealt with through our criminal law system.

What is Criminal Law?

The main purpose of criminal law is to protect society and to keep our communities peaceful and safe. Actions that are deemed criminal are believed to harm not only the victim, but also harm society as a whole. Thus, criminal law sets a standard of behaviour for all people in society. Common examples of criminal offences are theft, break and enter, assault, fraud, and impaired driving. Homicide and manslaughter are also criminal offences.

There are several components of the justice system that are used to address suspected criminal activity, including:

- police, who investigate the crime, arrest suspects, and charge people with criminal offences;
- crown prosecutors, who prepare and conduct legal proceedings against the accused perpetrator or perpetrators; and
- the court, which determines the guilt of the perpetrators and the appropriate punishment within the law.

### WHO ENFORCES CRIMINAL LAW ON THE ISLAND?

Although Ralph and Piggy were able to debate on whether or not Simon's death was a murder, their society is ill-equipped to bring about justice for this situation. It is apparent that at the very least, Ralph and Piggy know that what happened was wrong. However, the island has yet to develop a series of laws to deal with such offences. And even if they did have these laws in place, the boys lack a police force, public prosecutors, and a court system to ensure an orderly and fair way to determine the precise nature of the incident and who was responsible.

Given the boys downwards spiral into disorder, it is unlikely that a criminal justice system—however rudimentary—will develop on the island to remedy Simon's killing. Without a criminal justice system, it is doubtful that there is hope for justice and restoration to come about after a crime is committed.

### CONSIDER

1. When Piggy and Ralph discuss the killing of Simon, Ralph describes it as murder while Piggy claims it was an accident.
  - a) What truths do you see in Piggy's interpretation?
  - b) What truths do you see in Ralph's interpretation?
  - c) Whose interpretation is more accurate? Piggy's or Ralph's?

2. Consider your answers in question 1.

- a) Why is it important that societies have laws that help define the answers to these questions?
- b) Why is it important that societies have fair and established systems and institutions (such as police, judges, and lawyers) to determine the answers to these questions?

**FOR FUTURE READING**

With no consequences for Simon's murder, watch the boys' attitude towards violence as the story concludes.