



## THE CONCH, THE MACE, AND SYMBOLS OF GOVERNANCE

Many countries have symbols that represent their system of governance, law, and order. This is also true of *Lord of the Flies*. In the lagoon laying amongst ferny weeds, Piggy and Ralph discover a large creamy shell called a conch. The boys use this shell to call a meeting, and soon it becomes a symbol of the orderly governance of the island.

In Canada, the House of Commons and each provincial legislature has a symbolic item similar to the conch. It is a club-like weapon called the mace. Maces can be found in most legislatures based on the United Kingdom's Westminster-style of parliamentary governance.

The mace represents the honour of our system of democratic government. In Saskatchewan, the Mace in the legislature dates back to 1906. Though considered a priceless symbol of the royal authority that the legislature has to meet and determine laws, Saskatchewan's mace was originally manufactured in Toronto at the cost of \$465.

The history of the mace in Westminster legislatures dates back to at least the fifteenth century, if not earlier. According to the House of Commons Procedure and Practice manual, when a guard called the Sergeant-at-Arms was first placed in the United Kingdom's Parliament, he was armed with a mace. As the role of the Sergeant-at-Arms evolved the mace also evolved, from weapon into symbolic ornament.

One of the similarities between the mace and the conch is their use at assemblies. Much like how the boys sound the conch to call meetings, the mace is carried into the legislature at each day's opening of proceedings. It is placed on the centre table, and pointed towards the side where the government members sit. In Canada, the mace is considered integral to a legislature's operation. If the mace is not present, legislative proceedings cannot carry on.

One of the differences between the conch and the mace is the ability of people to touch it. While the boys need to be holding the conch for the right to speak, in Canada's legislatures the mace is off-limits to elected members. On the rare occasions that members of legislatures have touched or held the mace, an apology was required. This is because such actions are considered serious violations that obstruct the business of the legislature.

### CONSIDER

1. Are customs, conventions, and symbols of law, order, and governance important for a society? Why or why not?

### FOR FUTURE READING

As the story progresses, consider the role that the conch plays as a symbol of governance, law, and order on the island. Does it become more esteemed or less respected as the boys' society evolves?