



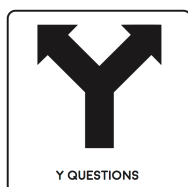
The Cowman and the Farmer

The title for this story is taken from the song from Oklahoma, "The Cowman and The Farmer Should Be Friends", which is set in the time of tension between the herd-driving cattlemen and settled agriculture. A similar conflict must have occurred without the thigh-slapping music many times in history, as areas traditionally grazed by nomadic herders were appropriated by farmers.



Which of these can you/should you be able to own?

Give out the attached cards to small groups and use the 'Conceptometer' (p. 13), or 'In/Out' (p. 21)



Read the story out loud. It's a good improv opportunity for volunteers who want to mime it as it is read. The story raises themes about property and progress, changing attitudes between generations. It takes its cue from one of the traditional preoccupations of political philosophy – how can rights to property and land in particular emerge from a "state of nature" in which nobody owns anything?



Facilitate a discussion using any of these to help provoke thinking:

- *The first time a piece of land belonged to somebody, what made it theirs? Was that fair?*
- *Is there a limit to how much one person should be able to own?*
- *Is there a limit to how little one person should be able to own?*
- *Are there any things that belong to nobody at all?*
- *Is it wrong to take things that belong to nobody?*
- *Are there any things that belong to everybody?*
- *Is it wrong to take things that belong to everybody?*
- *Can anything be owned by an animal?*

NEXT STEPS

You could also look at this issue historically through the Enclosures Acts, or topically, looking at conflicts between plantation owners and indigenous peoples in South America.

Today was an easy day. The sun was behind him, and a soothing breeze blew on his face. He looked up at the birds circling lazily in the sky. From up there, he thought, his cattle would look like a single creature, a great brown snake moving along the bottom of the valley.

His children darted back and forth urging on the herd, feeling important. He and his wife walked along behind.

He had travelled this way many times before, and knew that a watering hole lay just around the bend, past two big trees that leaned on each other.

Then there was a shout from out in front. His eldest, not a boy to make a fuss. The herdsman hurried forward.

There in a place where they did not grow were sharp sticks, pushed into the ground and pointing towards them. He could step over them easily enough, but the points of the sticks crossed over, so that there were no spaces between them where a cow could pass.

On the other side of the sticks, a man and his family were bending low over plants, picking at them. The herdsman stepped over the sticks and walked towards them. The man looked up.

"Watch what you are doing!" he shouted. "You are stepping on my food!"

The herdsman looked down and saw that he was crushing some of the little plants under his feet.

"I am sorry. I did not realise," he said. He took care to step in the spaces between the rows of plants.

"This is my land. You can take your cattle around the edge. There is plenty of room left," said the farmer.

The herdsman did not want trouble. There was more than enough room for his cattle to pass. So on he went.

The next year, when he passed the same way, there were two families picking at the plants. They had sticks between their fields as well as around the edge.

Year on year, there were more families and more patches of land fenced off with sticks. His had given his eldest son a herd of his own now, though they still travelled together. By now they had to take their cattle along the very edge of the valley. One of the cows lost its footing, and broke a leg. The herdsman was furious. He began pulling some of the sticks out of the ground to make a path for his cattle, but the farmers surrounded him and made him stop.

"Why is this land yours?" he demanded. "I always brought my cattle through here before you arrived. You did not make this land, so why is it yours?"

"What about your cattle? You didn't make them yourself, did you?" said the farmer, and laughed.

"No. But I look after them. If I did not, many of them would be eaten by wild animals. I keep them safe and so each year I have more."

"And we keep our crops safe. We plant them at the right time of year, and keep the fields free from weeds, and stop the animals from eating them. So each year, we have more crops. This land, which your cattle would graze in a single day, is enough for my family for a year."

They argued. In the end, the farmers agreed to move their fences so that there was a narrow path between their fields through which the cattle could pass.

The next year, the herdsman's son was quiet and moody on their journey. "You are going too slow for me, father," he said. "I will go on ahead and you can catch me up."

When the herdsman got to the place where the farmers were, his son greeted him proudly from behind the sticks. Looking around the little farms, the herdsman could see that each one now had a cow.

A wild animal



A pet



A country



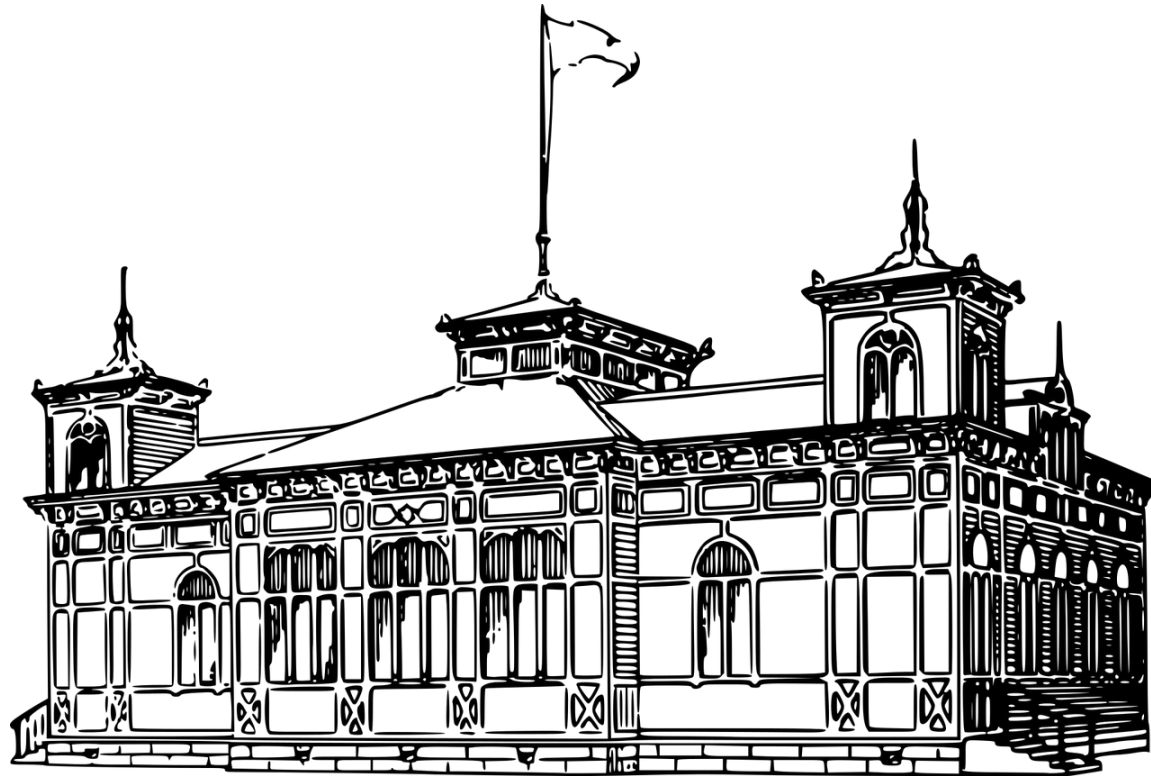
A house



A hair-style



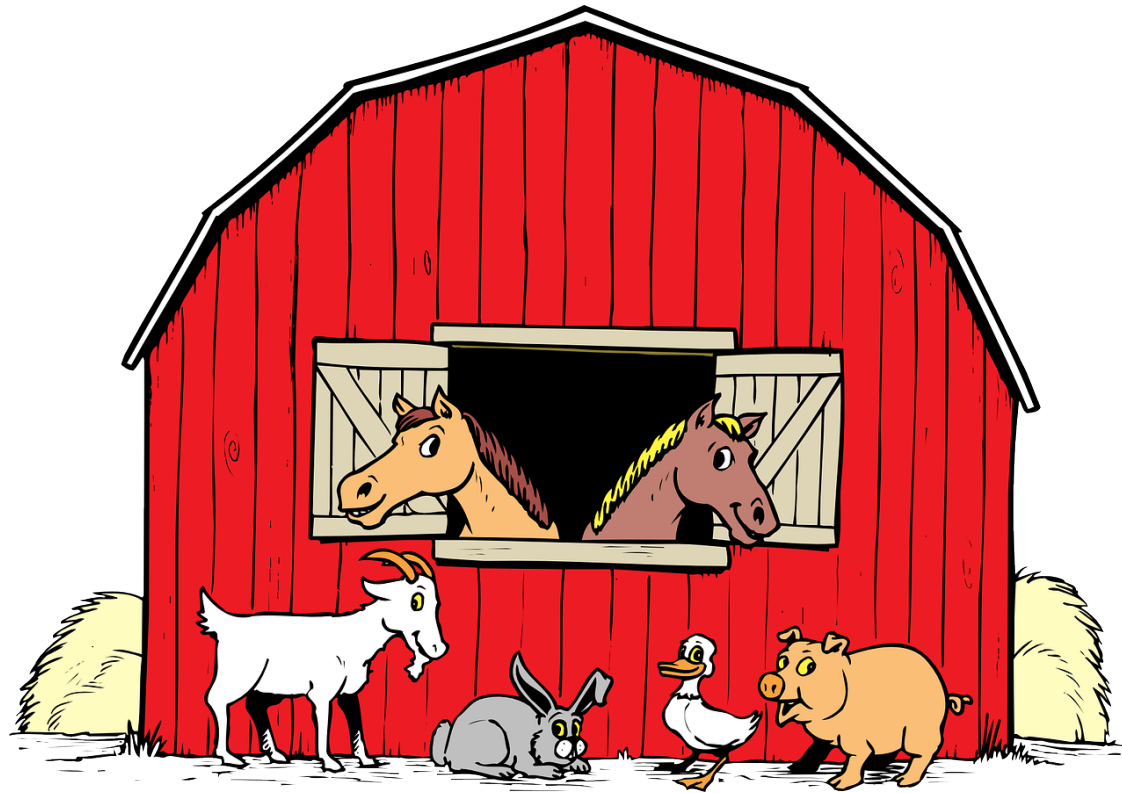
A school



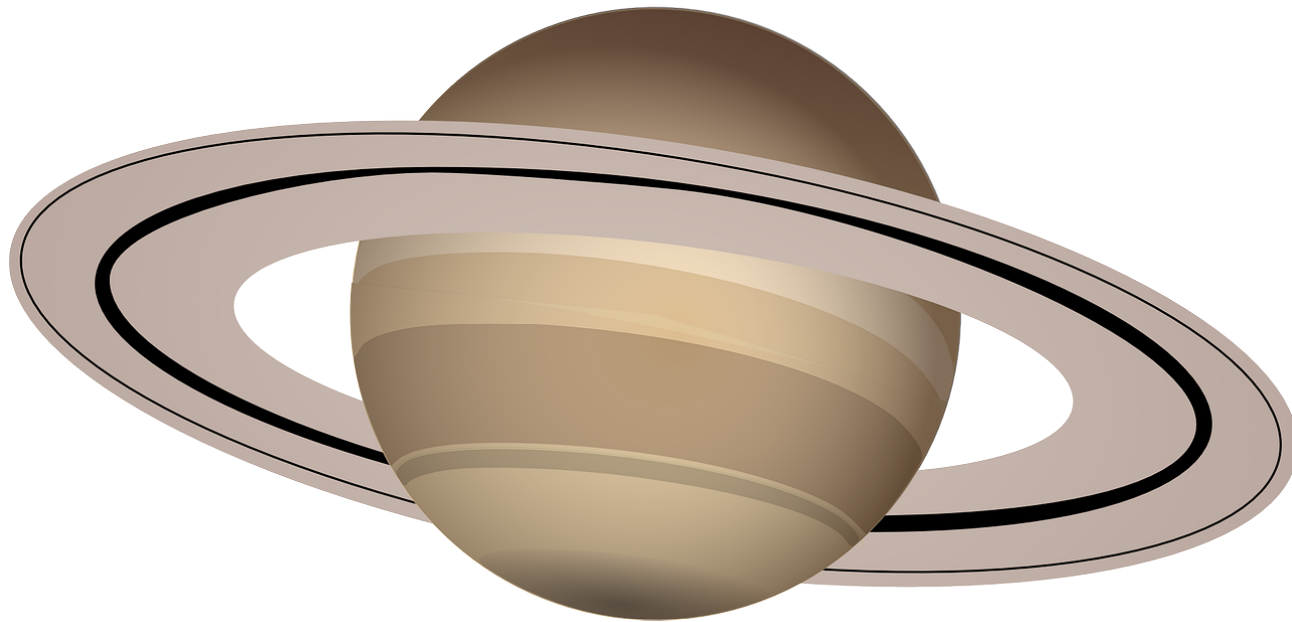
The world



A farm



A planet



A place no one has
been before

