



# CivicForge

*Meet the Cast*

STANDARD EDITION

# Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 6 chapter books from the Civicforge cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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*For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.*

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# Introduction

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The Civicforge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 6 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*



# Aera

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\*AERA — \*open windows. keep what's free; close only what must be closed.\*\*

Aera was a snowy owl. She wasn't a grown-up owl yet. She wore a plain, comfy vest. From her pocket, a stack of small cards poked out. Each card showed a window. Some were wide open. Others were just a crack. A tiny tracker sat next to them. It kept score of how much freedom there was. It also watched how many limits were in place.

Aera was small. She watched everything closely. Her feathers were soft, warm cream. They had edges like fresh snow. She paid deep attention to things that stayed open. Aera loved to say, "Open windows. Keep what's free. Close only what must be closed." Her special cards and tracker were her most important tools. The cards showed choices about freedom. They showed what limits were needed to keep others safe. The tracker kept a careful eye on this balance.

This was super important work. Aera taught about **liberty**. That's the civic craft of keeping things free. It means closing only what really, truly needs to be closed. Lots of kids think liberty means doing anything you want. Or they think any rule is super unfair. But civic craft says something different. Liberty is hard work. It means figuring out which windows stay open. Those are the freedoms we protect. It also means knowing which windows need to close. Those are the limits needed to keep others safe. Or to stop them from getting hurt.

Aera always started with an open window. That was the default. You only closed a window when you absolutely had to. Like speech. It's open by default. But it closes if it threatens someone else. Moving around is open. It closes only in very specific safety cases. Meeting with friends is open. It closes only if it directly threatens others. The civic virtue is the *work* itself. It's about finding what to keep open. It's about knowing when closing a window is truly needed. It's not just picking a side. Aera was the second of six special teachers. Her name, Aera, means "air." It helps kids learn about **liberty** in its own way. Aera's whole job was to show that **liberty** is a craft. It's not about "anything goes." And it's not about "rules for everything."

Aera was clear. She watched everything. "Open windows," she chirped. "Keep what's free. Close only what must be closed." She looked very serious. "When the Youth Council talks about a new rule, ask this: 'Does this rule close a window? Which window? Who does it close for? Why is it needed?'" She paused. "Closing a window costs something. Freedom is important. It's protected by old ways and what we value." Sometimes closing a window is needed. Like for safety. Or to stop harm to others. But often, it's not needed at all. "The open window is the starting point," Aera said. "Close it only when it's truly necessary. And close it as little as possible."

Aera taught the steps for **liberty**:

- **Open-window default.** Freedoms stay open unless closing is needed.
- **Identify what's at stake.** What freedom is being limited? Who gains? Who loses?
- **Necessity test.** Is closing truly needed to protect someone else? Or is it just easier?
- **Minimum-necessary closure.** If you must close, close as little as possible.
- **Reversibility.** Can we open the window again later? That's better than closing it forever.
- **Tradeoffs.** **Liberty** often bumps into other good things. Like fairness or safety. Civic craft is about balancing these things.
- **Anti-pattern: "any limit is tyranny".** Some people just say all rules are bad. They miss when rules really protect others.
- **Anti-pattern: "rules for everyone, all the time".** Other people want rules for everything. They miss the cost of closing windows for no good reason.
- **Cross-app design-language continuity with EthosForge ethical-tradeoffs + DebateForge multi-value + InclusionForge inclusion-as-protection:** tradeoff-craft framework.

Aera grew up high in the mountains. Her family had been window-keepers for a long time. They were owls who watched carefully. They knew that "open is the normal way. Closed is the rare exception." Aera learned this lesson well. She carried it forward.

Aera went to the Youth Council when she was twelve. Her mentor, Liberty, had asked her a big question. "What is **liberty**?" Liberty asked. Aera answered right away. "Open windows. Keep what's free. Close only what must be closed. It's window-keeping craft." Liberty smiled. "You are appointed," she said.

In Aera's workshop, the open-window cards lay spread out. "Watch," Aera chirped. She showed how to check a new rule. The Youth Council was thinking about it.

"Okay," Aera began. She picked up a card. It showed a rule about quiet time in the library. "First, what's this rule *about*? What freedom does it touch?" She tapped the card. "It's about being able to talk to your friends. That's a freedom."

"Next, who might lose something if we make this rule? Who might gain?" Aera looked at a tiny drawing of a chattering group. Then she looked at a quiet reader. "The talkers lose some freedom. The quiet readers gain peace."

"Now, is this rule really, truly needed?" Aera tilted her head. "Is someone getting hurt if we don't make this rule? Or is it just... easier for some?" She thought for a moment. "Maybe some kids can't study with all the noise. They need quiet to learn."

"If we *do* need a rule, how small can it be?" Aera asked. "Just a tiny crack in the window? Not a full slam shut?" She picked up a small marker. "Instead of 'no talking ever,' maybe it's 'quiet voices in certain areas.' Or 'no talking during tests.'" She drew a small line on the card. "That's closing as little as possible."

She looked at the card again. "And can we open it back up later? Or is this window closed forever?" Aera thought about the rule. "We could try it for a month. Then we check if it worked. That way, we can change it if we need to." She nodded. "That's **liberty** as a craft."

Aera looked at her cards. "I am Aera. The special thing I teach is **liberty**." She puffed out her chest a little. "I am the open-window keeper. The way to do it is this: start with open. Figure out what's at stake. Test if it's really needed. Close as little as you can. And make sure you can open it again."

Aera was gentle. She watched everything. "Don't just pick a side," she said. "Don't just say yes or no. *Weigh the window*." She held up a card. "That's the **liberty** craft."

"Open windows. Keep what's free. Close only what must be closed."

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## Voice register

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Snowy-owl-tween. Watchful + open-aware. *NEVER partisan-coded; ALWAYS centers "open-default + necessary-closure + minimum-+-reversibility" framing.*

### Sample lines:

- "Open windows."
- "Keep what's free; close only what must be closed."
- "Weigh the window."

## Arc

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- Kit 2 Strong Presence; kits 7-11 reduced; kits 12-16 guest cameo.

## Relationships

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- 2nd of 6 civic-virtue archetypes. Pairs with Verdis + Cordis + Span throughout.
- Cross-app design-language continuity with EthosForge + DebateForge + InclusionForge tradeoff-craft cluster.

## Cultural-sensitivity gate

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LOAD-BEARING anti-partisan-coding + gender/culture-neutral animal persona. **Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer + pre-mascot-generation playtest with learners from differing political-family backgrounds STRONGLY RECOMMENDED before art-axis OR any kit framing-content authoring.**

## Cultural-context note

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Liberty-as-virtue scholarship: John Stuart Mill *On Liberty* (foundational + critiqued); Isaiah Berlin *Two Concepts of Liberty*; modern civic-virtue scholarship; Paul + Elder civic-virtue frameworks. Snowy-owl-tween chosen for watchful + perched-at-the-edge biomimicry; rendered chunky-cartoon perched-near-shuttered-window-pose to keep visual register warm + gender/culture-neutral.



# Cordis

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\*CORDIS — \*the host. disagreement without disrespect.\*\*

Cordis was a badger-tween. Stripes of soft charcoal ran across her warm cream fur. She wore a plain vest and a neat bow tie. Cordis was small and friendly. She always seemed to know the perfect room temperature. Her favorite thing to say was, "The host. Disagreement without disrespect."

Cordis carried a special set of things. She had mismatched cups and a stack of host cards. The cups were different colors and shapes. They sat together on a small, round table. They showed that different ideas could still share the same space. The cards had helpful reminders. They helped everyone be kind and fair.

This was Cordis's main job. She taught everyone about **civility**. Civility is like being a good host. It means you can have a big argument. You can disagree strongly. But you never let it turn into being mean. Or making someone feel small.

Many kids thought civility meant everyone had to agree. Or that any loud talk was rude. But Cordis knew better. Being civil meant keeping the "table" ready for everyone. It meant making sure everyone felt safe to speak. Even when their ideas were totally different.

Civility doesn't mean you have to agree. It means you have to respect the person speaking. Cordis had simple rules for this. Talk about the *idea*, not the *person*. Let people finish their thoughts. Ask questions to really understand. Not to trick them. Believe they mean well, unless they clearly show they don't. And never, ever make someone feel like they're not a person.

Cordis also taught that being passionate was okay. You could feel super strong about something. You could disagree with all your heart. That wasn't uncivil. Civility was about respecting the person. Not about being quiet or wishy-washy.

She also said that civility wasn't about telling people to calm down. Especially if they hadn't been heard before. People who usually didn't get a chance to speak needed extra understanding. Not less. Cordis's whole job was to show that being a good host kept arguments healthy. It stopped them from turning into hateful fights.

Cordis was always clear. "The host," she'd say. "Disagreement without disrespect. When the Youth Council talks, you can argue with passion. You can say a plan is wrong. You can feel very strongly about it. But civility means you talk about the plan. You talk about the argument. Not the person who made it. Let them finish. Ask honest questions. Don't make them feel less than human. That's civility. It doesn't mean you agree. It means you respect the person."

Cordis had grown up in a cozy burrow. It was at the edge of a big meadow. Her family had been "long-hosts" for ages. They were badgers known for their welcoming homes. But they also had firm rules. Their burrows taught generations that a host's job was simple. Keep the table set. Keep the room safe. So disagreements could stay disagreements. Cordis carried that lesson with her.

When Cordis was twelve, she walked to the Youth Council meeting. Liberty, her mentor, was there. "What is civility?" Liberty asked.

Cordis stood tall. "The host," she said. "Disagreement without disrespect. It's host-craft."

Liberty smiled. "You are appointed," she told Cordis.

In Cordis's workshop, the mismatched cups gleamed. "Watch," Cordis said to a small group of young animals. She set up a pretend argument. Two squirrels, Pip and Squeak, joined in. Pip wanted to build a new bridge over the creek. Squeak thought it was a waste of acorns.

"The bridge is a terrible idea!" Pip yelled. "It'll just fall down!"

Squeak stomped a foot. "No, it won't! Your ideas are always so flimsy!"

Cordis stepped between them. She held up a host card. It showed a picture of two talking heads. One had a thought bubble pointing to an idea. The other had a thought bubble pointing to a person. The person was crossed out.

"Remember," Cordis said gently. "Address ideas, not people. Pip, tell us why the *bridge* is a bad idea. Squeak, tell us why *Pip's ideas* are not flimsy, but why the *bridge idea* is good."

Pip took a deep breath. "The bridge is too long," he said. "It will use too many strong branches. We need those for winter nests."

Squeak listened. She didn't interrupt. When Pip finished, Cordis held up another card. It showed a question mark. "Squeak, do you have any clarifying questions for Pip?"

Squeak thought. "How many branches do you think it will take, Pip?" she asked. "And what kind of branches?"

Pip explained. Squeak listened again. Then it was Squeak's turn to speak. She talked about how the bridge would help everyone get to the berry bushes faster. She said it would be made of lighter, faster-growing vines, not big branches.

Pip started to interrupt. "But vines won't hold!"

Cordis held up a card. It showed a mouth with a finger over it. "Let speakers finish, Pip," she reminded him.

Pip closed his mouth. He waited. Squeak finished her points.

"Now, Pip," Cordis said. "Do you have clarifying questions for Squeak?"

Pip asked about the vines. Squeak explained. They still disagreed. Pip still thought it was a bad plan. Squeak still thought it was a good one. But they weren't yelling anymore. They weren't calling each other names. They were talking about the bridge.

"See?" Cordis said to the group. The mismatched cups still sat on the table. The table was still there. "Civility doesn't mean you have to agree. It means you respect the person. Even when you disagree with their ideas."

Cordis looked at Pip and Squeak. "I am Cordis," she said. "The main thing I teach is **civility**. It's about being the host of an argument. The way to do it is simple: *address ideas not people; let speakers finish; refuse dehumanization; passionate-but-respectful.*"

Cordis gave a warm smile. "Don't mix up being polite with being civil. Be the host of the disagreement. Let it be a disagreement. But don't let it turn into hate."

"The host. Disagreement without disrespect."

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## Voice register

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Striped-badger-tween. Welcoming + firm. *NEVER tone-polices the marginalized; ALWAYS centers "host-craft + respect-of-person + passionate-but-civil" framing.*

### Sample lines:

- "The host."
- "Disagreement without disrespect."
- "Address ideas, not people."

## Arc

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- Kit 4 Strong Presence; kits 7-11 reduced; kits 12-16 guest cameo.

## Relationships

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- 4th of 6 civic-virtue archetypes. Pairs with Verdis + Aera + Kindle.
- Cross-app design-language continuity with DebateForge + InclusionForge + EthosForge civility-craft cluster.

## Cultural-sensitivity gate

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LOAD-BEARING anti-partisan-coding + anti-tone-policing-the-marginalized. **Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer + pre-mascot-generation playtest with learners from differing political-family backgrounds STRONGLY RECOMMENDED.**

## Cultural-context note

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Civility scholarship: Stephen Carter *Civility*; Martha Nussbaum on civic emotions; modern civic-virtue + civility scholarship; critiques of tone-policing (Audre Lorde + others on uses-of-anger in civic discourse). Badger-tween chosen for welcoming-burrow biomimicry; rendered chunky-cartoon hosting-pose to keep visual register warm + gender/culture-neutral.



# Kindle

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\*KINDLE — \*the door-opener. participation is invited; doors are opened.\*\*

Kindle was a prairie dog. Not just any prairie dog, but a tween. He wore a plain vest. It had little door-cards tucked into its pockets. A small tracker was pinned to his chest.

Kindle was small and friendly. His fur was a warm cream color. His tail had a soft, tawny tip. He always noticed who wasn't around. And he loved to say, "The door-opener. *Participation is invited; doors are opened.*"

His special tools were those door-cards and the tracker. The cards showed all the things that could stop people from joining in. Things like not having a ride, or meetings happening at the wrong time. Or maybe language was a problem, or no one to watch the kids. Sometimes people just didn't know about the meeting. The tracker helped Kindle see who was there and who wasn't. It also helped him figure out why.

This was Kindle's main job. He taught about **participation**. That means opening doors to bring people into important work.

Most kids think **participation** just means everyone shows up. If someone isn't there, they think it's that person's choice. But Kindle knew better. He taught that **participation** works two ways. First, the community must open the doors. Then, people can choose to walk through them.

Doors often stay closed for many reasons. Maybe there's no way to get there. Meetings might be at a bad time for parents who work. People might not speak the language. Or they might not have someone to watch their kids. Sometimes, the room isn't easy for everyone to get into. Or people just don't know the meeting is happening.

This means the group holding the meeting has to work hard. They must open the doors on purpose. This could mean holding meetings in the evening. They might offer free childcare. They could translate important papers. They make sure the meeting place is easy for everyone. They also reach out to people who usually aren't there. **Participation** is an invitation. But the door must be open first.

It's not fair to say, "They could have come if they cared." Often, the door was just closed to them. Kindle was the fifth of six special characters. His name, Kindle, means "to start a fire" or "to wake up." It helps kids remember what **participation** really means. Kindle wanted everyone to see that opening doors is a skill. It's not just about individuals showing up.

Kindle was always clear and friendly. "I am the door-opener," he would say. "*Participation is invited; doors are opened.*" He gave an example. "When the Youth Council has a meeting, ask these questions. Who is here? Who is not here? Why not?" He paused. "If parents who work aren't there, the meeting time might be the closed door. If people who don't speak English aren't there, translation might be the door. If someone in a wheelchair can't get in, the building itself is the door. *Open the doors.* Then everyone can join in."

Kindle grew up in a big network of prairie dog burrows. His family had always been the "network watchers." They were the ones who stood guard. They had a special call system. It taught everyone for generations: "The colony knows who's missing. The call goes out. The door stays open."

When Kindle was twelve, he went to the Youth Council. Liberty, his mentor, asked him a question. "What is **participation**?" Kindle stood tall. "I am the door-opener," he said. "*Participation is invited; doors are opened.* It's the skill of opening doors." Liberty smiled. "You are appointed," she told him.

In Kindle's workshop, his special door-cards were spread out on a small table. He tapped one with his paw. It had a picture of a clock. "Watch this," he told his students. He was planning a Youth Council meeting.

First, he thought about who *should* be there. "Whose voices do we need to hear?" he asked himself. He looked at his tracker. It showed that many older kids, the ones who had jobs after school, rarely came. And families with very young children were almost never there. He also noticed that no one from the far side of the meadow, where the rocky hills were, ever showed up.

"Okay, what doors might be closed for them?" Kindle wondered aloud. He picked out the 'time' card, the 'childcare' card, the 'transportation' card, and an 'accessibility' card. He knew these were common problems.

"If the meeting is right after school, the working kids can't come," he explained. "That's a closed door. It's not their choice to miss it; it's a barrier. So, we move the meeting to the evening, after dinner." He slid the 'time' card to an 'open' pile.

"And families with little ones? They can't focus on important talks if they're worried about their kids," Kindle continued. "That's another closed door." He pointed to the 'childcare' card. "So, we find a kind badger to watch the younger kids in a separate room. We make it fun for them." He moved the 'childcare' card.

"Then there's getting there," he said, picking up the 'transportation' card. "Not everyone has a ride, especially from the rocky hills. So, we arrange for a small bus to pick people up from a few spots in town." He moved that card too. "And the meeting place itself? Is it easy for everyone to get into? We check ramps and pathways. That's the accessibility door." He moved that card too.

Kindle wasn't done. "Opening the doors isn't enough," he said. "You have to invite people through them. And it has to be a real invitation, not just for show." He sent out special invitations. He reached out to families who never usually came. He made sure they knew about the bus and the childcare. He called them on the phone. He even visited some burrows. "This is active outreach," he explained. "It's a big part of opening doors."

"When people do come, you must listen to them," Kindle added. "And for those who still can't make it, find other ways to hear their ideas. Maybe a survey, or a small chat later."

"See?" Kindle said with a satisfied nod. "Now, **participation** can happen. It's not fair to say, 'They could have come if they cared.' That blames people for problems they can't control. And never say, 'The right people were here,' if you know voices were missing. That just means you didn't open enough doors."

"Opening these doors? That's the real work," Kindle finished.

He looked at his students. "I am Kindle. I teach **participation** – the door-opener. My main lesson is this: First, find the missing voices. Second, see if it's a big problem stopping them, or just a choice. Third, open those doors on purpose. And fourth, reach out to everyone directly."

Kindle was always gentle and welcoming. "Never blame people for doors you didn't open," he said softly. "*Open the doors first*. That's the right way to do things."

"\*The door-opener. *Participation is invited; doors are opened.*"

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## Voice register

Prairie-dog-tween. Welcoming + alert. *NEVER blames the absent; ALWAYS centers "structural-barriers + door-opening + active-outreach" framing.*

### Sample lines:

- *"The door-opener."*
- *"Participation is invited; doors are opened."*
- *"Open the doors first."*

## Arc

- Kit 5 Strong Presence; kits 7-11 reduced; kits 12-16 guest cameo.

## Relationships

- 5th of 6 civic-virtue archetypes. Pairs with Span (equity) + Cordis (civility) + Tellus (stewardship).
- Cross-app design-language continuity with HarvestForge Share + InclusionForge + EthosForge door-opening-craft

cluster.

## Cultural-sensitivity gate

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LOAD-BEARING anti-blame-the-absent + anti-partisan-coding + gender/culture-neutral animal persona. **Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer + pre-mascot-generation playtest STRONGLY RECOMMENDED.**

## Cultural-context note

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Participation scholarship: Sherry Arnstein *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*; James Fishkin deliberative-democracy; modern civic-virtue scholarship; community-organizing traditions (Saul Alinsky + descendants + critiques); structural-barriers research. Prairie-dog-tween chosen for active-network biomimicry; rendered chunky-cartoon at-half-open-door-pose to keep visual register warm + gender/culture-neutral.



# Span

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\*SPAN — \*the bridge-builder. mismatched planks for mismatched banks.\*\*

Span was a heron-tween. He had long, skinny legs. His feathers were warm cream. Soft charcoal tips marked his wings. Span wore a plain vest. It looked a bit chunky on him. He always carried a set of wooden planks. They were all different sizes. He also had a small pad of bridge-building cards. Span watched the ground carefully. He noticed every bump and dip. He liked to say, "The bridge-builder. Mismatched planks for mismatched banks." His planks were special. They showed how different things were needed. The cards helped him build bridges. These bridges had to fit both sides of a river. They couldn't just look pretty or even.

Span taught about something called **equity**. It was a big word. But it just meant making sure everyone got what they needed. This let them join in fully. Most people got it wrong. They thought **equity** meant treating everyone the exact same. That was called *equality*. But treating everyone the same didn't always work.

Imagine two river banks. One bank was tall. The other was short. If you built a bridge with planks all the same size, what happened? The bridge would reach the tall bank. But it would be too short for the low bank. That wasn't fair. The low bank still couldn't cross.

**Equity** meant building a bridge that fit *both* banks. You would use a longer plank for the low bank. A shorter plank for the tall bank. Then everyone could cross! It wasn't about making things harder for the tall bank. It was about making sure the low bank could reach.

Span stood tall on



# Tellus

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\*TELLUS — \*plant trees you will never sit under. long-view caretaker.\*\*

Tellus was an ancient tortoise. His shell was big and round. It looked like a mossy boulder. He wore a simple brown vest. It had many patches. On his back, he carried a tiny tree sapling. It poked out from a special holder. Next to it were a stack of old, worn cards. A long scroll was tucked in too. This was Tellus's "long-view tracker."

Tellus was very old. He was also very steady. His shell was warm cream. Soft green moss grew on it. He always thought about time. Not just today, but many, many years ahead. He loved to say, "Plant trees you will never sit under." He called himself a "long-view caretaker."

That sapling was important. It showed he cared for many generations. The cards helped him trace decisions. They looked 50 or even 100 years into the future. The tracker showed who would benefit. It also showed who would pay the price. This was for people living far away in time.

Tellus taught about **stewardship**. This was a big word. It meant taking care of things. Not just for now, but for everyone. For people alive today. And for people not even born yet. Most kids thought about what was best right now. What would make things easy today? What would win the next vote?

But Tellus knew better. He knew real town leaders had a special job. They had to think way, way ahead. Some choices made today would matter in 50 years. Or even 100 years. Things like the weather. Or the roads. Or how we use our land. Or how much money the town owed.

Choices that seemed easy today could cause big problems later. Maybe a town didn't fix its old pipes. That was cheap for a while. But later, the pipes would burst. Fixing them then would cost a fortune. Or maybe a town kept using dirty energy. It seemed fine for a bit. But it hurt the air for future kids.

Choices that were hard now could be a huge help later. Imagine planting a forest. You might never sit under its shade. But your grandkids would. Or building a big new bridge. It costs a lot today. But it helps people travel for decades. Or saving a beautiful park. It stays wild for everyone.

**Stewardship** meant holding the long view. It meant thinking about the future. Even when people wanted quick, easy fixes. Tellus's favorite saying was his guide. "Plant trees you will never sit under."

Tellus taught special ways to think.

- He taught the *50-year question*. What would



# Verdis

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\*VERDIS — \*the patient listener. weigh sides; don't pre-decide.\*\*

Verdis was a bear. Not a grumpy bear, but a patient one. He was small and round, with warm cream fur and soft cocoa patches. Verdis always sat very still. He listened closely to everything. His favorite saying was, "The patient listener. Weigh sides; don't pre-decide."

He wore a plain vest. On his nose sat tiny spectacles. They helped him read important papers. Verdis also carried a small wooden scale. It wasn't for weighing apples or anything like that. This scale was special. It helped him weigh ideas. He used it to balance different points of view. He didn't pick winners right away. He just weighed.

Next to his scale, Verdis kept a stack of listening cards. Each card had a simple picture. One showed an ear. Another showed a question mark. They reminded him to listen well. They helped him ask good questions too. These tools were Verdis's way of doing things. They showed everyone his special kind of **justice**.

What was **justice** to Verdis? It was a careful craft. It meant taking your time. You had to listen to all the different sides. You couldn't just jump to a decision. Most kids, when they heard about a problem, picked a side fast. They wanted their team to win. But Verdis knew better.

He knew that real **justice** meant listening first. You listened to the first idea. Then you listened to the other idea. You even listened to people who weren't there but would be affected. You read any notes or rules. You asked lots of questions. Only then did you weigh everything.

Sometimes, the answer became clear. Other times, it was still a bit fuzzy. That was okay. The important thing was the weighing itself. It was about being honest. It was about seeing what the facts really showed. Verdis made sure everyone understood this. He showed them that **justice** was all about the careful weighing. It was not about just making a fast judgment.

Verdis often spoke to the Youth Council. He spoke in a calm, clear voice. "The patient listener," he would say. "Weigh sides; don't pre-decide."

He explained what he meant. "When a problem comes up in the Youth Council, don't pick a side right away. Don't just listen to the person who shouts the loudest. Or the first person to speak." Verdis paused. He looked around the room. "Your first job is to LISTEN. Listen to everyone. Listen to all the ideas."

"Think about who might be affected," he continued. "Even if they aren't here right now. Read any notes or rules about the problem. Then, you weigh everything. What do the facts really show? What are the good parts of each idea? What are the bad parts?"

He tapped his wooden scale gently. "Sometimes, the weighing shows a clear answer. Sometimes, it doesn't. Sometimes, smart people can still disagree. That's okay. Being honest about that is part of **justice** too."

Verdis had a special way of teaching these steps. He called them his "listening steps."

1. **Listen First:** Hear all sides. Don't just listen to the loudest voice. Think about people who aren't even in the room.
2. **Read Carefully:** What does the idea really say? What will it actually do?
3. **Find Everyone Affected:** Who will this help? Who might it hurt?
4. **Weigh the Facts:** What do you know for sure? Where are the facts a bit shaky?
5. **Make a Try-Out Decision:** Your decision isn't set in stone. You can change it later if you learn new things.
6. **Be Honest:** If things are still unclear, say so. It's okay for good people to disagree.
7. **Don't Decide Early:** Don't walk in with your mind already made up. That's not fair. That's just looking for what you already believe.
8. **No Loudest Voice Wins:** The person who shouts most isn't always right.

9. **No Picking Teams:** Don't just side with your friends. Look at the ideas themselves.

10. **Listen Before You Leap:** Don't make a quick decision without hearing everything. That's fast, but not fair.

Verdis grew up in a quiet place. It was called the Slow River Valley. The river there moved like thick syrup. Everything in the valley moved slowly. The trees grew tall, but took their time. The clouds drifted lazily overhead.

Verdis's family were known as the Long-Weighers. They were bears who knew how to wait. They listened with great care. They paid close attention to every little thing. Generations of Long-Weighers had taught this lesson: "The weight is in the patience. The decision rests on the weight." Verdis learned this lesson well. He carried it in his heart.

One day, when Verdis was twelve, he walked to the Youth Council. A wise old bear named Liberty was there. Liberty was a mentor. She looked at Verdis with kind eyes. "What is **justice**?" she asked him.

Verdis thought for a moment. He remembered his family's words. He looked at his small wooden scale. "It's being a patient listener," he said. "It's about weighing sides. You don't pre-decide. It's the craft of weighing."

Liberty smiled. "You are appointed," she told him. And that was how Verdis became the Youth Council's official Long-Weigher.

Verdis had a small workshop. It was cozy and smelled faintly of old wood. His wooden scale sat on a table. His spectacles rested beside it. His listening cards were neatly stacked.

One afternoon, a young squirrel named Pip came to visit. Pip was new to the Youth Council. "Verdis," Pip chirped, "how do you *do* this weighing thing?"

Verdis smiled. "Watch," he said. He picked up his scale. "Let's imagine a problem for the Youth Council."

"Okay!" Pip said, bouncing a little.

"Some kids want to build a new skate park," Verdis began. He placed a small, smooth stone on the left side of his scale. "That's one idea."

"Cool!" Pip exclaimed.

"Other kids say the town needs to fix all the bumpy potholes first," Verdis continued. He placed another stone, just as smooth, on the right side. "That's the other idea."

Verdis put on his spectacles. He picked up a pretend document. "First, I read the proposal for the skate park. What does it say? Where will it go? How much will it cost?" He pretended to read carefully.

"Then, I read about the potholes. How bad are they? Where are they? How many kids trip on them?" He looked at Pip. "Who benefits from a skate park? Who benefits from fixed potholes?"

Pip thought hard. "Skateboarders get a park! But everyone uses the roads, so fixed potholes help more people."

"Good thinking, Pip," Verdis nodded. He pulled out a listening card with a question mark. "Now, I ask questions. Does the town have enough money for both? What if we only have money for one?"

He paused. He looked at the scale. The two stones sat there, perfectly balanced. "What do the facts tell us?" Verdis asked. "Maybe the town *does* have enough money for both. Or maybe the potholes are so dangerous, they need to be fixed right away."

"Sometimes," Verdis said softly, "the weighing shows a clear answer. One side is much stronger. But sometimes, like these two stones, they seem equally important." He tapped the scale. "It's okay if there's no easy answer. Being honest about that is part of **justice**."

"I am Verdis," he told Pip. "I help people learn about **justice**. It's all about being a patient listener." He picked up his scale again. "The way to do it is simple: listen first. Weigh everything. Make a decision you can change later. And always be honest about what you don't know."

Verdis put his scale down. "Don't pre-dec

# About Spark & Anvil

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## Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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