The Secret River

INTRODUCTION

EXTRA CREDIT

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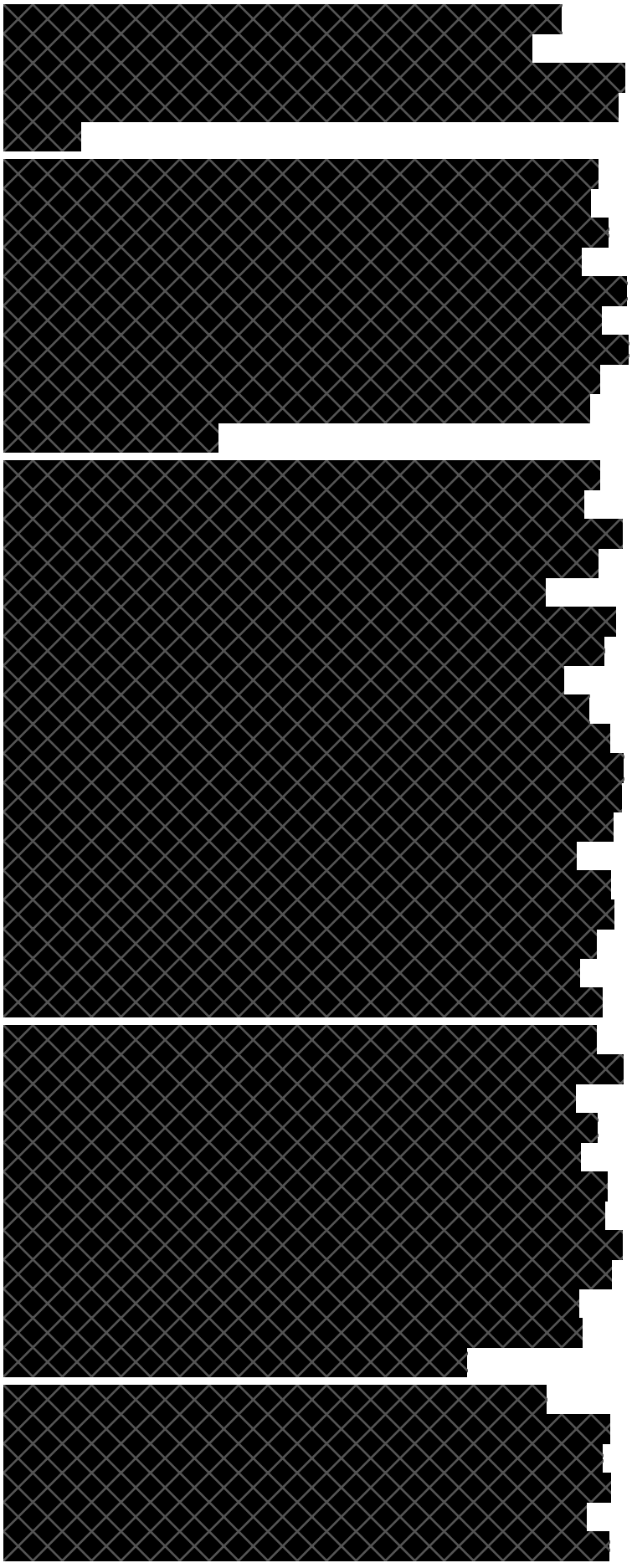
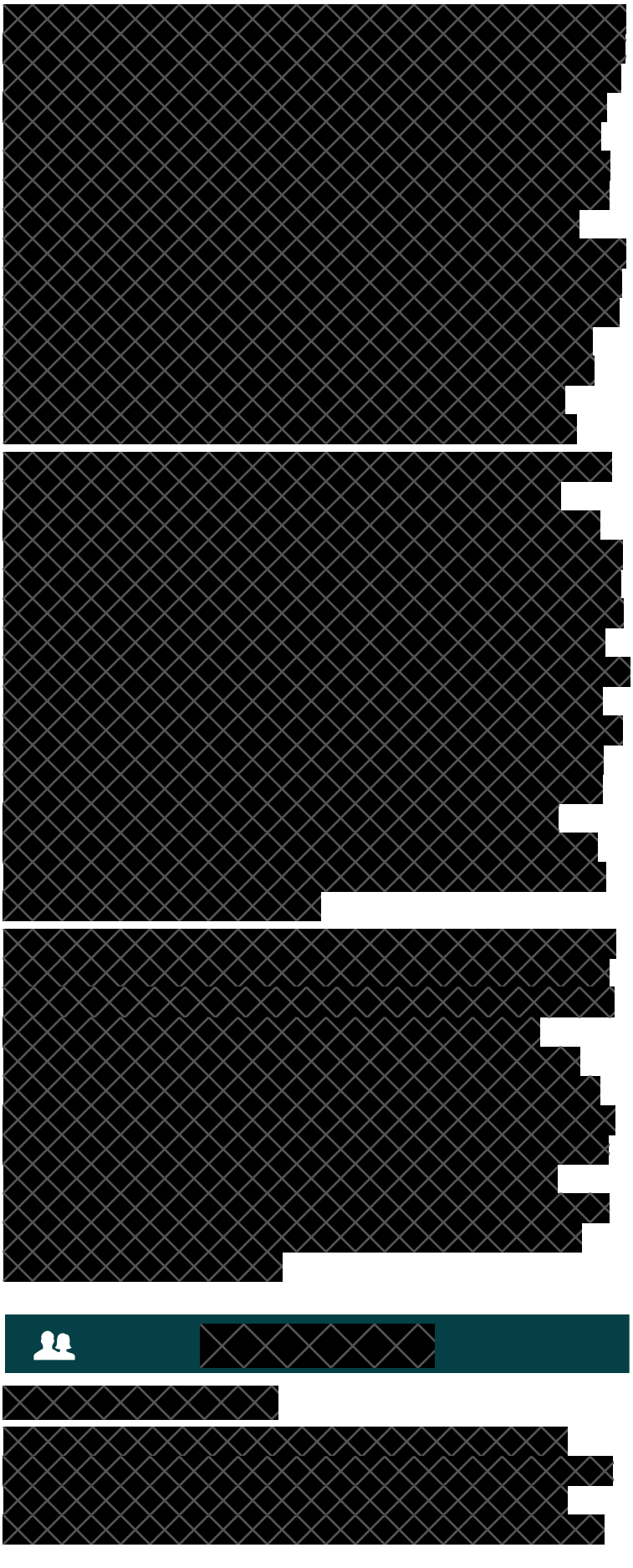
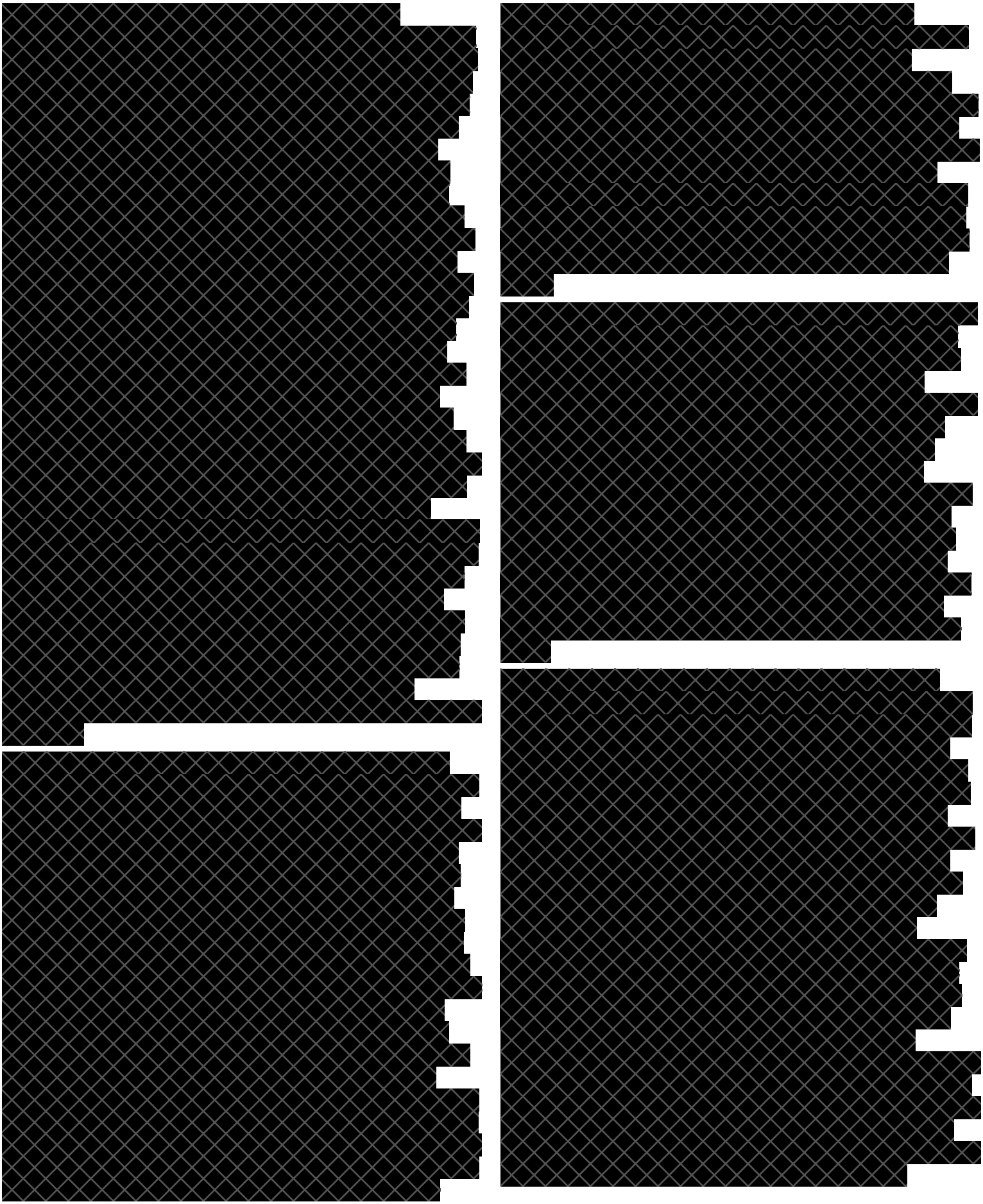
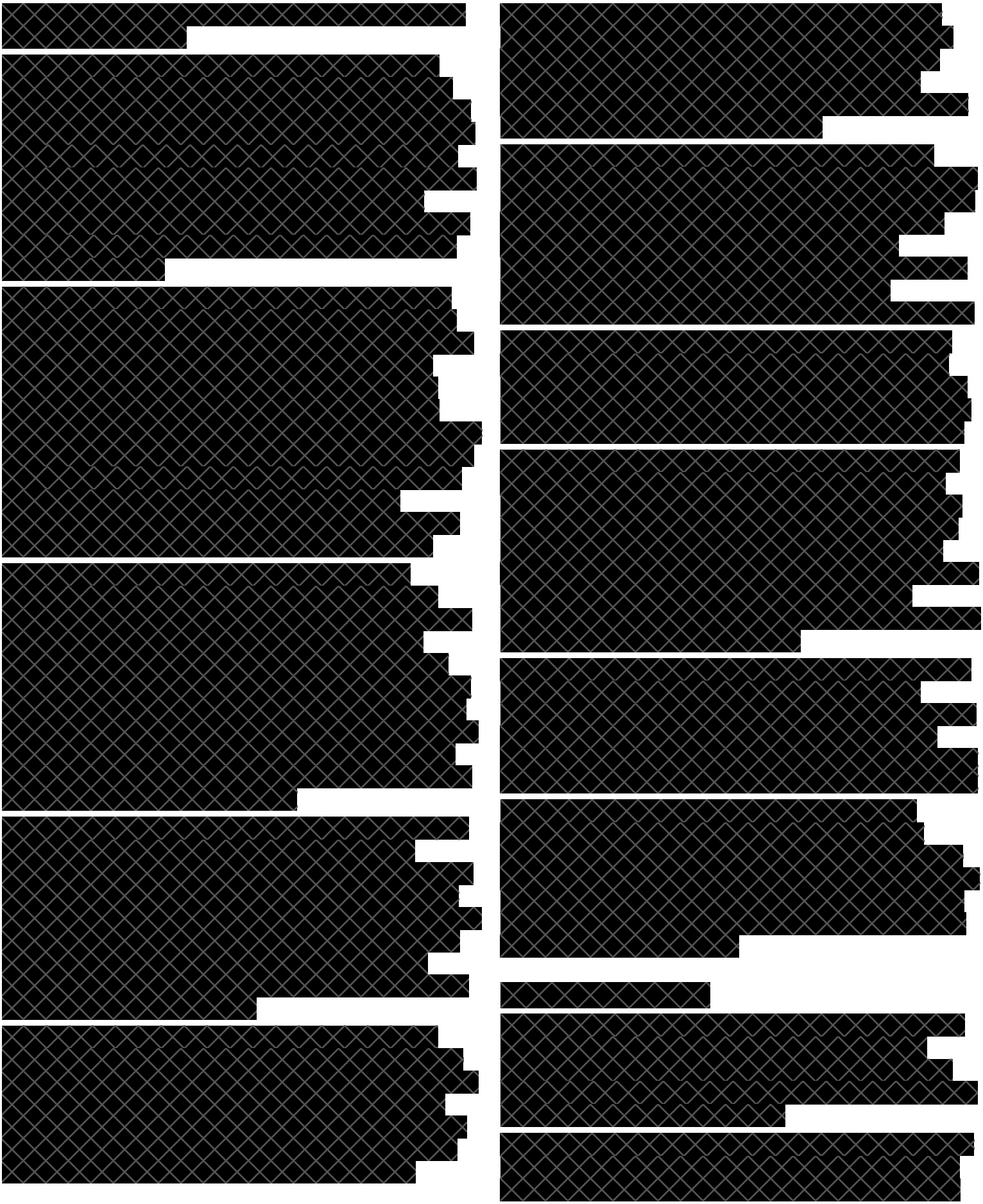
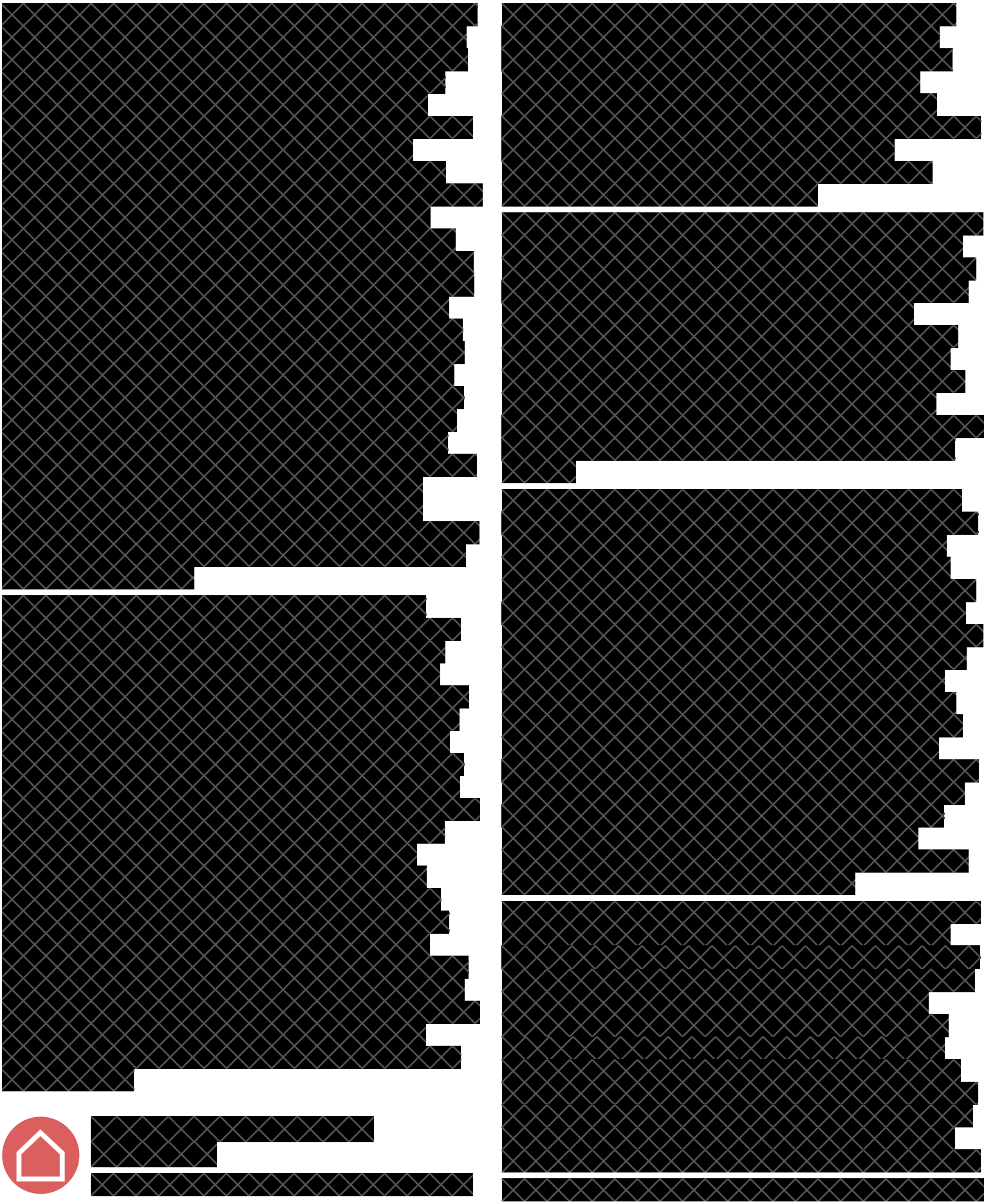
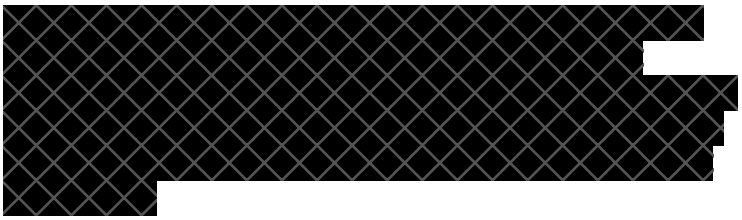


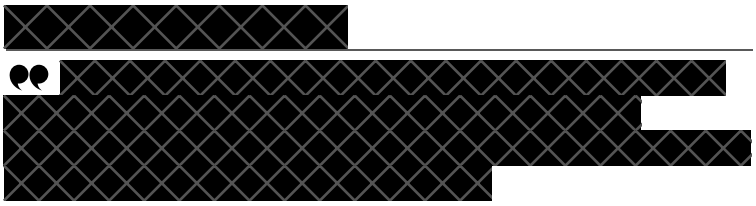


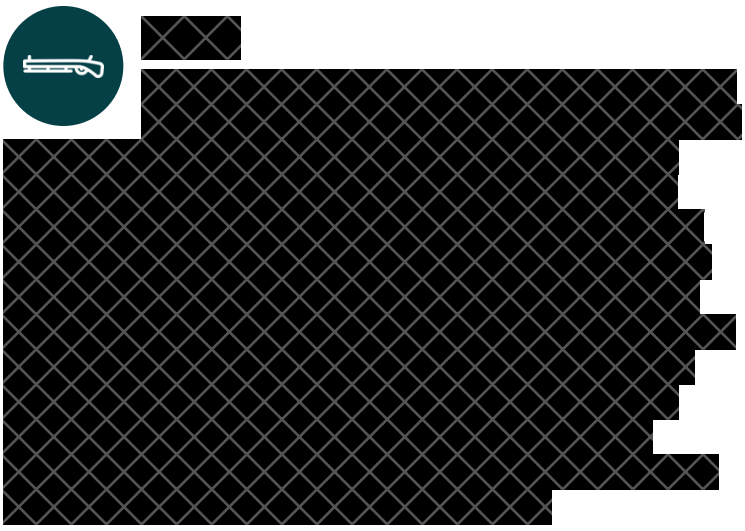


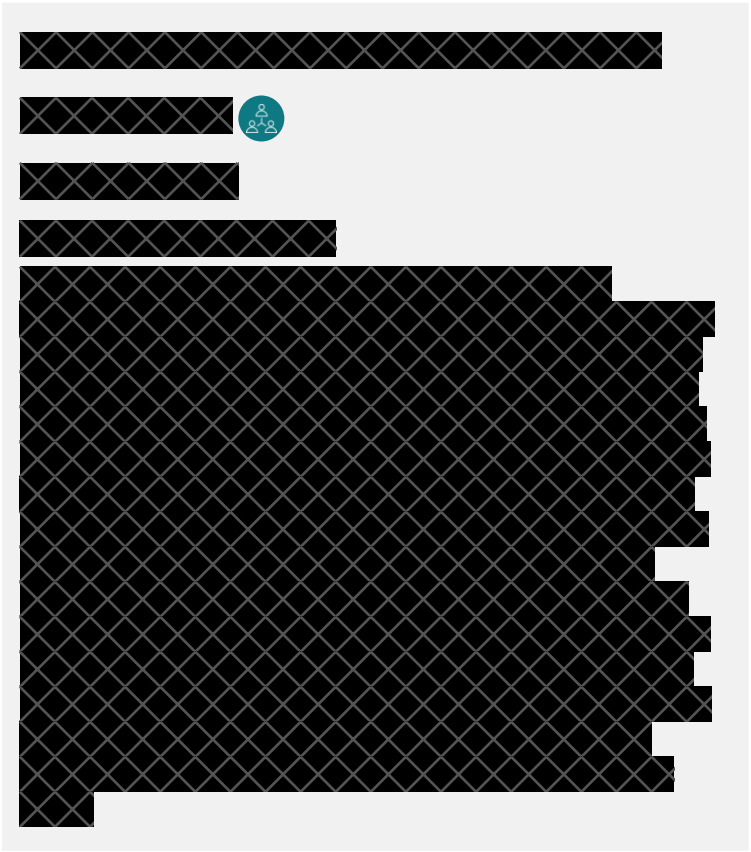


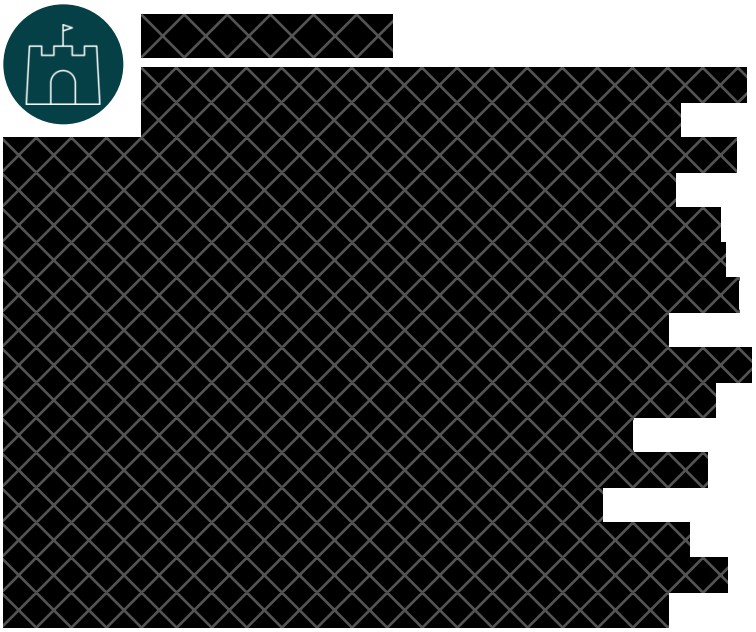


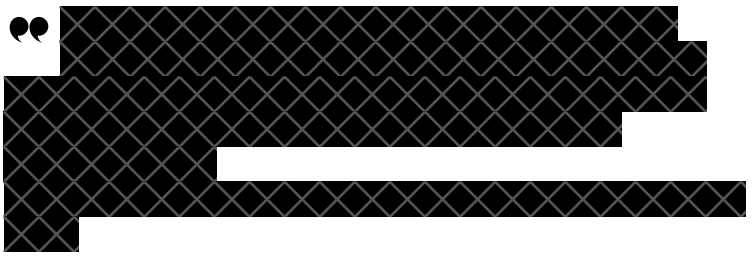


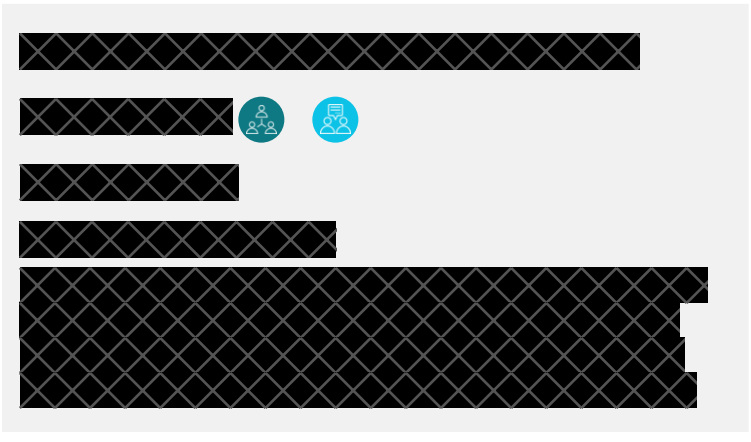


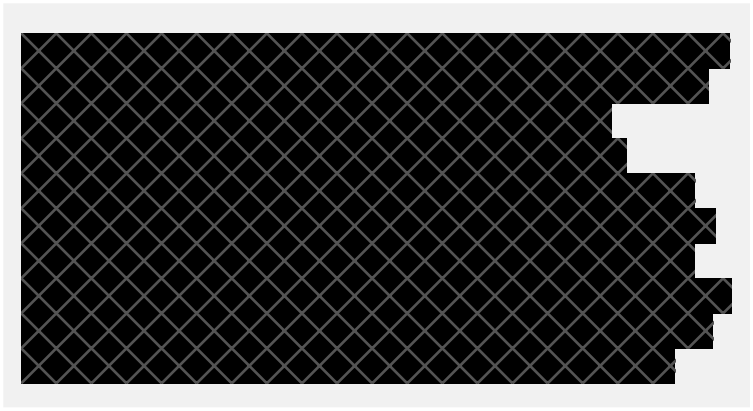


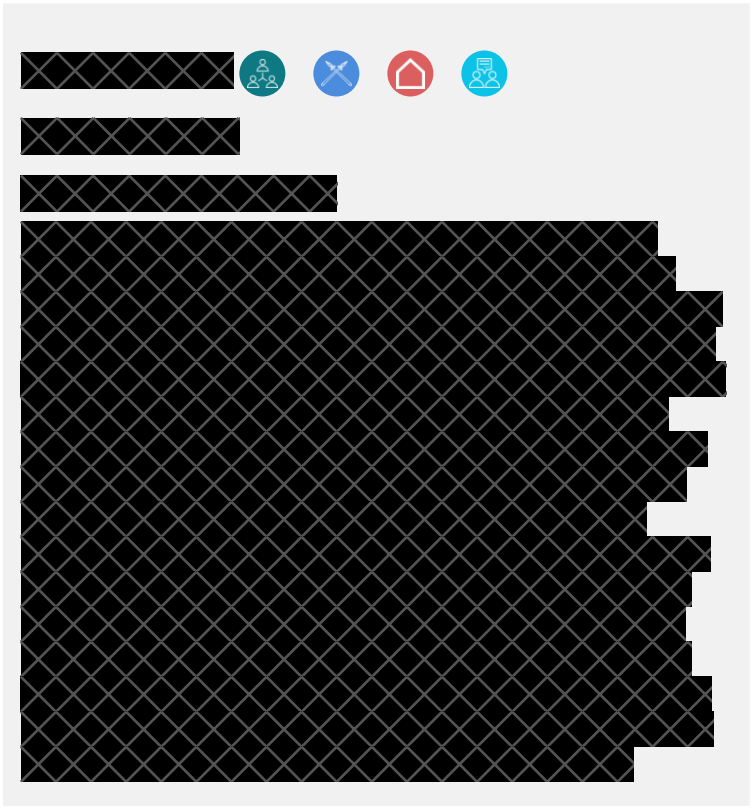


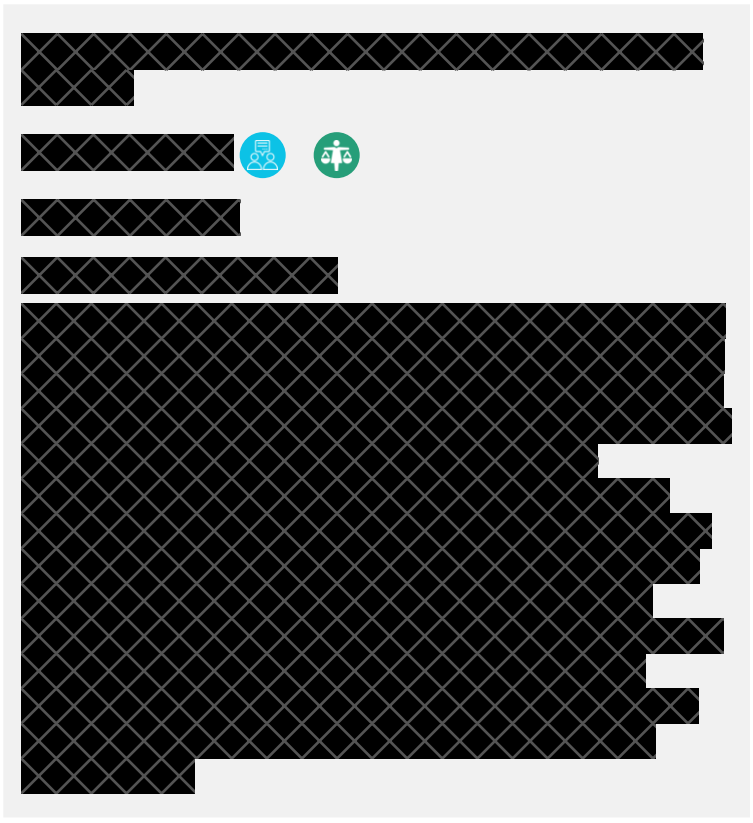


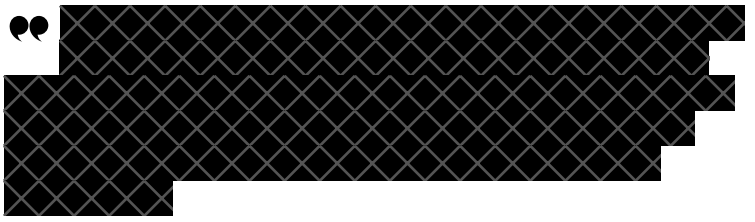


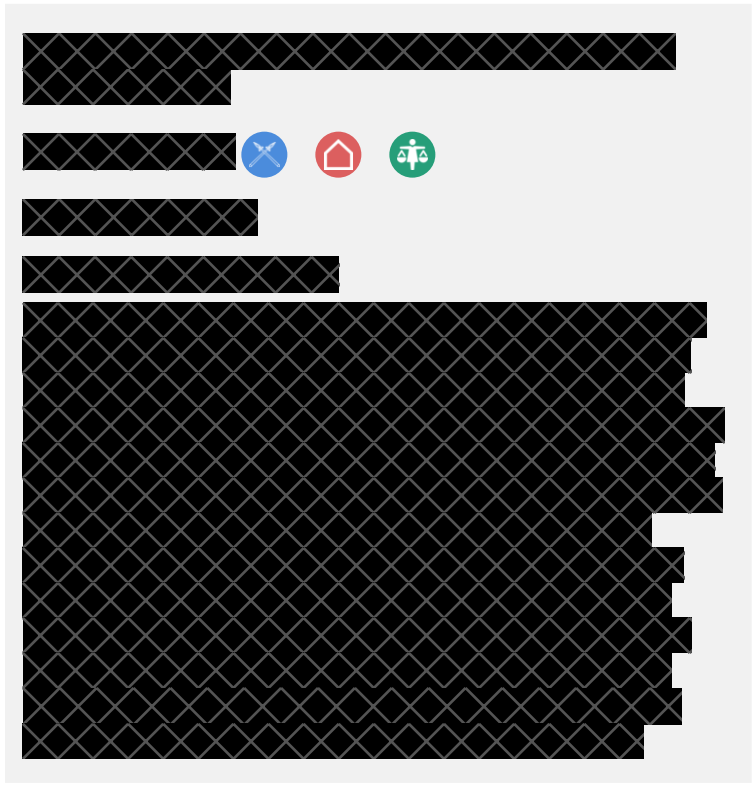


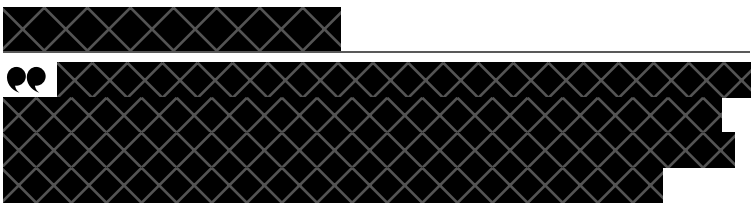


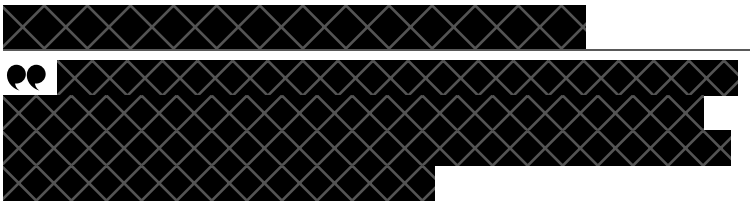


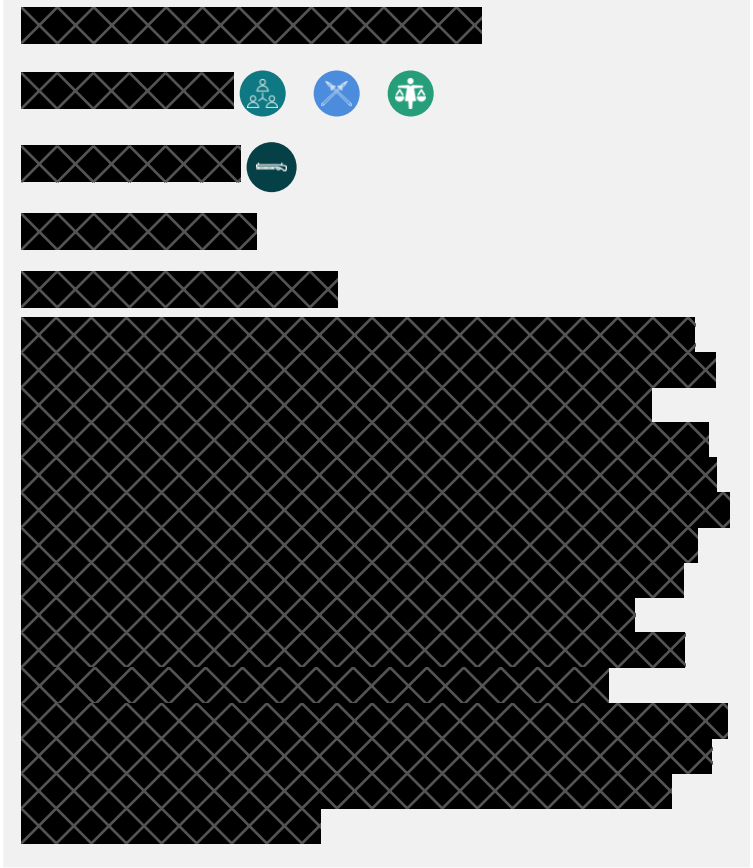


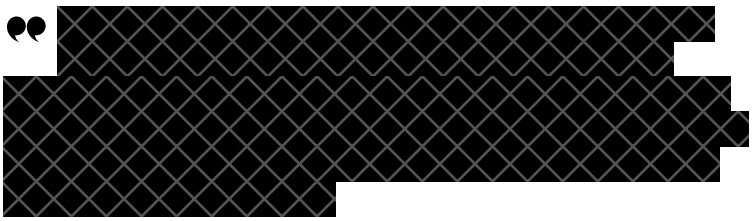


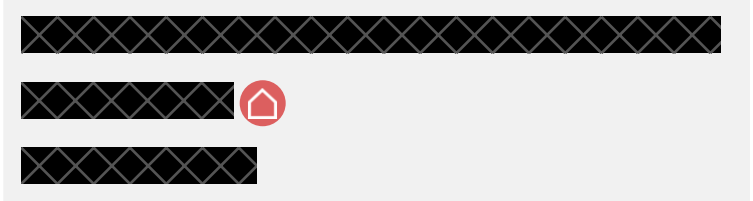


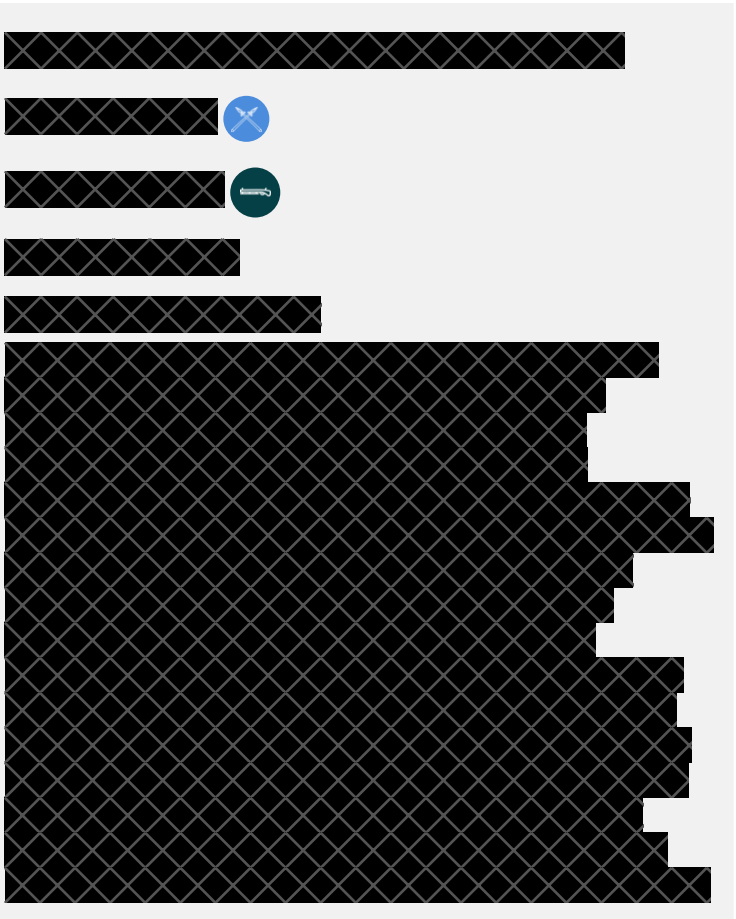


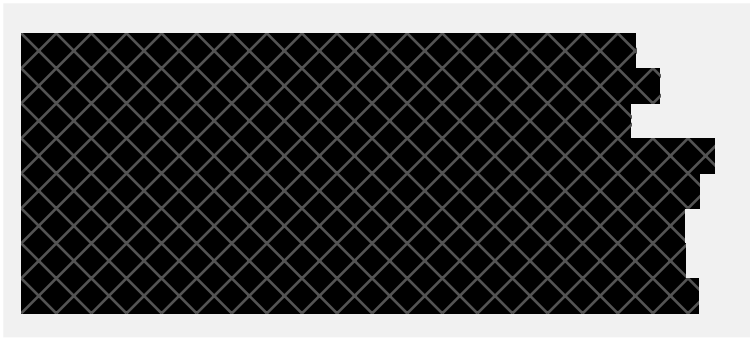


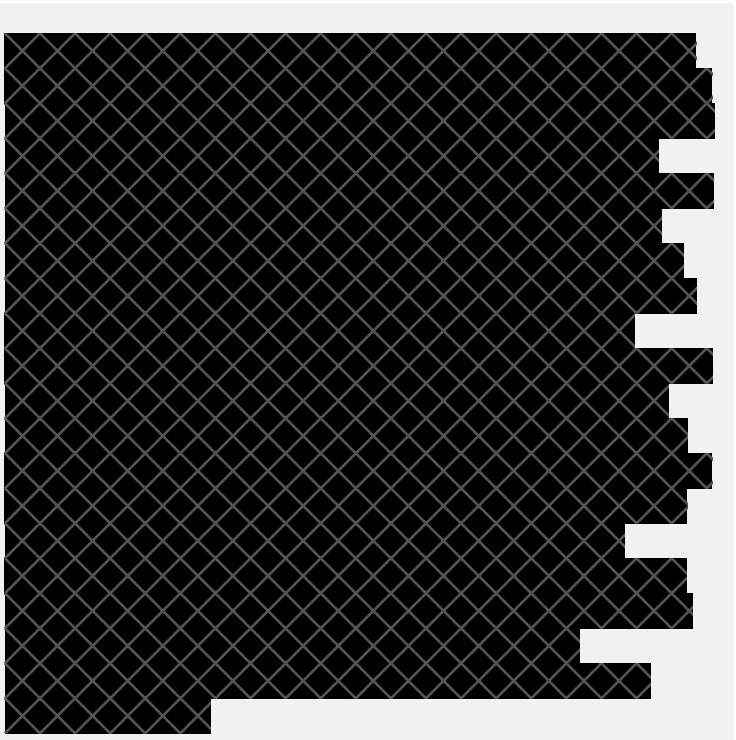


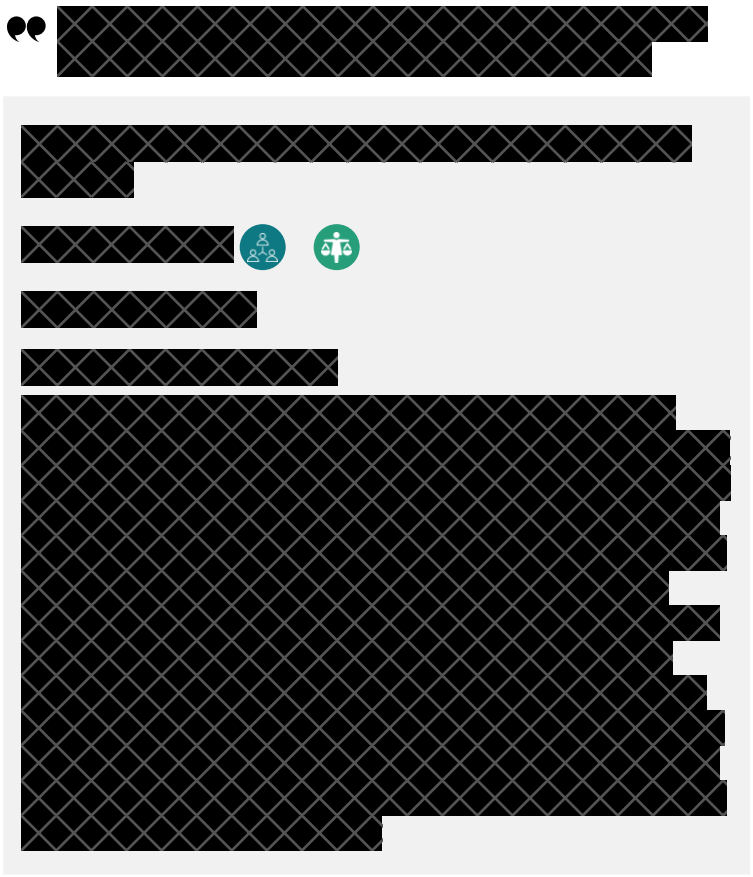


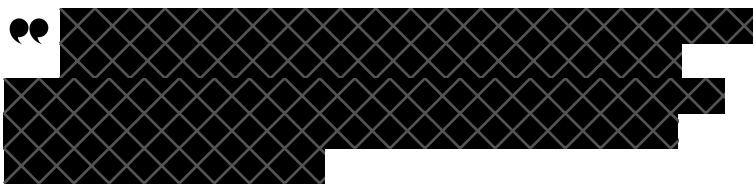


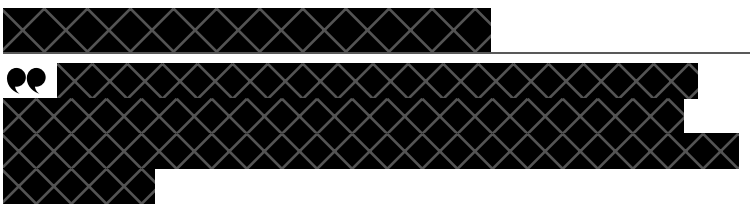


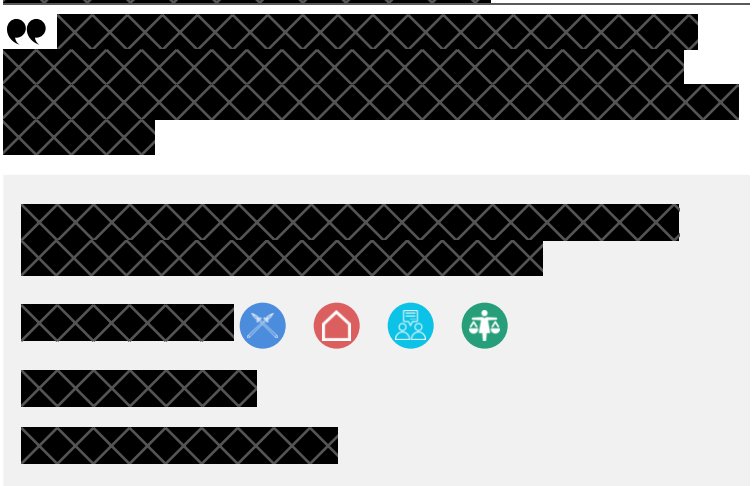


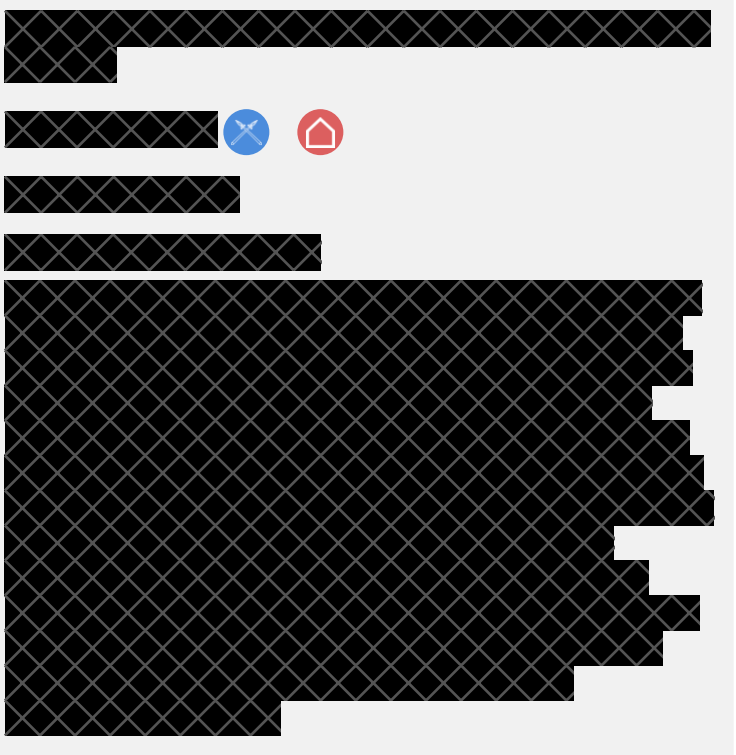


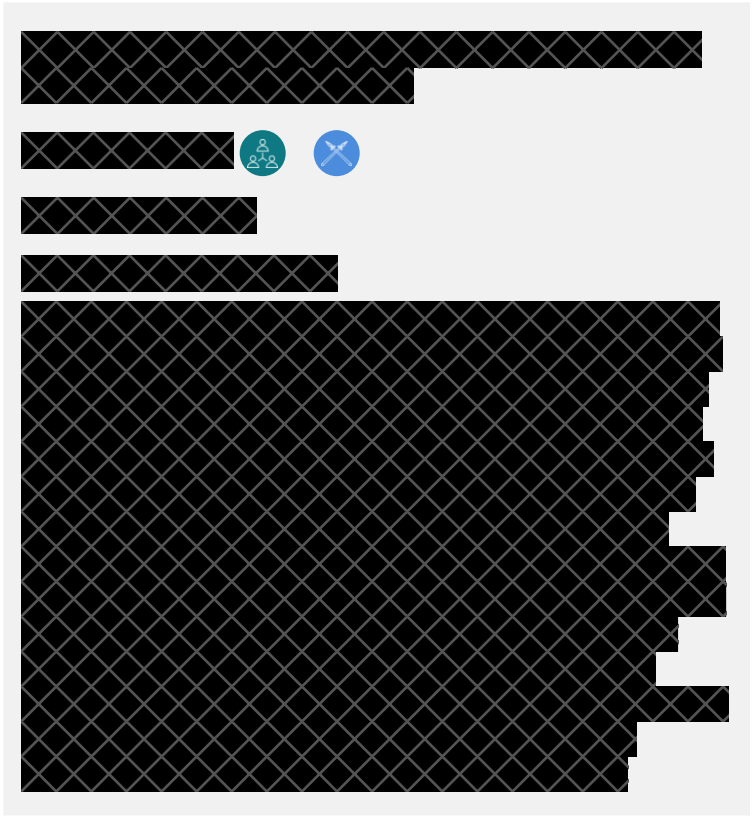


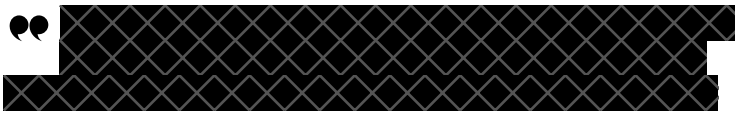


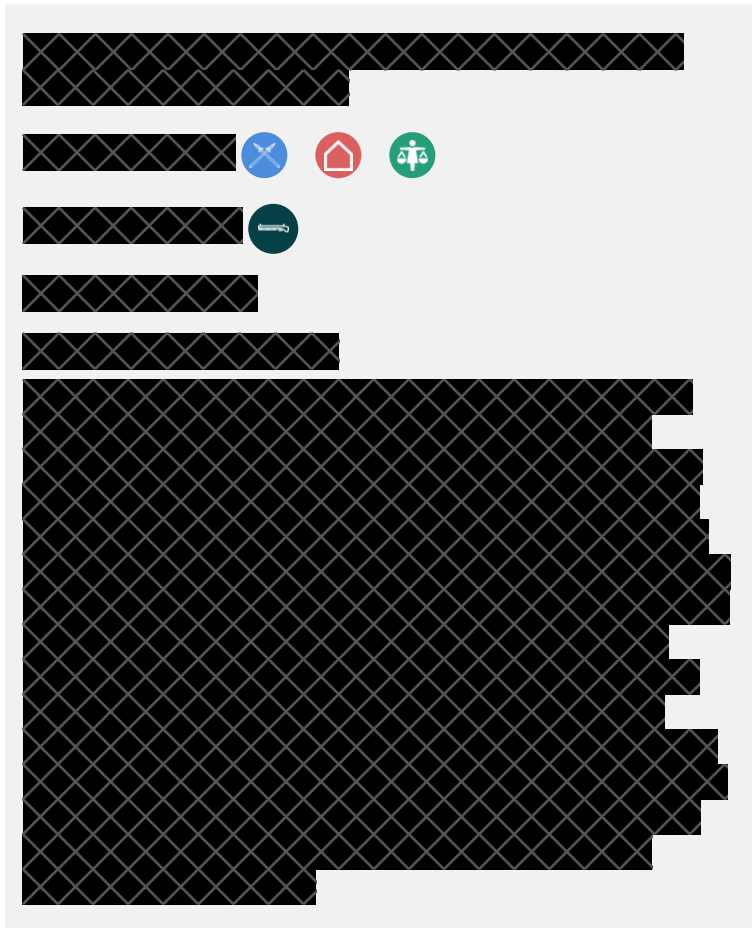


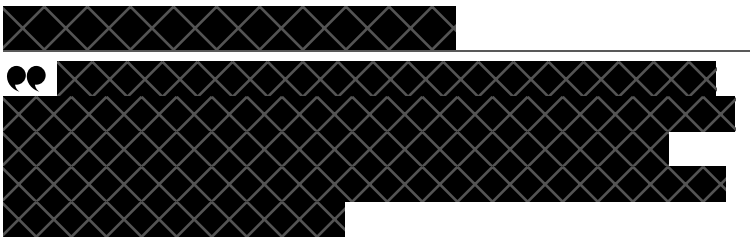


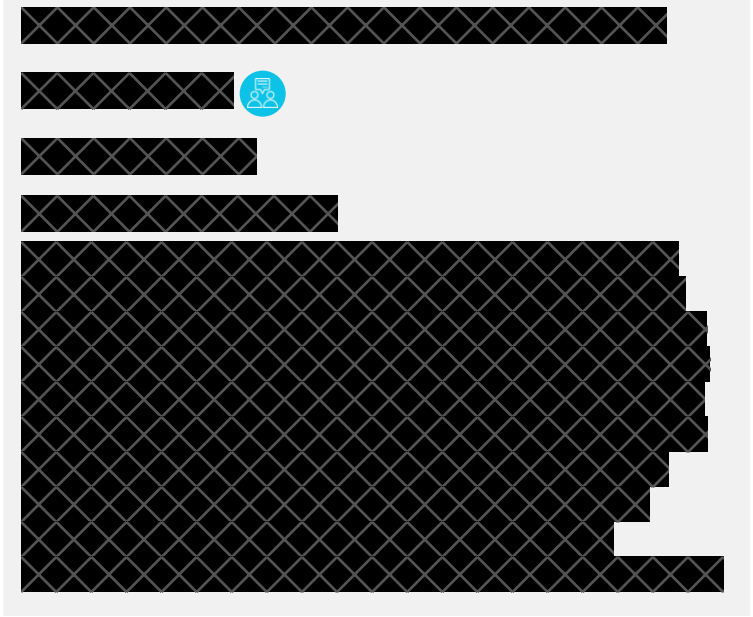


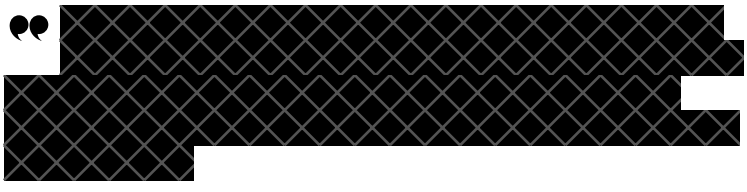


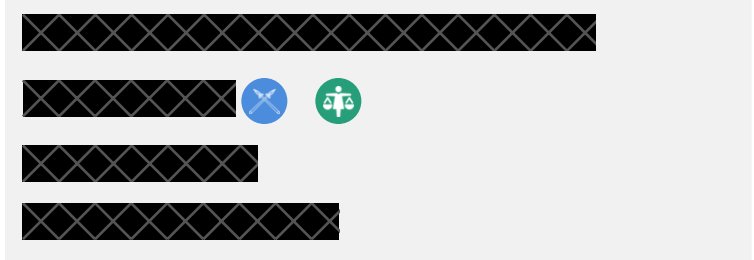


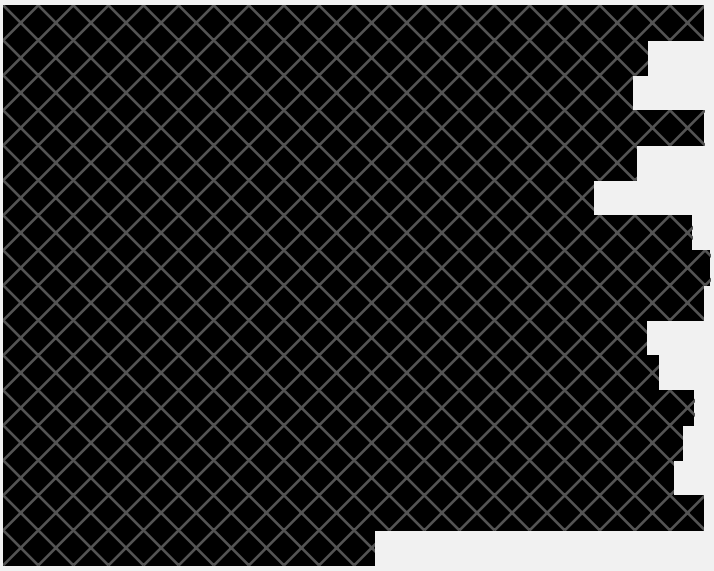


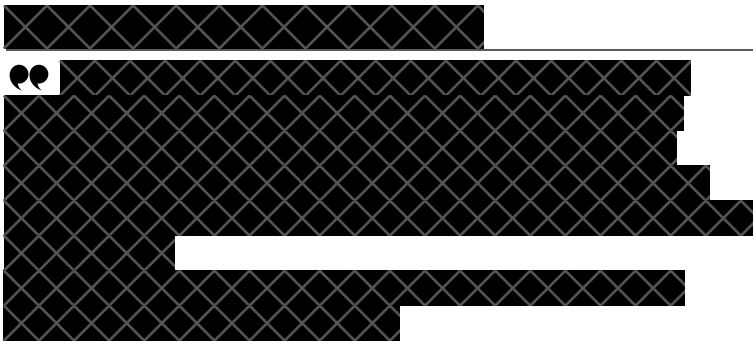


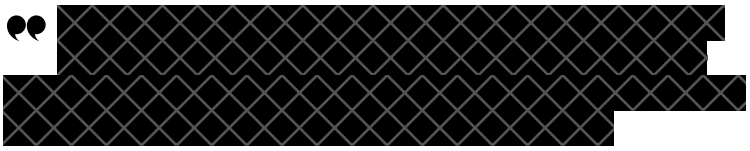


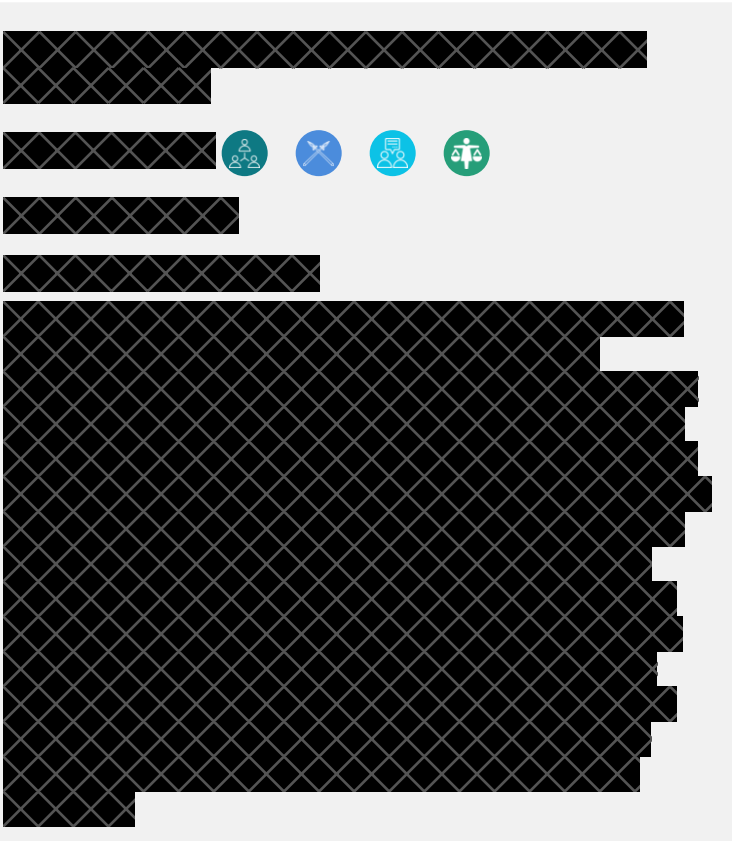


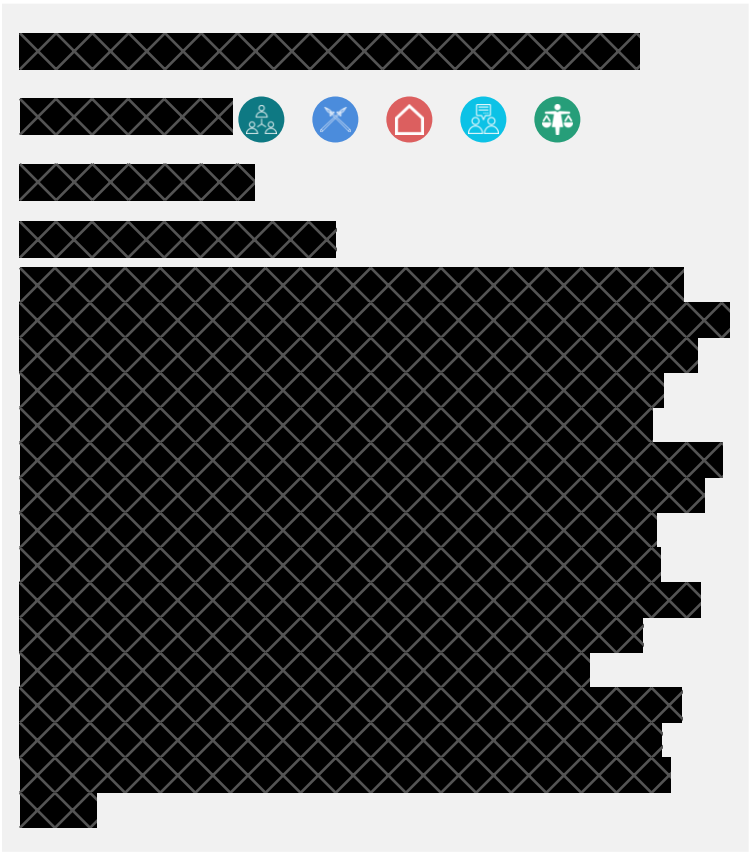


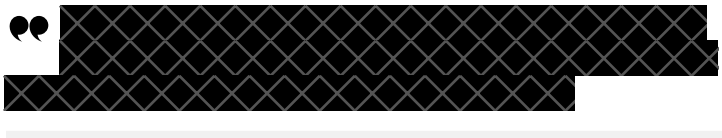


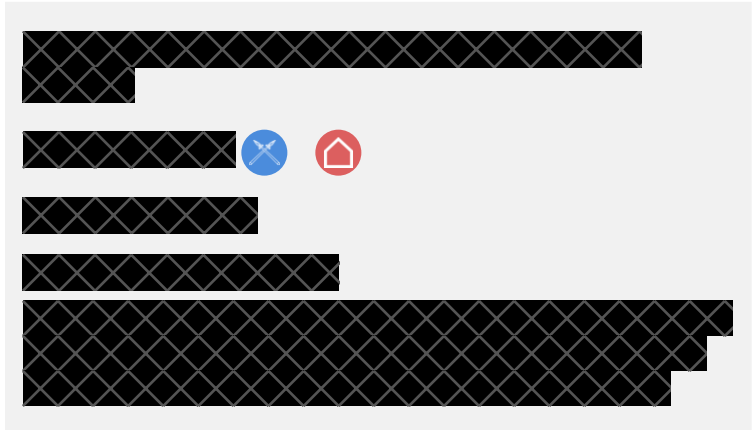


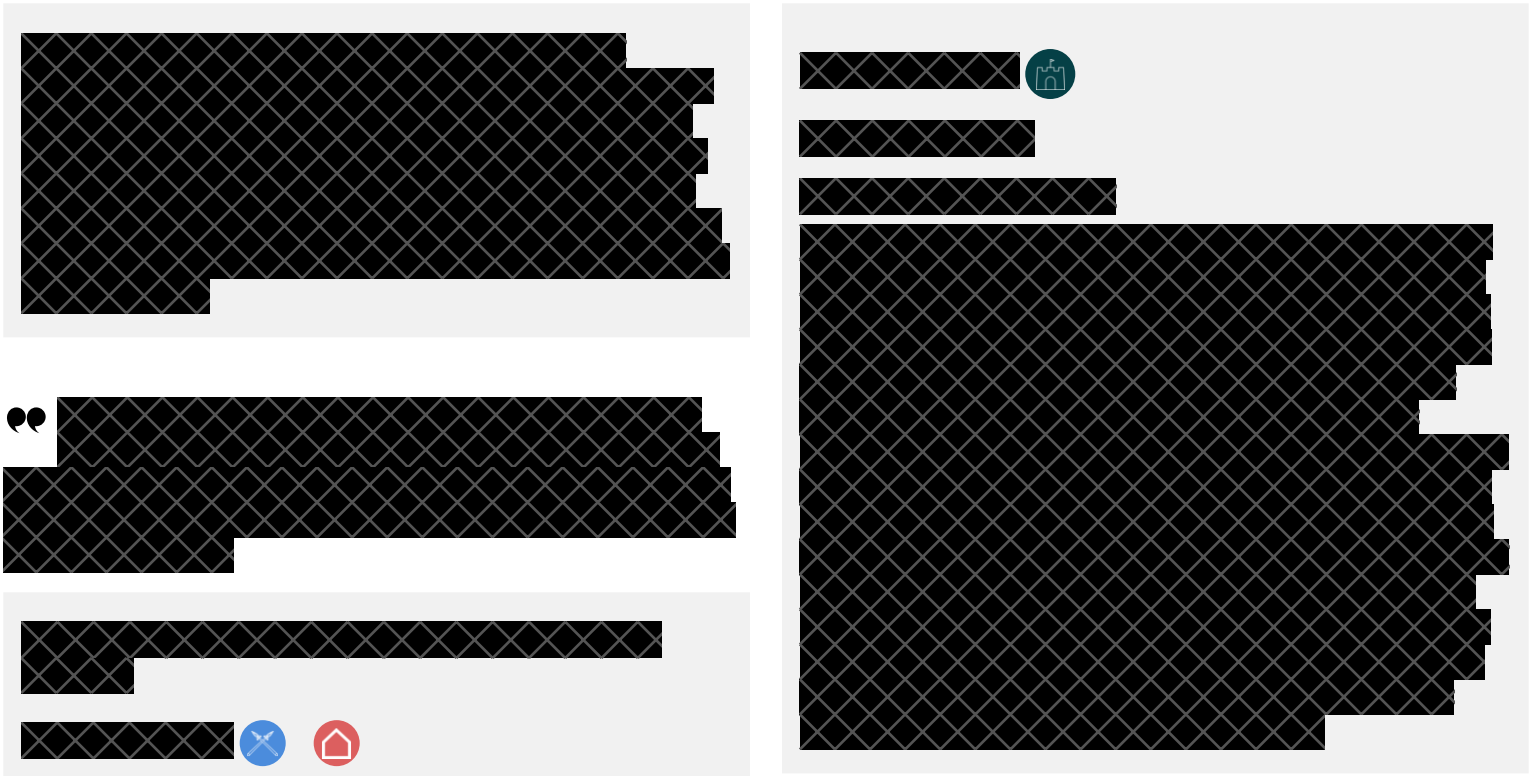












SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

STRANGERS

The *Alexander*, the ship that brought William Thornhill, his wife, Sal, and his two children to New South Wales, had been at sea for nearly a year. Now, Thornhill, Sal, and the children lie in a hut made of bark, sticks, and mud. Sal and the children are asleep, but Thornhill can't bring himself to sleep. He gets up and is aware that, although there are no guards, he's in a prison surrounded by thousands of miles of water. He feels small in this vast land and doesn't recognize any of the stars.

The novel begins by making it clear that Thornhill feels unmoored and displaced. Thornhill sees New South Wales as a prison rather than a land of opportunity, and certainly not as a home for him and his family. The description of the hut shows that Thornhill and Sal aren't of a particularly high class, and so shows that they're living here in relative poverty.

During the months Thornhill spent on the *Alexander*, he tried to listen for Sal's voice from the women's quarters and spent his time mentally paddling along the Thames River. Now that he's in New South Wales, he knows he'll never see that river again. Thornhill knows that he'll die here and feels as though he died in London. He thinks that being here is worse than death.

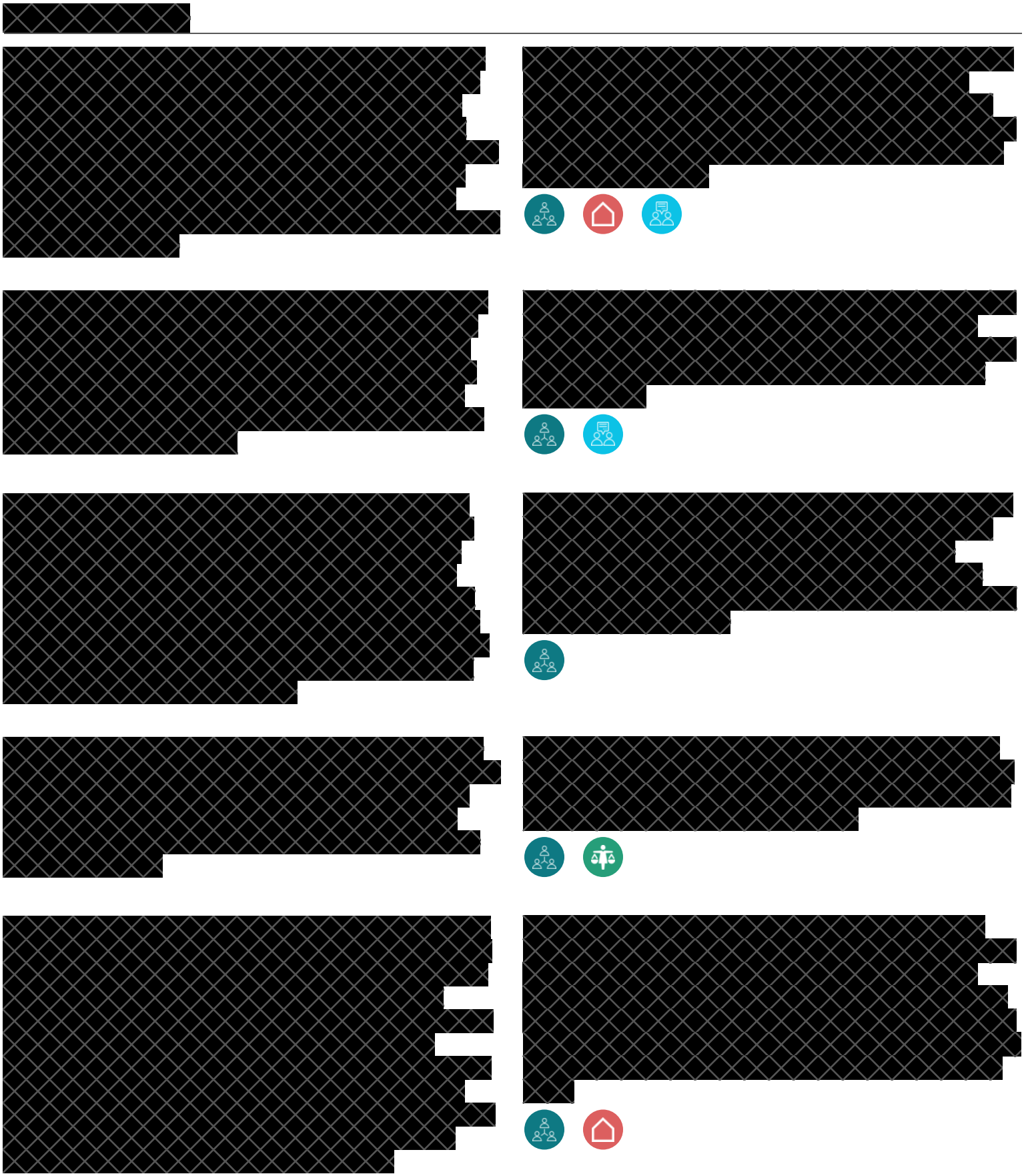
Thornhill's mental paddling along the Thames shows that London is his true home, though Sal is also an important element of how he thinks about home. This shows that Thornhill's sense of home depends, at least in part, on the people he loves.

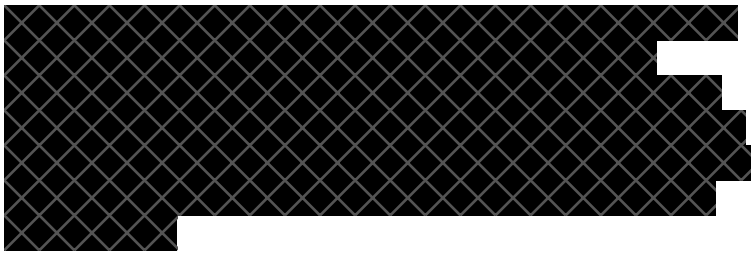
Thornhill sees darkness moving in front of him and realizes that a black man has appeared before him. The man is naked and scarred, and his spear seems to be a part of his body. Thornhill feels naked and vulnerable and fears for his children's lives. He shouts angrily at the man to leave and steps forward. As he raises his hand, he notices that the stone at the tip of the spear is jagged. The black man begins to speak, but Thornhill can't understand what he says. Suddenly, Thornhill understands the man is saying, "be off!"

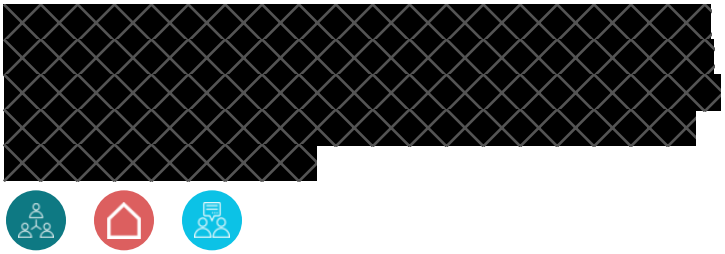
The encounter with this man makes it abundantly clear that this place is not, and perhaps never will be, Thornhill's home: it's this man's home, and he's learned enough English to tell the invaders as much. Here, Thornhill retaliates only because he's scared, not because he thinks he has any claim to the land. This shows that fear is often one of the primary motivators for the violence involved in the conflict between the English and the Aborigines.

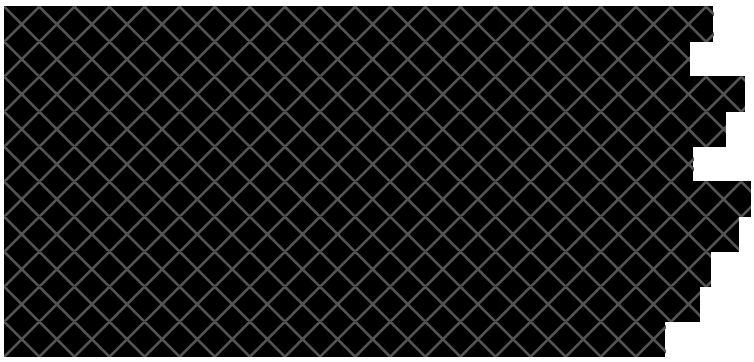
Thornhill finds himself speechless. He thinks that he already died once and can die again, but looks back towards Sal and the children. When he turns back to face the black man, the man is gone. Thornhill looks at the forest and thinks that it could hide a hundred black men and their spears. He stumbles back into the hut, even though he knows it offers no safety. He lies down next to Sal and anticipates the stabbing pain of one of the spears in his belly.

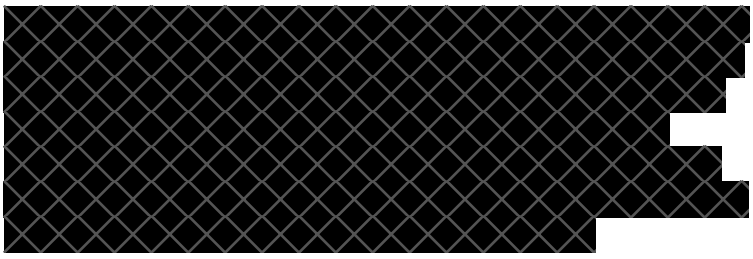
Now that Thornhill has met the natives, the landscape is even less inviting. Thornhill senses even now that the Aborigines and the land are intrinsically parts of each other: the landscape is threatening because of the humans that hide within it, and the humans are scary because of their close relationship to the mysterious land.

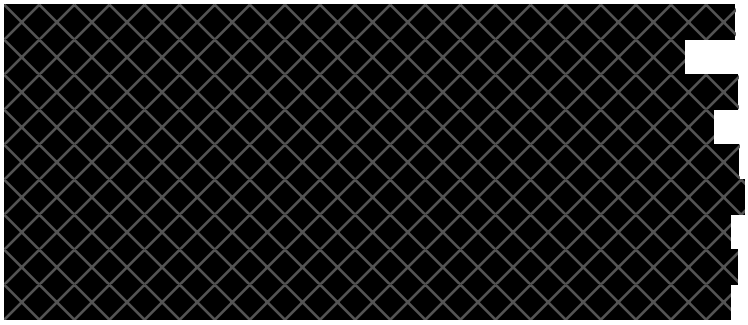


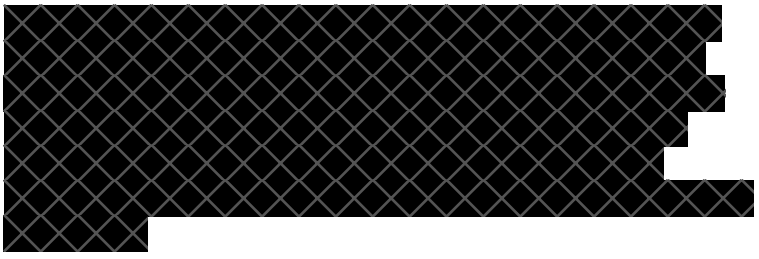


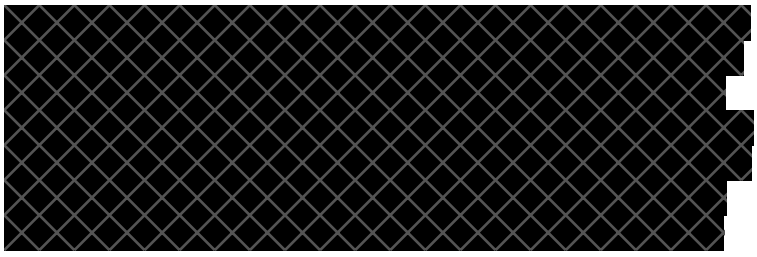




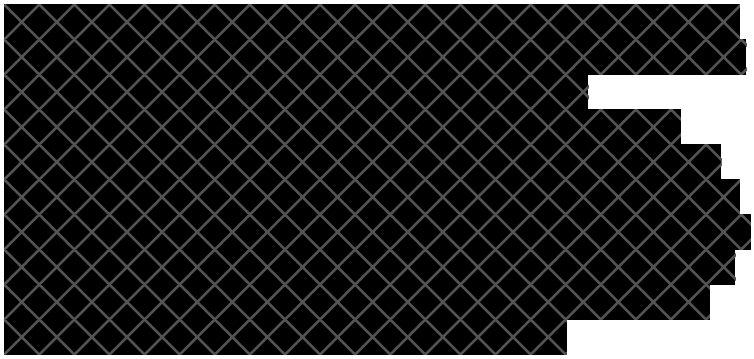








The apprentice system offers William an official channel through which he'll have the opportunity to move up in the world. It gives William hope to succeed in the system that has, until now, kept him and his family down, and encourages him to believe that not all people of a higher class than him are bad, as evidenced by Mr. Middleton's kindnesses.



It's worth noting that for a boy such as William, his dreams here are lofty ones given his family's limited means and modest background. William's observations about the class system at play in the grand room begin his journey of truly situating himself within the greater class system. By figuring out where others stand in the hierarchy, he can place himself in that same hierarchy and, eventually, find a way to move up in the world.

Mr. Middleton introduces William and the robed men ask if William has his "river hands." Mr. Middleton explains that William already has blisters from rowing, and William offers his hands to the robed men. They laugh and grant him his apprentice's license.

Though working as a waterman promises to give William a way to move up in the world, the calluses he'll form are a physical marker of his occupation and of his class that will be with him for years to come.

For the first time, William is well-fed and warm. His blisters never heal and the blood from them stains his oar brown. Mr. Middleton teaches William how to read the tide, and he learns how to interact with the gentry and not get cheated. William develops a charming way of interacting with the gentry, but thinks of them as a different species. One day, standing in the water and steadying his boat as a couple climbs in, he hears the man telling his companion to not show her leg to "the boatman." William looks up at the gentleman, whose look tells William that, while the gentleman "owns" the woman, William owns nothing. William thinks that the gentleman doesn't look like he knows what to do with his beautiful companion, even if she is his property.

William struggles to think of the gentry he meets on the river as people. Their lives seem so vastly different from his own, he finds it hard to see the similarities. This will come up again when Thornhill is in New South Wales, but these experiences here suggest that it's part of William's nature to immediately think of different types of people as inhuman. The gentleman's cruel and condescending attitude towards William only heightens William's sense that the gentry must be an entirely different species.

William looks to the woman's leg, covered in silk stockings with green silk slippers on her feet. Although the woman thanks her husband, William thinks that she's purposefully showing him her leg, possibly to provoke her husband. The husband climbs in and pulls his wife's skirt down over her leg. When William climbs into the boat, the woman stretches her leg out, pulls her skirt to her knee, and laments that her slipper is ruined. She gives William a quick look, and William realizes that the gentry are indeed people, with human desires.

For William, the thought of sex brings this gentlewoman onto his level of understanding: she desires sex and to play with the men around her, just like other women William (presumably) knows. However, the couple's way of interacting with each other suggests that, for the husband, his wife is truly his property, something to be guarded. She's less than a full human being in his eyes.

William spends his Sundays with Sal since he doesn't have to work. The first winter she decides to teach him to read and write, though he's not particularly interested. He can keep lists and do math in his head and sees no reason to write anything down, but humors Sal. The quill feels foreign in his hand and when he finally tries to write, ink splatters all over the paper. William thinks that he can do anything but this. Sal laughs, but soon stops. She draws a T for Thornhill on the paper in dots, and William carefully traces it. He insists on being done for the day. By the end of winter, he becomes the first in his family able to write his name.

Although Thornhill certainly wants to move up in the world, he's less interested in learning to read and write, which are markers of being of a higher class. This suggests that at this point, truly climbing the social ladder is an abstract idea for William and he doesn't exactly know how to do it. For now, he sees his ability to move through life without needing to write as being a marker of success, even as he comes in contact with rich people on a daily basis who demonstrate their status through writing.

As the years go by, William realizes that he's in love with Sal. He thinks about her while he's on the river and the thought warms him. They begin spending time together in the graveyard at Christ Church, where they read the writing on headstones. One day, he tells her that as soon as he's done with his apprenticeship, he'll marry her. She promises to wait for him.

William is building his life and his home in London: he'll marry Sal, and he has Mr. Middleton's example to look to for how to create a home. The headstones are, notably, those of richer individuals. William and Sal are learning about the lives of the upper-class as they read them.

William and Sal marry on the day William is freed from his apprenticeship. Mr. Middleton gifts William a boat as a wedding gift, and the couple takes a room near Mr. Middleton's house. At night, they tell each other stories. Sal tells William about **Cobham Hall**, a luxurious place where her mother worked before marrying. They talk about their future as well: the children they'll have and how successful William will be on the river. William (who now begins to go by Thornhill) can barely believe his good luck. He works primarily rowing coal and timber to shore and can employ Rob to help him.

The boat from Mr. Middleton is one of the first things that Thornhill truly owns. As such, it is proof that he's advancing up the social ladder and is realizing his dreams of owning things. Thornhill also shows that he's kind, generous, and wants to support his entire family by employing Rob. This allows him to share his wealth and good fortune with others and suggests that he might be more generous with his wealth than the gentry he ferries across the river.

Sal gives birth to a boy a year later. Though they christen him William, they call him Willie. Thornhill loves Willie, and loves watching Sal care for him. When Willie is two, winter arrives with a vengeance. In January, the Thames freezes and the Thornhills huddle together and hope the money they have saved is enough to get them through. Things begin to go downhill quickly: Lizzie comes down with the quinsy (a form of tonsillitis), and then Mrs. Middleton falls on the ice and struggles to recover. The surgeon is expensive, as are the delicacies that Mr. Middleton fetches for her with the hope of getting her to eat something.

The speed with which the Thornhills begin to slide back down the social ladder shows how fickle the entire system is. Wealth and fortune aren't things that can be counted on, even when Thornhill seemed so sure of his success only months ago. The fact that all this comes about because of an act of nature begins to suggest that nature itself will prove to be one of Thornhill's primary adversaries.

Sal and Thornhill visit often. One day they meet Mr. Middleton on his way to an apothecary across town. He refuses to be talked out of going. He returns to his wife hours later. Mrs. Middleton takes one sip of the mixture before refusing more, and Mr. Middleton finally allows Sal to help him out of his coat and boots. Mr. Middleton is very cold and wakes with a fever the next day. He dies a week later. When Sal tells her mother, Mrs. Middleton turns away, refuses to eat, and finally dies.

The intensity with which Mr. Middleton cares for Mrs. Middleton shows how devoted Mr. Middleton is to his wife and his family more generally. It also helps explain how, later in the novel, Sal will learn to define home for herself: not just in terms of where her literal home is, but in terms of the people she loves.

After the Middletons' deaths, Thornhill realizes that their prosperity had been precarious. Mr. Middleton had spent all his savings on the delicacies for his wife and the prescriptions from the doctor. When the rent collector calls, Thornhill finally understands that Mr. Middleton's house was leased, not owned, and he begins to think of it as cheerless and unsafe. He and Sal sell the furniture to pay rent, but the bailiffs seize Mr. Middleton's boats, including the one he'd given Thornhill as a wedding gift. Thornhill must now make a living as a journeyman, rowing boats for other men.

At this point, Thornhill understands that his idolization of Mr. Middleton's way of life was in some ways misguided. Thornhill places so much emphasis on owning that the revelation that Mr. Middleton's home was rented is enough to make a place that, by all other metrics, was a warm, cheerful home seem suddenly very unsafe. Although Thornhill thinks that it's the home that's unsafe, he's slowly learning that prosperity in general isn't something he can rely on.

Sal fights this turn of fate. When Mrs. Middleton dies, Sal purchases red velvet for her coffin. She doesn't cry until they bury Mr. Middleton, but after she cries, she seems more prepared to move forward. She takes it upon herself to find her family cheaper and cheaper rooms. Thornhill admires her tenacity, even as she begins to steal food. Because Sal has never experienced hunger before, stealing is fun for her. She acts as though it's a fun game, but Thornhill feels as though his life is going backwards.

Sal conceives of her poverty as something that she'll experience for a while and eventually leave behind. This illustrates her privilege, as she can't bring herself to believe that this will be her permanent state going forward. Thornhill, having experienced poverty before, knows that it likely will be: society makes it very difficult for the poor to get ahead without a great deal of help.

One day, Sal develops a plan to steal a chicken from their landlord. Thornhill successfully abducts the chicken and gets it up to their room, but before they can wring its neck, they hear footsteps on the stairs. Sal throws the chicken out the window, where it stalks across the roof of the outhouse, clucking. When their landlord bursts into the room, he accuses the Thornhills of stealing, but they swear they did nothing and the landlord leaves them alone.

The fact that Sal develops this plan illustrates just how dire of a situation the Thornhills are in. The girl who couldn't bear to see a chicken killed is now orchestrating thievery and butchering schemes in her own home. This shows that Sal is able to adjust and adapt to new circumstances.

The narrator explains that watermen in general were not honest people. They were all thieves, though some were certainly better than others. The narrator mentions Thomas Blackwood, a successful thief who owns a lighter (a type of boat) with a false bottom for storing stolen goods. Collarbone isn't so lucky: he's caught with Spanish brandy and sentenced to hang. Thornhill visits him the day before his hanging and imagines hanging himself. Collarbone asks Thornhill to bribe the executioner to buy him a quick death, and Thornhill agrees. The executioner, however, takes no notice of the bribe and Collarbone chokes and tosses on his rope the next morning. Rob vomits, and later Thornhill tells Sal that it was a clean, quick hanging. She sighs and turns back to her darning.

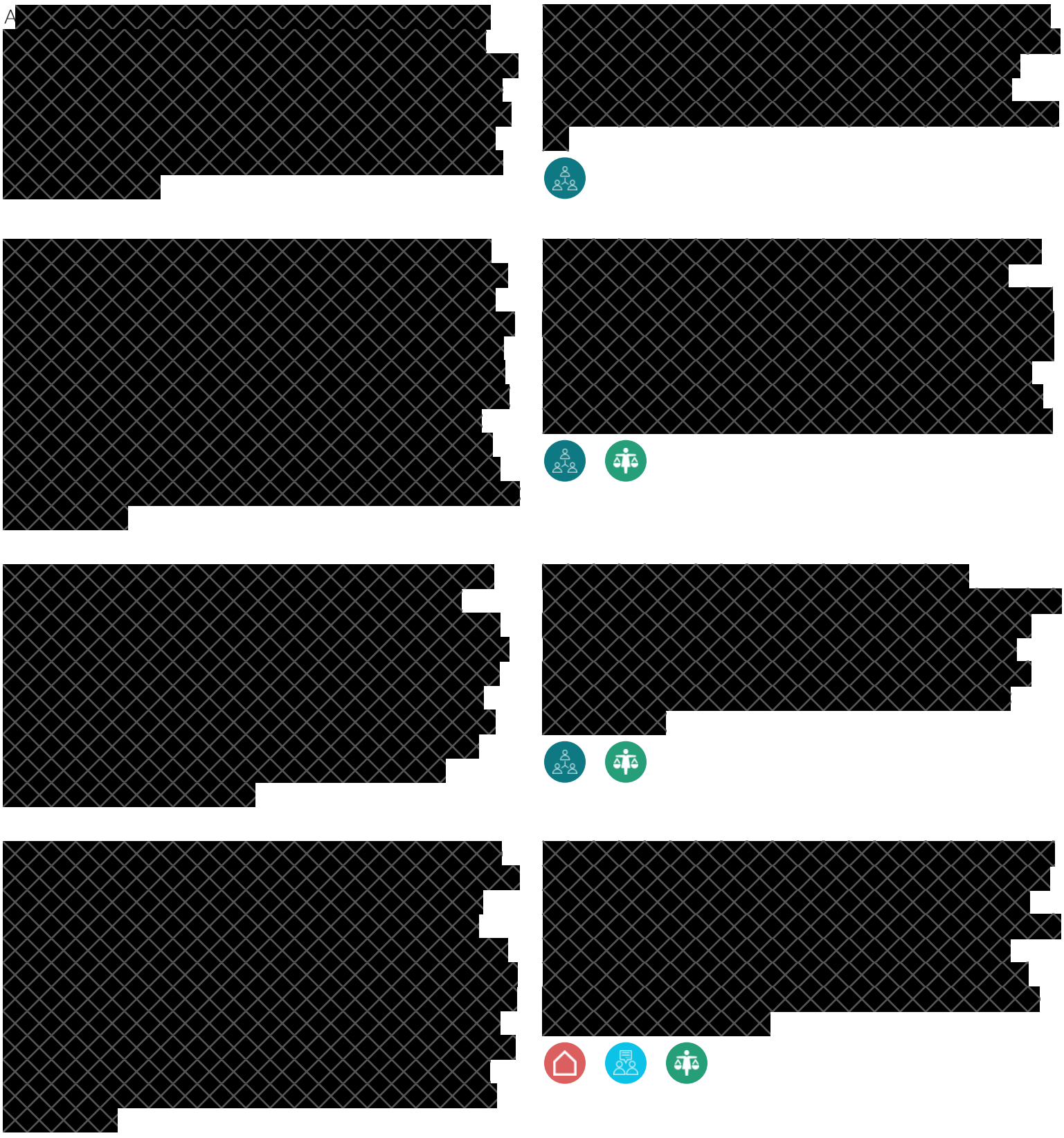
The system in which Thornhill and his peers find themselves is not set up to allow them to get ahead at all: they must steal to survive, but if they are caught, they are punished without mercy. The only comfort is the hope of a quick exit from this life, which Collarbone's horrific death shows isn't even something that can be bought. When Thornhill lies to Sal, he does so to protect her from these horrors. This begins to erode the trust and openness between the two in ways that Thornhill couldn't have predicted.

Thornhill is hired by Mr. Lucas, a successful man who's rumored to want to be Lord Mayor of London. He employs a man named Yates as a foreman and doesn't tolerate thieving on his boats: he made sure one man caught stealing from him hung to set an example for others. Thornhill is cautious at first and learns to bribe the marine police with French brandy. One night, after three years of working for Mr. Lucas, one of Thornhill's friends lets him know that a ship has just arrived carrying valuable Brazil wood.

Mr. Lucas's goals and ambitions show that men of the gentry class can move up the social hierarchy, and can do so by exploiting men of a lower class. This shows that there is the possibility of upward mobility for some people, but it's certainly not available to all.

Yates instructs Thornhill to transport the Brazil wood, along with other timber, to a wharf upriver. Thornhill is ready and thinks of Sal as he sleeps in his boat. She's pregnant again, and doesn't ask too many questions about where Thornhill's money comes from. All the same, he senses that she's beginning to turn away from him.

The silence between Thornhill and Sal, which began when he lied about Collarbone's hanging, is truly beginning to create distance between the two. Although Sal doesn't ask questions, the outcome here suggests that they'd be better off if they were honest with each other.



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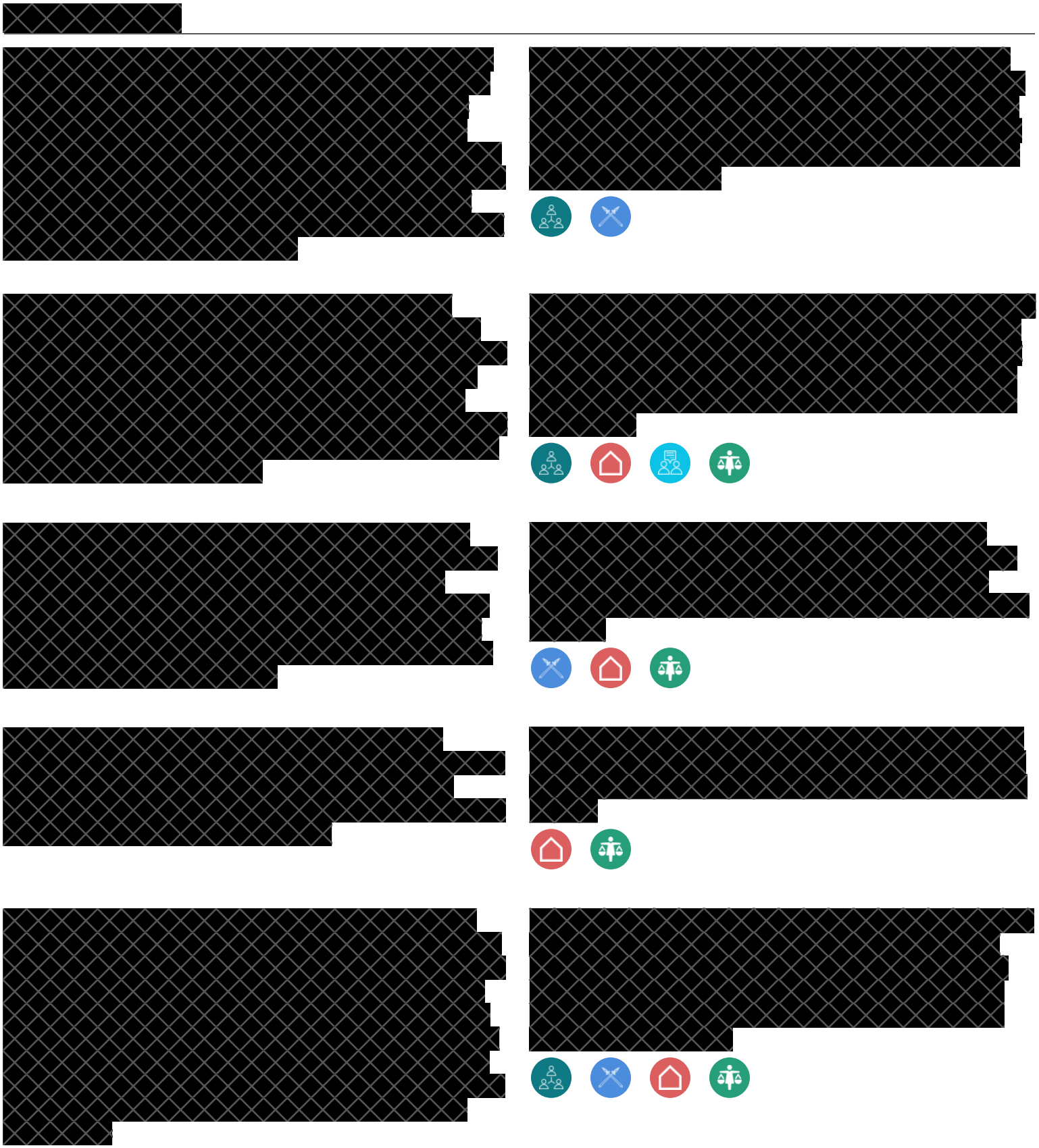
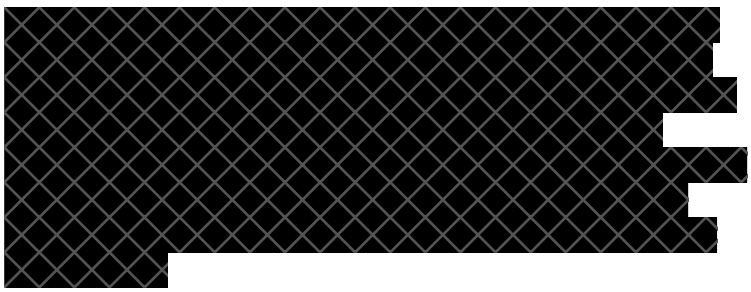
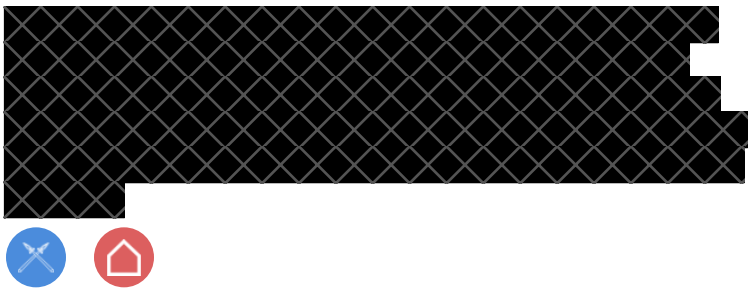
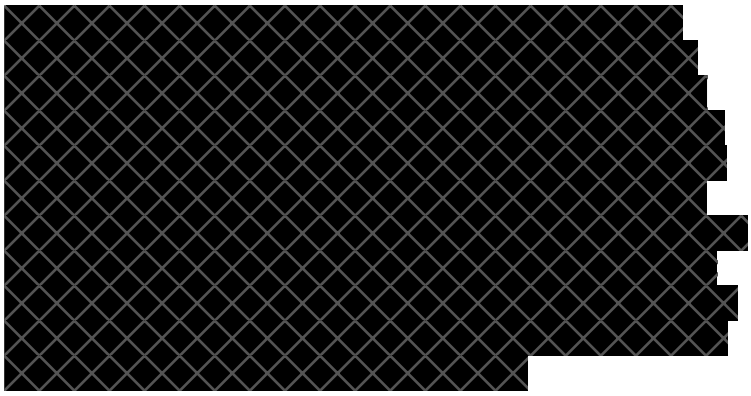
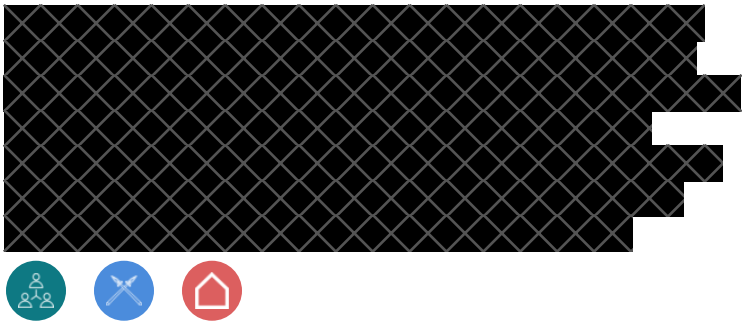
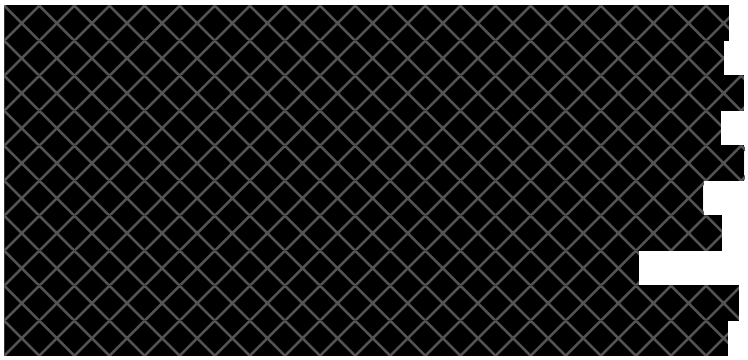


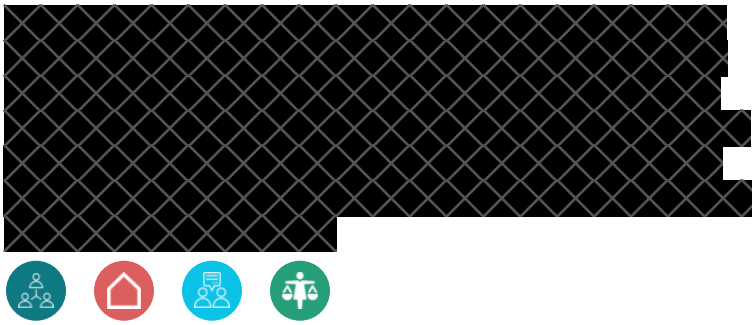


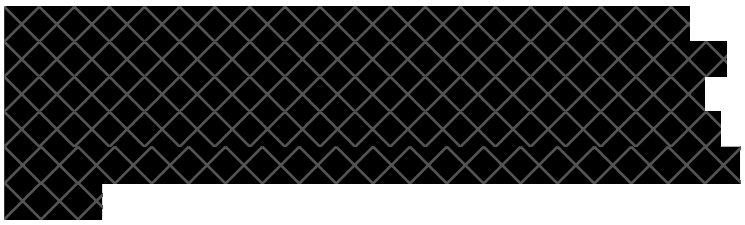


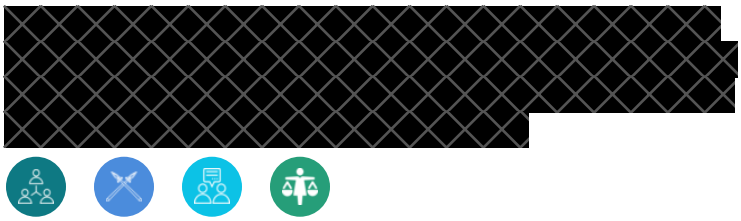


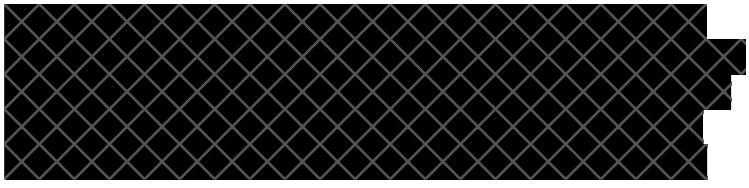


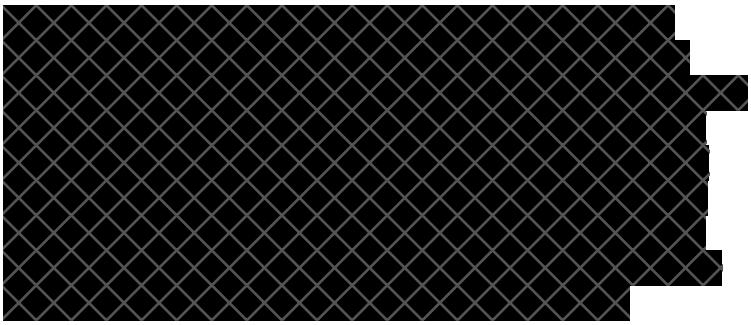


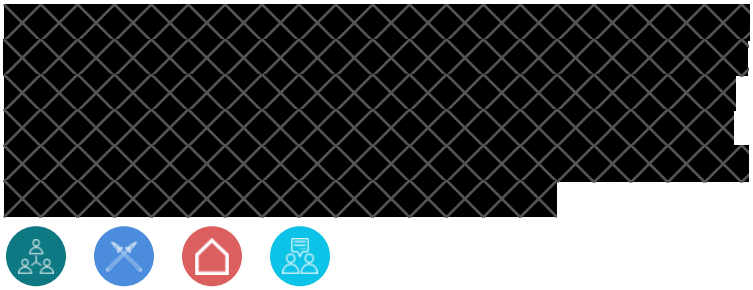


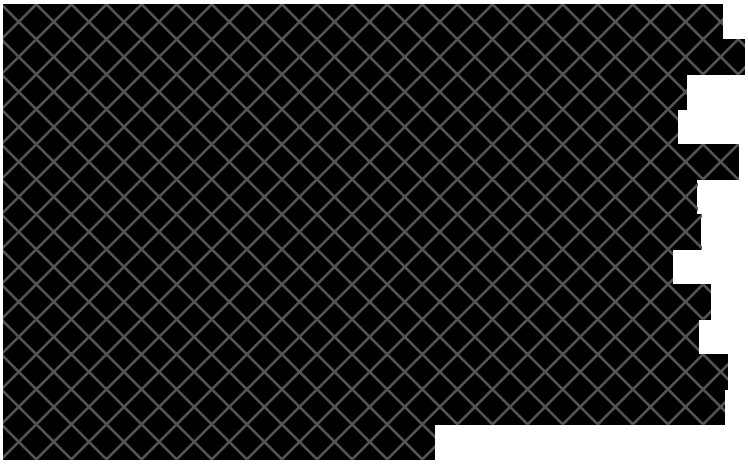


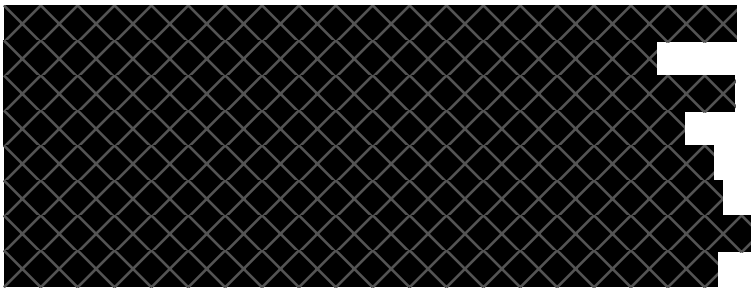


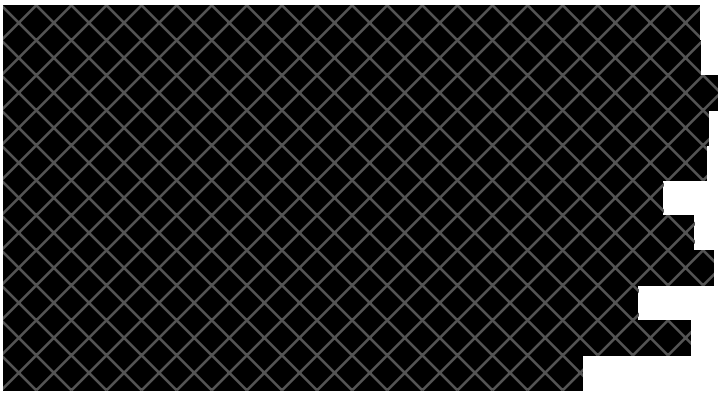


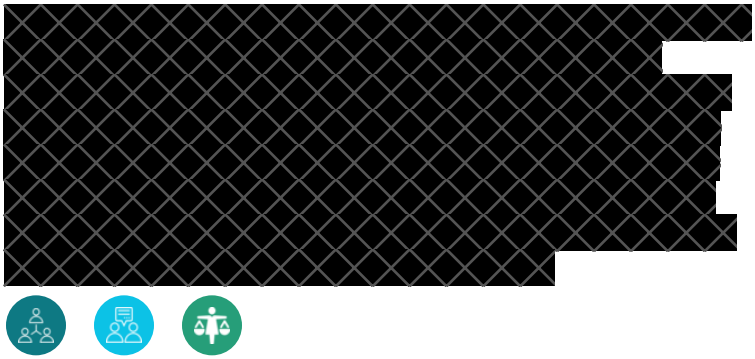


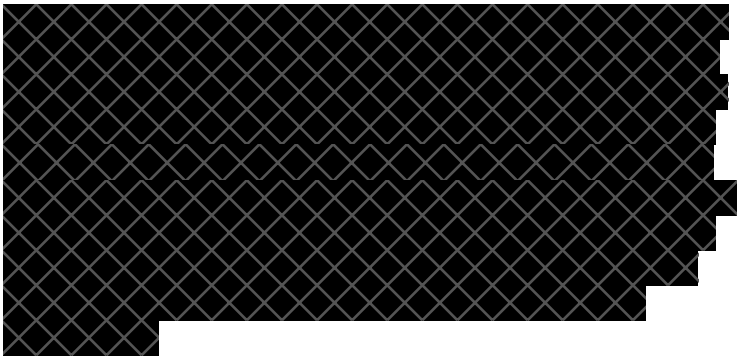


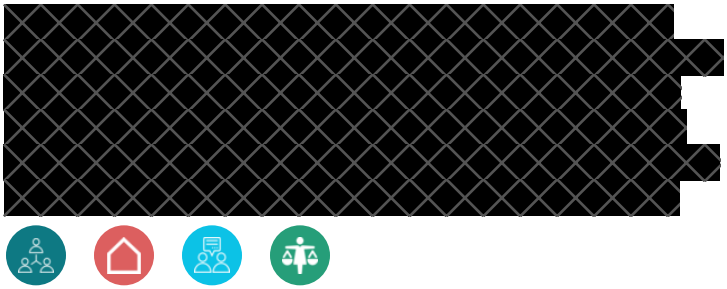


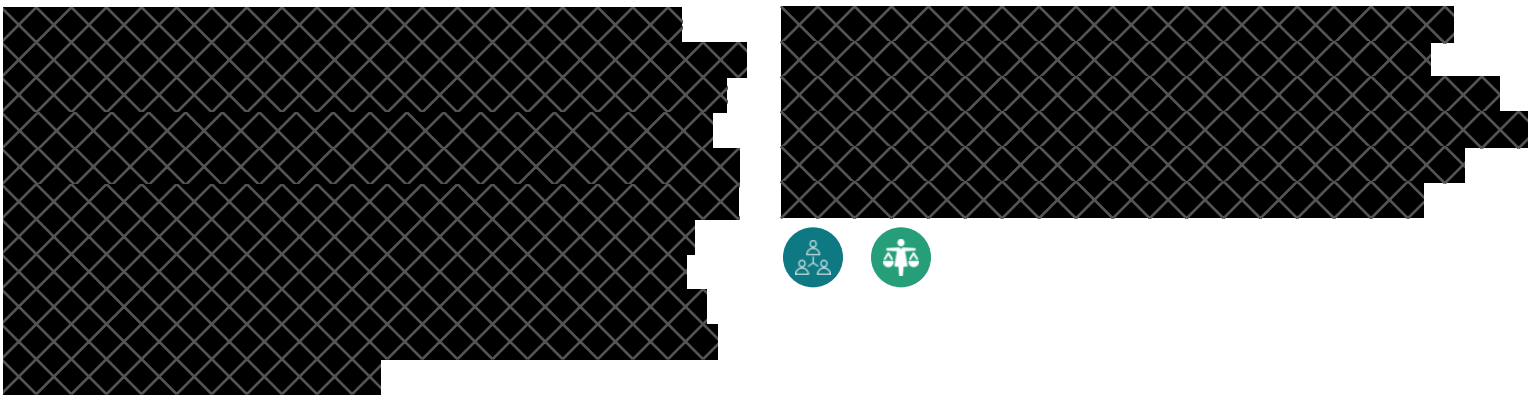


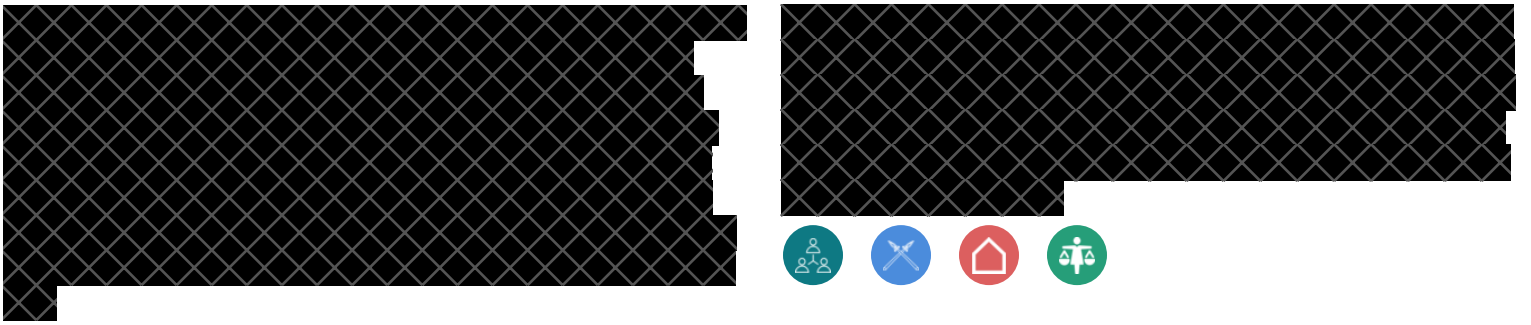


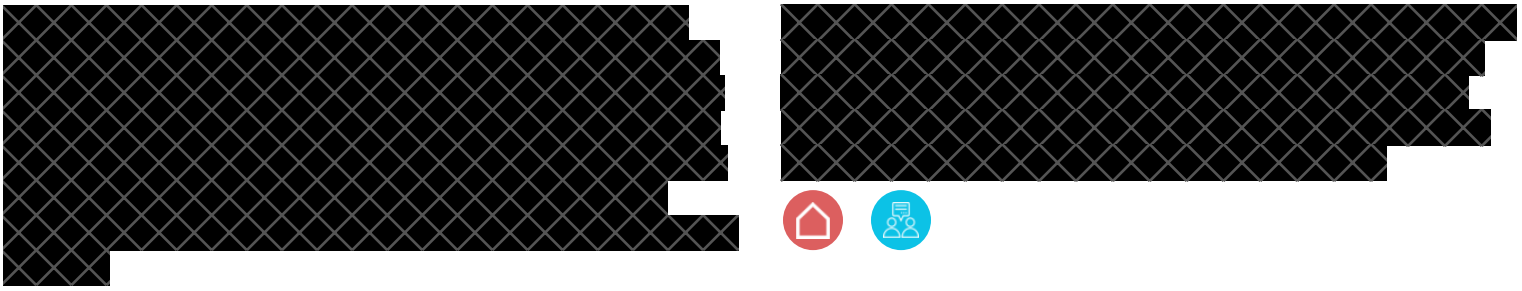


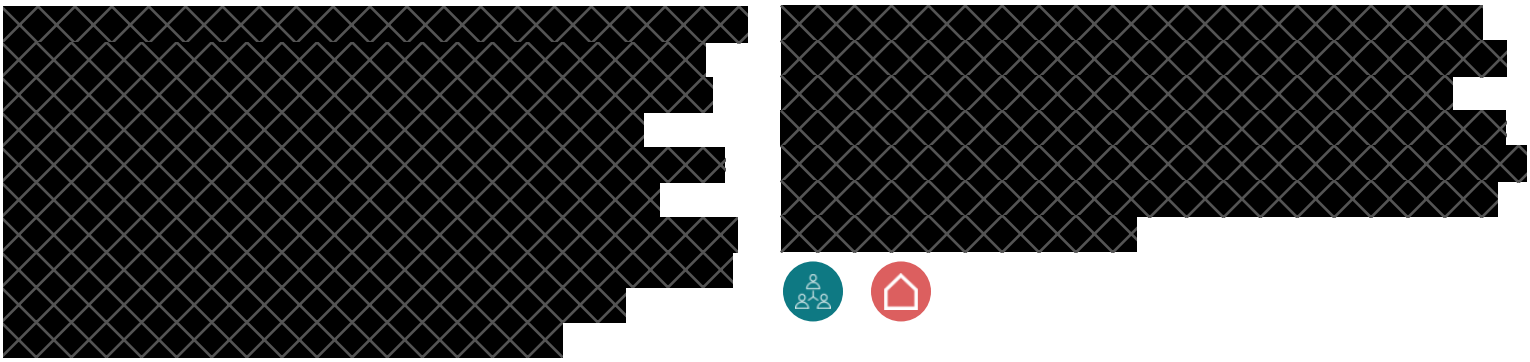


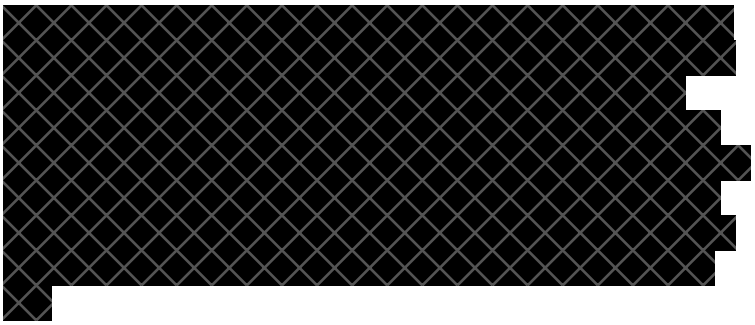


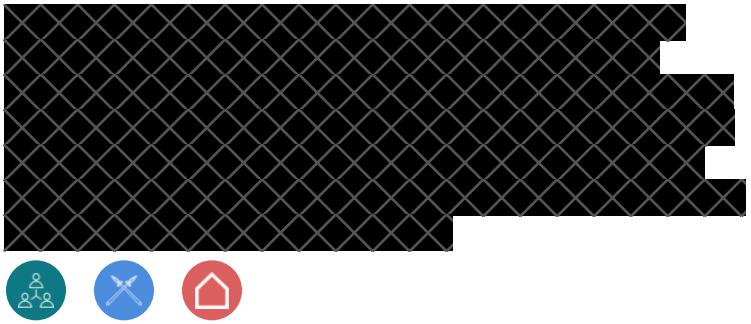


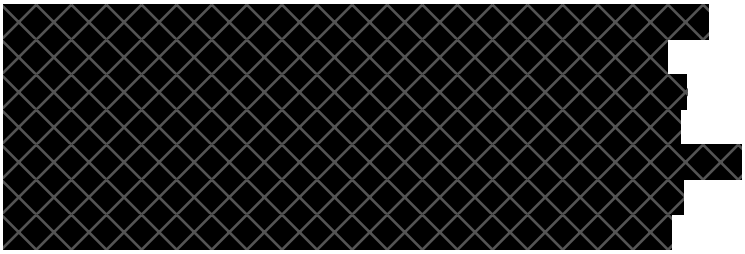


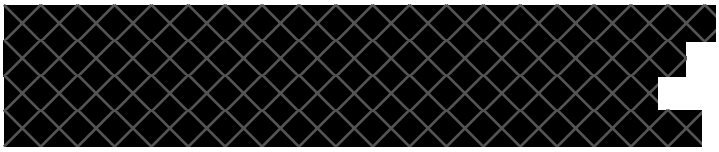


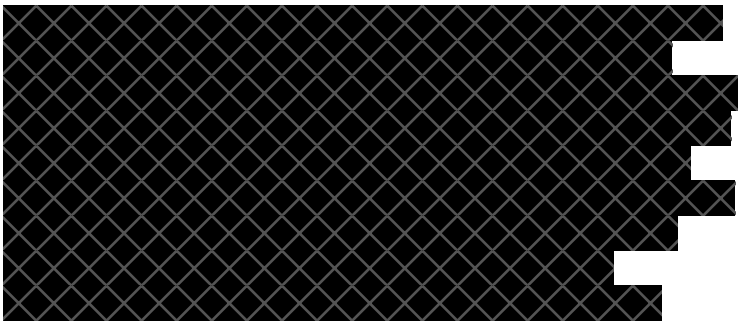


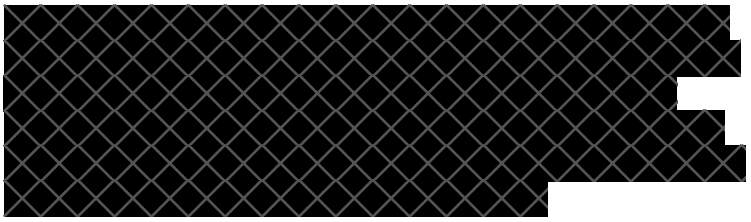


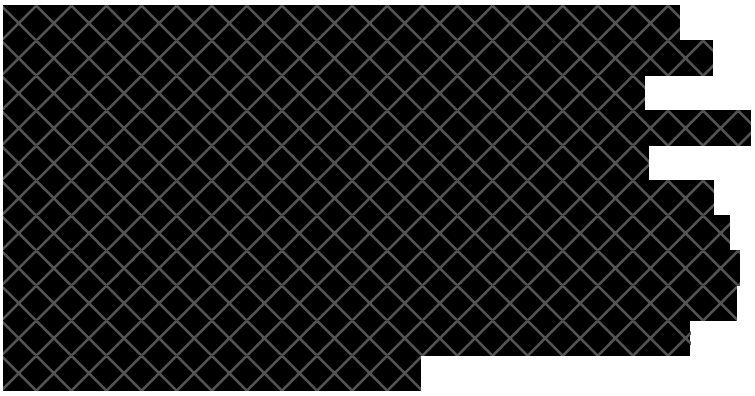


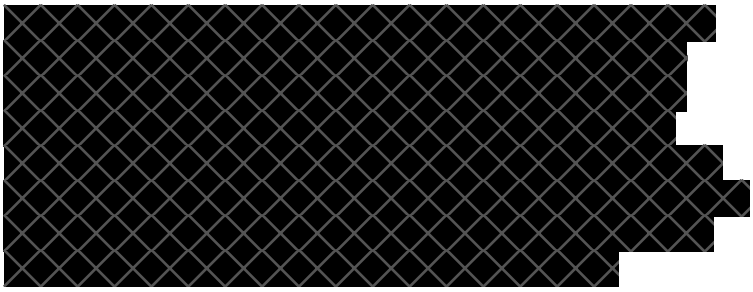


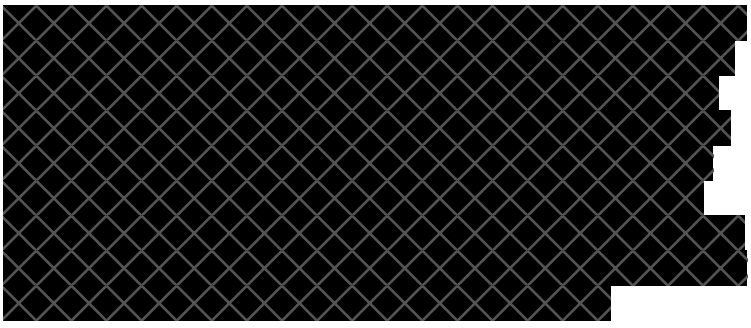


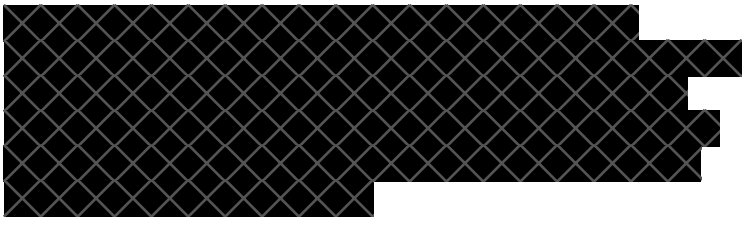


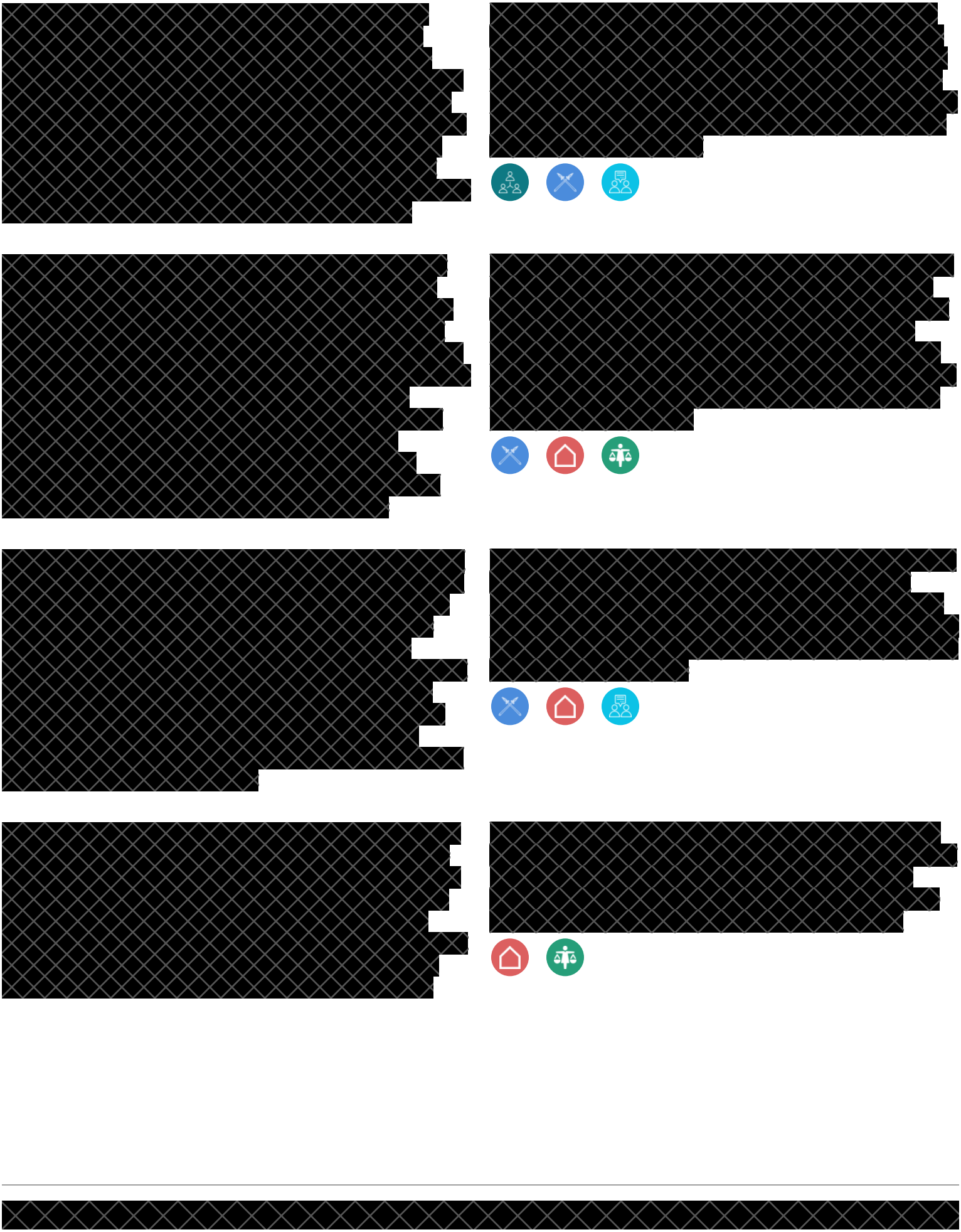












Within two weeks, the corn sprouts. Willie and Dick water the plants while Sal tethers Bub and Johnny in the yard to keep them from danger. Though she agrees to come down to the corn patch to admire it, Sal doesn't seem impressed. When Thornhill tries to offer her edible plants he finds, she refuses to try them and insists on waiting for the corn. Thornhill understands that she's going to wait her five years before they can return to London. In the mornings, she tells Thornhill her dreams of wandering around London. All the Thornhills feel watched, though they don't actually see any of the natives.

Again, Sal does everything in her power to resist learning about her new home in an attempt to keep herself from adjusting. In addition, by turning her mind so fully to London and her future there, she reinforces for herself and for Thornhill that London is her home. By playing to Thornhill's guilt and not allowing him to forget his promise, she tries to ensure that he'll act fairly and follow through in the end.

For the first few weeks, Thornhill and his sons perform hard labor to get the corn growing and begin to construct a hut. After two weeks, Thornhill decides to climb the ridge on one edge of his property. He looks forward to seeing all of his land laid out before him. However, he soon realizes that the ridge isn't an easy or straightforward climb. After struggling for a while, he settles for a flat rock at the base of the ridge. From there, he can see Sal washing clothes and Willie standing still instead of hoeing. Thornhill yells to Willie, but the vastness of the land swallows his voice and it doesn't carry.

Though the landscape entrances Thornhill now that it's not so terrifying, it's still not exactly welcoming. This complicates how Thornhill thinks of this place as being home, as the land itself seems to directly oppose Thornhill's attempts to master it. Thornhill can't even control his own family, as the landscape swallows his voice. In short, the land isn't doing Thornhill any favors.

Thornhill looks down at an ant and notices a freshly scratched line in the rock. He follows it and thinks that it must be the work of water and wind, though when he realizes that the lines make up a detailed drawing of a fish, he admits to himself that it's a drawing made by humans. The drawing is five yards long, and the fish looks very alive. As Thornhill walks around the fish, he notices another drawing overlapping the fish. Upon closer inspection, he realizes it's a drawing of the *Hope*. Thornhill makes an indignant noise, which the land also swallows up.

Thornhill's thought process mirrors the thoughts he had when he began his corn patch: he struggles to believe that the Aborigines are capable of creating something, which shows just how superior Thornhill believes his culture is. When the land "swallows" Thornhill's reaction, it suggests that the land is on the side of the Aborigines and that Thornhill's language has no place here.

Thornhill looks around and sees no one watching him, but he realizes that even though the land may seem empty, the drawings are proof that this place is populated. He turns to watch Sal again and thinks that he'll tell her about the fish someday, but not yet. He begins to realize that once you start keeping secrets from someone, it's easier to keep doing it than to stop.

Now, Thornhill finally understands that what he calls "home" is land that others also think of as their home. He decides not to tell Sal about the fish to allow her to think she's safe. Again, his intentions are good, but it means that neither of them will be able to truly understand the other's experience.

On their fourth week on the Hawkesbury, Smasher Sullivan arrives with a housewarming gift of rat poison, a keg of lime, and oranges from his tree. His dog follows him up to the half-finished hut. Sal greets Smasher as though they're old friends and offers him all the hospitality she can, while Thornhill only sits down to be pleasant. Smasher tells them how he was convicted and sent to New South Wales. Sal tells Smasher her story and shows him her marks on the tree. Thornhill realizes how lonely Sal is, but thinks that he hadn't thought to ask her about it.

Arriving with gifts stands in stark contrast to what Thornhill saw on his first trip up the river: this is chilling evidence that Smasher is racist and cares only for the white *inhabitants of the river. When Thornhill finally learns that Sal is lonely, he confronts the consequences of his own silence. She's turning to others instead of him, and in some ways, putting him in his own prison of solitary confinement.*

When Dick gets tired of holding Mary, Sal takes her and sends Dick to play. With the children gone, Smasher begins talking about the natives and regales them with tales of their viciousness. Sal becomes quiet and holds Mary tightly, while Thornhill tries to give Smasher a hint to stop talking. Smasher continues to talk about his guns and his dogs, which he trains to attack only natives. Finally, Thornhill puts the cork in the rum bottle and Smasher finally shouts goodbye and leaves. Both Thornhill and Sal can't seem to shake the violent stories.

Smasher seems to get real pleasure and satisfaction from talking like this. This kind of language allows him to feel superior and successful, though it also shows that his success is built on a foundation of violence and cruelty. The fact that Thornhill and Sal can't escape the stories after Smasher's departure recalls Thornhill's observations from prison: the stories seem more true the more often they're told.

Later that night, when the lamp goes out, Sal forces herself to laugh and asks Thornhill if Smasher is just exaggerating. Thornhill insists that he surely is, but thinks about the hands and the flayed man he saw his first time up the river. Sal is quiet for a minute and then says she didn't like how Smasher spoke about having guns and whips around to teach the natives lessons. She makes Thornhill swear he'd never do that. Thornhill thinks of watching Collarbone hang and how he lied to Sal that the death was clean. He assures her he'd never be so violent and Sal falls asleep immediately.

By continuing to lie, Thornhill creates a false sense of safety for Sal, one that downplays the very existence of the Aborigines, as well as invalidates and tones down the very real violence of Smasher's words. It suggests that Smasher isn't one to be taken seriously when, in fact, he embodies the beliefs of many settlers: that the natives aren't welcome on this land, and violence is a perfectly acceptable way to deal with them.

The hut proves a difficult structure to erect. As Thornhill fights the difficult earth to build it, he discovers that he's actually capable of building things. He finishes the hut in the fifth week on the Hawkesbury and has cleared a larger corn patch by then, too. The hut makes the place seem more human, though it's so crude it barely keeps the wilderness out: one morning, a black snake crawls out of Willie and Dick's mattress. They all watch it go silently, and then Sal tells Willie and Dick to patch the gaps in the walls after breakfast. Sal insists that they don't have to do an impeccable job since they'll be leaving soon, but Thornhill wonders if five years is going to be enough.

Thornhill is able to deepen his emotional connection to Thornhill's Point by building the physical home on his land. Though Sal certainly benefits from the new hut, she still works hard to keep her distance from the building that she could call home. For her, the building has little symbolic value—it's not much more than a place to stay for a while. Thornhill's wondering suggests that his emotional connection is strengthening so much that he's considering breaking his promise to Sal.

Thornhill encourages Smasher to tell others on the river that his family enjoys company, so one Sunday, several neighbors arrive. Smasher arrives first, followed by a man named Sagitty. Sagitty had once had a wife and children here in New South Wales, but they all died. He farms wheat and raises hogs, though he insists that the natives steal from him constantly. Though Thornhill bristles when Sagitty says he "learned them a lesson," he understands that theft on the scale he describes isn't a small matter.

Thornhill finds Sagitty a more sympathetic character than Smasher because he lays out a logical system of actions and consequences when it comes to the natives (they steal, he punishes them). Smasher, on the other hand, doesn't seem to require provocation to behave violently towards his black neighbors. This shows that Thornhill very much relies on these systems of justice to justify his beliefs and actions.

Sagitty and Smasher exchange knowing looks as they talk about the natives. Thornhill tries to change the subject, but Smasher dreamily says that killing the natives is like killing flies. Sal stops in her tracks. Smasher notices and insists he doesn't actually kill the natives, but Thornhill knows he's lying.

Smasher shows here that he thinks of the Aborigines as completely sub-human, and therefore worthy only of being hunted for sport—a horrifying way to think of and treat any group of people.

A man nicknamed Spider arrives with Loveday. Thornhill hopes the conversation will turn away from killing the natives, but it only becomes more intense. Spider insists that the natives are vermin, and tells the group that they kill white people and eat them. Loveday regales them with a tale of being speared in the hip and even shows them the scar. Thornhill laughs with the others, but hopes that Sal will think that these are stories and not factual. The widow Mrs. Herring arrives. She tells Sal that because she lives alone, she gives the natives what they want and turns a blind eye when they steal. She insists that she has enough supplies to not need to make trouble.

Mrs. Herring's view on how to deal with the Aborigines is more closely aligned with Blackwood's than any of the other attendees. However, hers also seems to come from a place of fear and recognition that she's vulnerable as a single, older woman. This suggests that she might not think this way if she had more power or didn't live alone, while Blackwood's philosophy seems to come more from an active choice to cooperate than from a place of fear.

Smasher notices Blackwood coming up the river. Smasher and Sagitty exchange a hard glance as Blackwood walks up with a keg of his homemade rum. When he arrives, everyone becomes quiet and sober. Thornhill thinks he barely knows Blackwood. Even though he worked with him for a year, Blackwood had discouraged Thornhill from visiting him on the river.

Blackwood truly seems worlds apart from any of his companions here: he's silent and unknowable, with beliefs that don't line up with anyone else's. This suggests that he's operating under an entirely different social system than everyone else, and makes his participation in this system somewhat fraught.

Smasher says loudly that the natives stole from him the night before. As though he didn't hear, Blackwood motions to Thornhill's cornfield and notes that he dug up the daisies. Blackwood explains that the roots are edible, like yams, and the natives gave him some when he first arrived. Mrs. Herring agrees that the daisies are sweet, and Blackwood tells Thornhill that once you dig up the daisies, they won't grow back and the natives will go hungry. Sagitty angrily insists that the natives don't farm, but Blackwood speaks over him and says that there was a meeting a while ago between the Governor and one of the natives who spoke some English, and they shook hands that no more white settlers can claim land past a certain point of the river.

Blackwood's information about the daisies is an encouragement for Thornhill to see his own farming methods as destructive, not just a way to lay claim to the land. This in turn challenges Thornhill's sense of ownership of his land, as his corn is his way of staking a claim. It's worth noting that the meeting Blackwood mentions was one of many that took place during this time that did grant the Aborigines some rights to their land, but these agreements were all overturned about 20 years later so that Englishmen could settle even more area without consequences.

Smasher yells that the natives are dishonest thieves, and Blackwood insults Smasher's own honesty. Blackwood turns to Thornhill and tells him again that he needs to remember that when he takes a little, he has to give a little back. He gets up and leaves, and the rest soon follow. Thornhill wonders if Blackwood's advice is a warning or a threat, but he knows it's better than any advice from Smasher.

For now, Thornhill recognizes that Blackwood's peaceful relationship with the Aborigines is preferable to the violent ways of Smasher and Sagitty, but Thornhill doesn't have seem to have the tools or temperament to build a relationship like Blackwood's with the natives. Thornhill is too caught up in claiming the place as his own to "give a little."

Before the Thornhills left Sydney, Thornhill had applied for convict servants. Five weeks after moving to the river, he receives word that he's been assigned two. Thornhill worries about leaving his family alone for a week, but he and Sal know he has to go. As he leaves, he waves to Sal and thinks of how vulnerable Thornhill's Point is.

The convict servants are another status symbol for Thornhill, as they mean that he actually has power over other Englishmen and not just theoretical power over the Aborigines.

On the wharf, Thornhill remembers what it was like to emerge from the dark ship years ago. Thornhill is unpleasantly surprised to find that the captain who brought him to New South Wales on the *Alexander* is there, assigning convicts to free men. When the two men look at each other, the captain recognizes Thornhill and insults him. Thornhill tries to look stony, but realizes that he'll always be known as a felon even if he's free now.

Being back on the wharf where he himself arrived in New South Wales, Thornhill realizes that his past life as a poor man and as a convict will follow him forever. However, Thornhill doesn't feel this way on Thornhill's Point, which suggests that owning that land is allowing Thornhill to escape his past.

Thornhill gets one of the last picks of the convicts. He chooses a man called Ned because Ned reminds him of Rob, and after he has chosen another man, the man excitedly introduces himself as Dan Oldfield, Thornhill's childhood friend. Dan happily cries that London sends its regards, but Thornhill mildly tells Dan to call him Mr. Thornhill. Dan's face falls.

Thornhill's fear and shame at remembering his past leads him to be cruel to a man who was once a very kind friend. This shows the power of the new class system in Australia, and it shows Thornhill embracing it.

Thornhill realizes that, to men like the captain, he and Dan are one and the same, and he begins to understand that there's no future for the Thornhills back in London. He remembers how he himself avoided men who'd been to New South Wales as though they were diseased, and realizes that nobody would trust him to be honest. Further, his children would carry the same curse. He understands that the Hawkesbury River is the one place where everyone is equal and can forget their pasts.

This difficult realization shows Thornhill that the idea in his head of London as home is an idealized and unrealistic one. London won't allow the Thornhills to live in luxury, but will instead condemn them to continue suffering the consequences for Thornhill's theft. Again, it seems land ownership on the Hawkesbury is what will allow Thornhill to leave his crimes and his shame behind him.

When Thornhill returns to the river with Dan and Ned, Sal insists that Dan call her Mrs. Thornhill. She uses fancy language she heard rich people use to tell him so. Thornhill wonders at the pleasure he experiences bullying Dan. He thinks that he didn't know he could be a tyrant, and gives Sal the gifts he brought from Sydney: an engraving of London Bridge and some chickens. Sal nearly cries at the engraving.

Sal's use of high English words mimics the way Thornhill spoke to the Aborigines in the field. Even if the language is foreign to Sal and not quite correct, Sal's newfound power as a mistress allows her to experiment with it without being laughed at.

At breakfast the next morning, Thornhill watches Dan eye the cliffs and surrounding forest. He waits until Dan looks at him to say that the savages are out there, and he won't make it the 50 miles back to Sydney if he runs away. Thornhill then tells Dan and Ned to start building a lean-to at the back of the hut so they can sleep separately from the Thornhills. Ned soon shows that he's useless, and Dan struggles to chop wood and fight the flies in the hot sun. Finally, Dan pleads for a break, but Thornhill refuses. Dan looks for a moment like he's going to refuse to work, but finally turns back to his task. Thornhill strolls around in the shade with a flywhisk.

Thornhill learns that it's exceptionally easy to dehumanize people of a lower class. In doing so, he perpetuates the system of class violence that he was once, and continues to be, victimized by. Further, even though Thornhill certainly doesn't care what Dan was convicted for in England, he now becomes the person responsible for making sure that the English justice system does its job in the new colony. The tables have turned.

That night, Dan and Ned crawl into the lean-to, and Thornhill notices that Sal is smiling. He tells her that they'll fix up the hut and she won't want to leave, and Sal laughs at the joke. They have sex, and Thornhill thinks that New South Wales is taking over and taking them in a new direction. Sal doesn't pinch the candle to save the wick for another day.

Sal's decision to not pinch the candle wick is again an indicator that the Thornhills are doing better than they ever have, since conserving supplies isn't a concern for them right now.

When the hot weather starts, Sal's breasts become painful and baby Mary frets. Sal wakes one morning with hard breasts and a fever, so Thornhill fetches Mrs. Herring. Mrs. Herring insists that Sal must keep nursing and use poultices on her breasts. Thornhill worries Sal will die as she lies ill for days. He finally goes upriver to fetch a real surgeon, but the surgeon refuses to help. Thornhill knows it's because Sal is the wife of a felon. Finally, Sal asks Thornhill to bury her facing north towards London.

Despite the Thornhills' newfound power on the Hawkesbury, when Thornhill deals with other powerful individuals (like the surgeon), he's reminded that his life truly doesn't matter to anyone but himself and his family. To them, Thornhill is still a convict and undeserving of help. This again shows the cruelty of the upper classes.

Their neighbors on the river bring gifts of food and alcohol, but Sal doesn't begin to look better until Blackwood arrives with jellied eels. The day after, Sal is sitting up when Thornhill wakes. She looks much better and asks Thornhill if they've been making the marks on the tree. Though Thornhill assures her they've been making them, he's disappointed that the marks were her first thought.

Sal still thinks of herself as a prisoner, even if she's an exceptionally well-cared for one. Thornhill's disappointment shows just how much of a shift he's undergone in how he thinks about New South Wales: the fact that Sal wants to leave this place that's offering him so much is heartbreaking for him.

PART 4: A HUNDRED ACRES

With Dan and Ned on Thornhill's Point, Thornhill feels better leaving to work on the river. The children grow quickly and well, and even Bub thrives. Business is good now that the Governor decided to settle towns near the mouth of the river, so Thornhill doesn't have to go as far to trade. He buys Sal gifts when he's in Sydney and buys himself his first pair of boots. They make him walk like a rich man. Thornhill says nothing to Sal, but whenever he's in the towns he hears about the atrocities committed by the natives.

That Thornhill's children are thriving suggests that Thornhill's Point isn't at all a bad place to live and call home. Whether Sal likes it or not, it's where her children are growing and developing—and it's the place they'll call home. Thornhill's boots function much like the gun does. They're a symbol of wealth and help him act the part, even if he doesn't feel like a gentleman.

In December of 1913, as Thornhill approaches his property on the river, Willie runs down wildly and says that the natives have arrived, though nobody's dead yet. He points to smoke further down the river. Thornhill listens to the faraway sounds of a dog and a child crying, and Willie tells his father to get the **gun**. They go to the hut where Sal gives Thornhill a bag of food and tobacco. She tells him to take it to the natives, but Thornhill refuses and insists that if they always give them things, the natives will never stop. Sal agrees. Thornhill realizes he must draw a line with the natives and decides to go down to talk to them.

That Thornhill's actions are guided by fear (and not spurred by an actual, obvious overture by the Aborigines) speaks to the power of the stories told in the newspaper, by Smasher, and in the townships. Thornhill cannot conceptualize that the natives might not mean him harm. Willie's insistence on getting the gun shows that he's been listening to Smasher and others like him. He believes in the power of brute force and violence.

When Thornhill reaches the camp, it takes him a minute to notice a few older women and children sitting around the fire. He steps towards them and tells them to leave. One of the women stands, and Thornhill can barely look at her. He's never seen a woman naked, even Sal, and he's embarrassed. One of the women begins to speak without fear, and Thornhill replies by saying he could shoot her head off if he wanted to. One of the women gestures for him to leave. When Thornhill turns around, a group of six tall men is standing behind him.

Thornhill's observation that the woman speaks without fear is an interesting one, as it throws his own fear into sharp relief. His fear, and her lack of fear, points to Thornhill's insecurity in this situation. Because of this, he turns to violent language, even though she can't understand him. It makes him feel better and more in control, even though it doesn't actually accomplish anything.

Thornhill decides to act like he's hosting these men and greets them loudly, though he wishes he had his **gun**. The men approach him, and the old man Thornhill once slapped comes right up, touches his arm, and begins to speak. Thornhill cuts him off, gestures around, and tells him that all the land is his now, but they can have the rest of the country. The old man picks up one of the daisy roots from the fire. He eats some, explaining something to Thornhill, and even offers Thornhill a piece. Thornhill deems the roots "monkey food" and refuses. The man looks as though he's waiting for an answer, but Thornhill doesn't know what to say.

All the Aborigines here seem intent simply on communicating with Thornhill, which again makes his own fear and threats seem exceptionally out of place. When Thornhill refuses the roots, he tells the Aborigines (and himself) that their way of life isn't worth trying to understand. It also again allows Thornhill to feel superior and in control. Admitting he has something to learn from these people would mean admitting that his power has limits and can be questioned.

When Thornhill returns to the hut, he tells Sal that the natives will leave soon, but as Christmas passes, they don't leave. Eventually, Thornhill and Sal start to give the natives names. They call the old man Whisker Harry, and another is Long Bob. One of the younger men they call Black Dick. Sometimes the men watch Thornhill, Ned, and Dan work, but the women approach Sal often. One day, he watches as a large group of women, including one Sal named Polly, show Sal their wooden dishes and touch her skirt. One woman takes Sal's bonnet, and the entire group laughs.

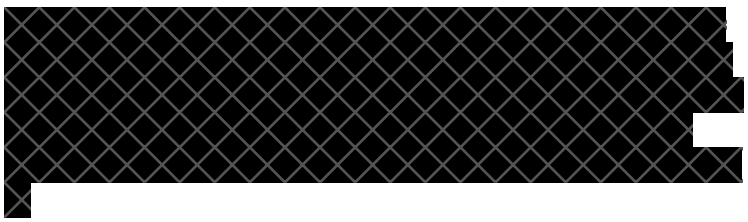
Giving the Aborigines English names gives Thornhill and Sal a way to connect with their neighbors, though it should be acknowledged that doing so is a form of erasure of the native people's own culture. It seeks to turn the Aborigines into individuals who are more acceptable and palatable to the white settlers by diminishing the importance of their culture and customs as much as possible.

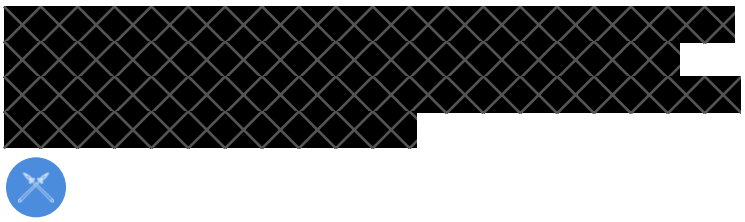
Dan, Ned, and Thornhill watch all of this, entranced by the bare breasts of the younger girls. They watch as Sal barters with the older women for one of their wooden dishes and trades sugar and her bonnet for it. Sal is proud of having struck a deal and tells Thornhill that there's no need for **guns** or whips to deal with the natives.

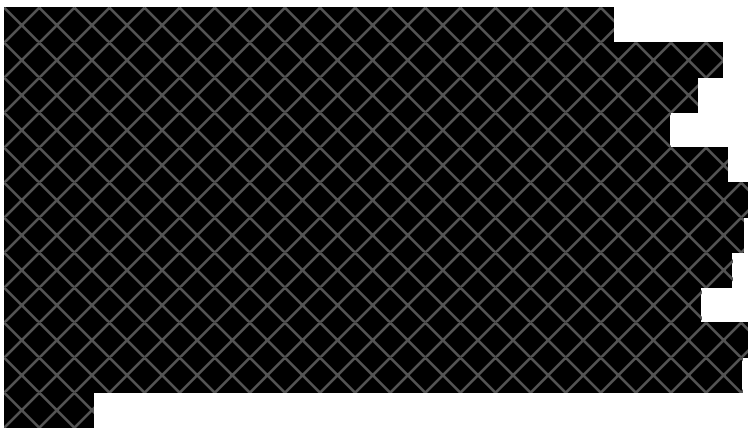
Sal's success in trading is a prime example of Blackwood's "take a little, give a little" principle. It shows that it is possible to come to agreements with the Aborigines and coexist peacefully and fairly.

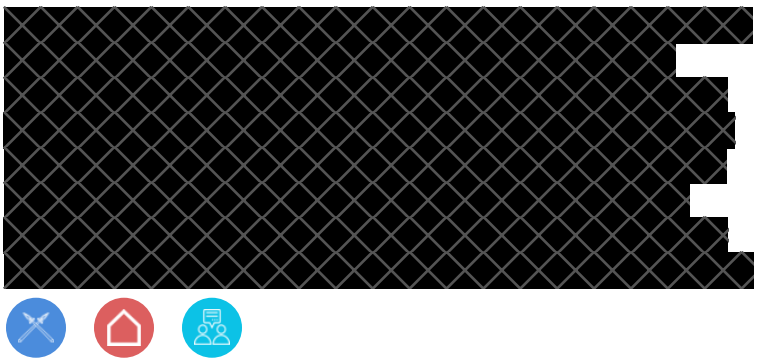
Thornhill realizes that he has no idea how to find food in the forest like the natives do. He wonders if the native women laugh at him for this reason. They spend their time strolling around and finding food, while the Thornhills spend all day working. Ned and Dan scorn the natives and think of them as animals, and Sal halfheartedly suggests they put them to work in the field.

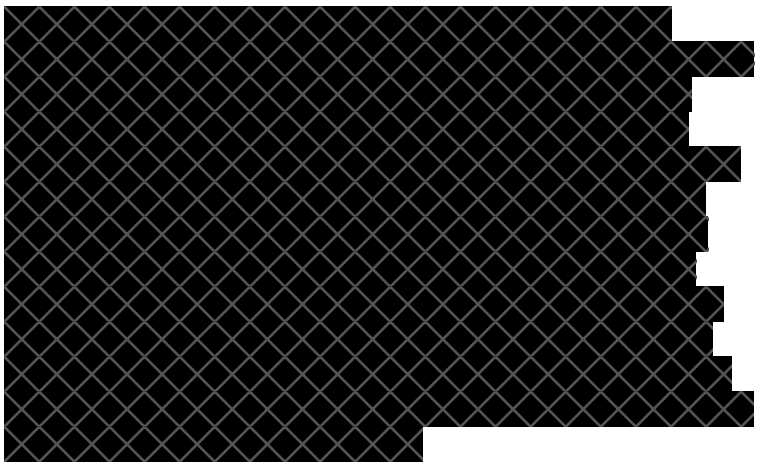
When Thornhill recognizes that the Aborigines don't necessarily need to work in the way that he does, it shows that he's beginning to develop a more lenient and positive view of his neighbors. Ned and Dan, on the other hand, embody the colonial mindset that the Aborigines are inferior, even if the leisurely aspects of their lifestyle might be appealing.

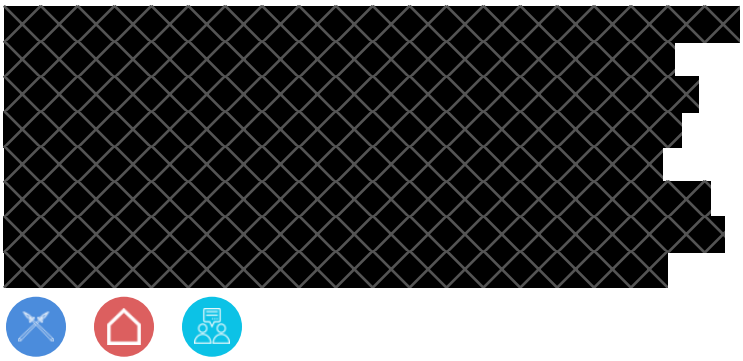


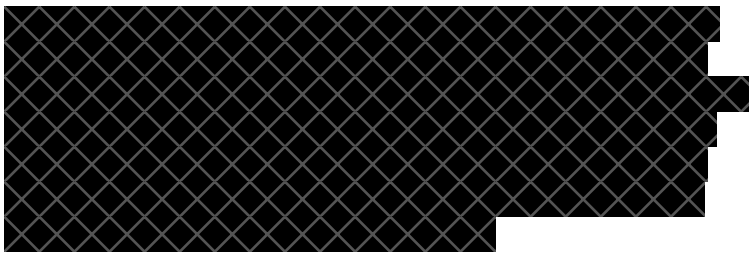


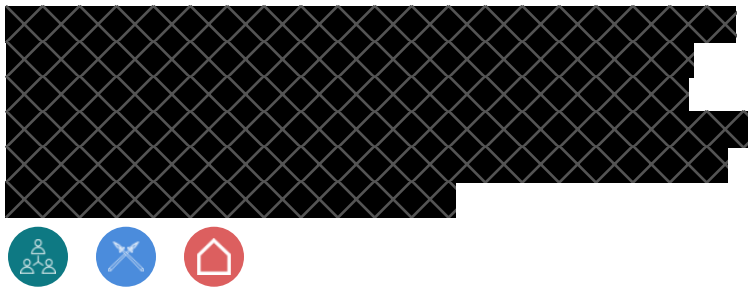












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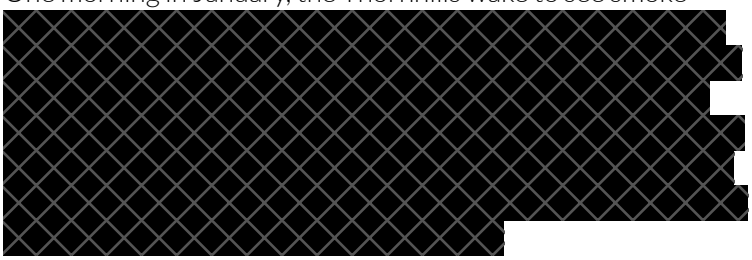
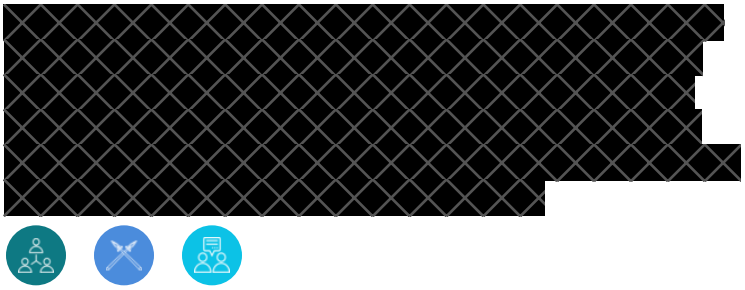
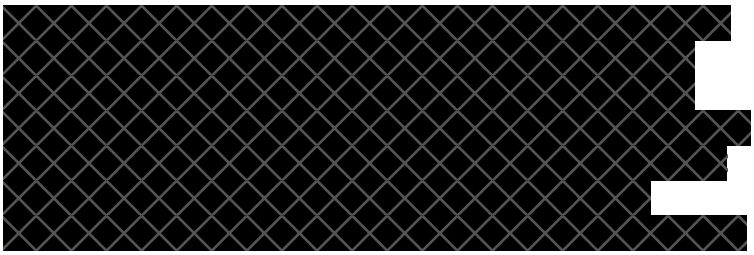
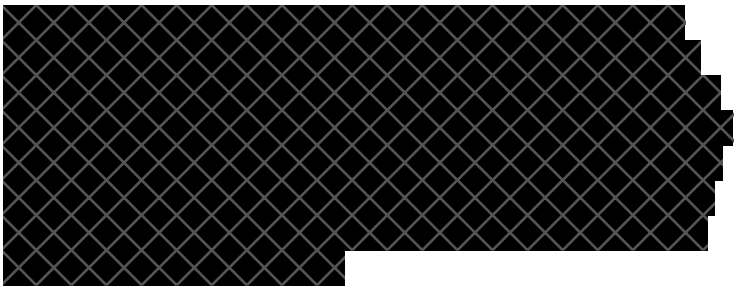
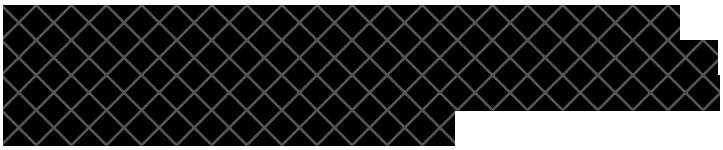
One morning in January, the Thornhills wake to see smoke

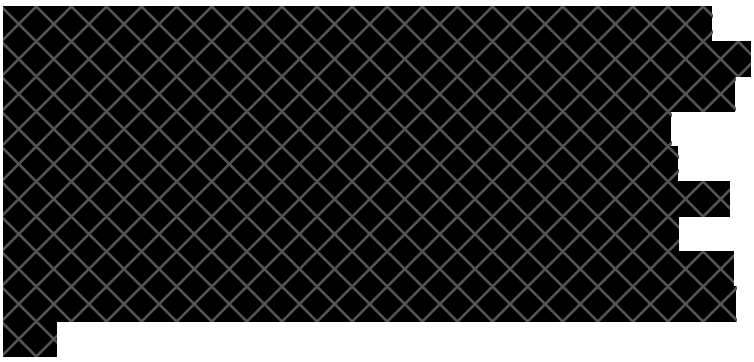


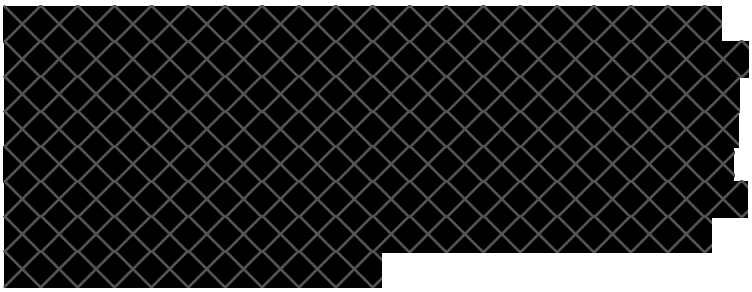


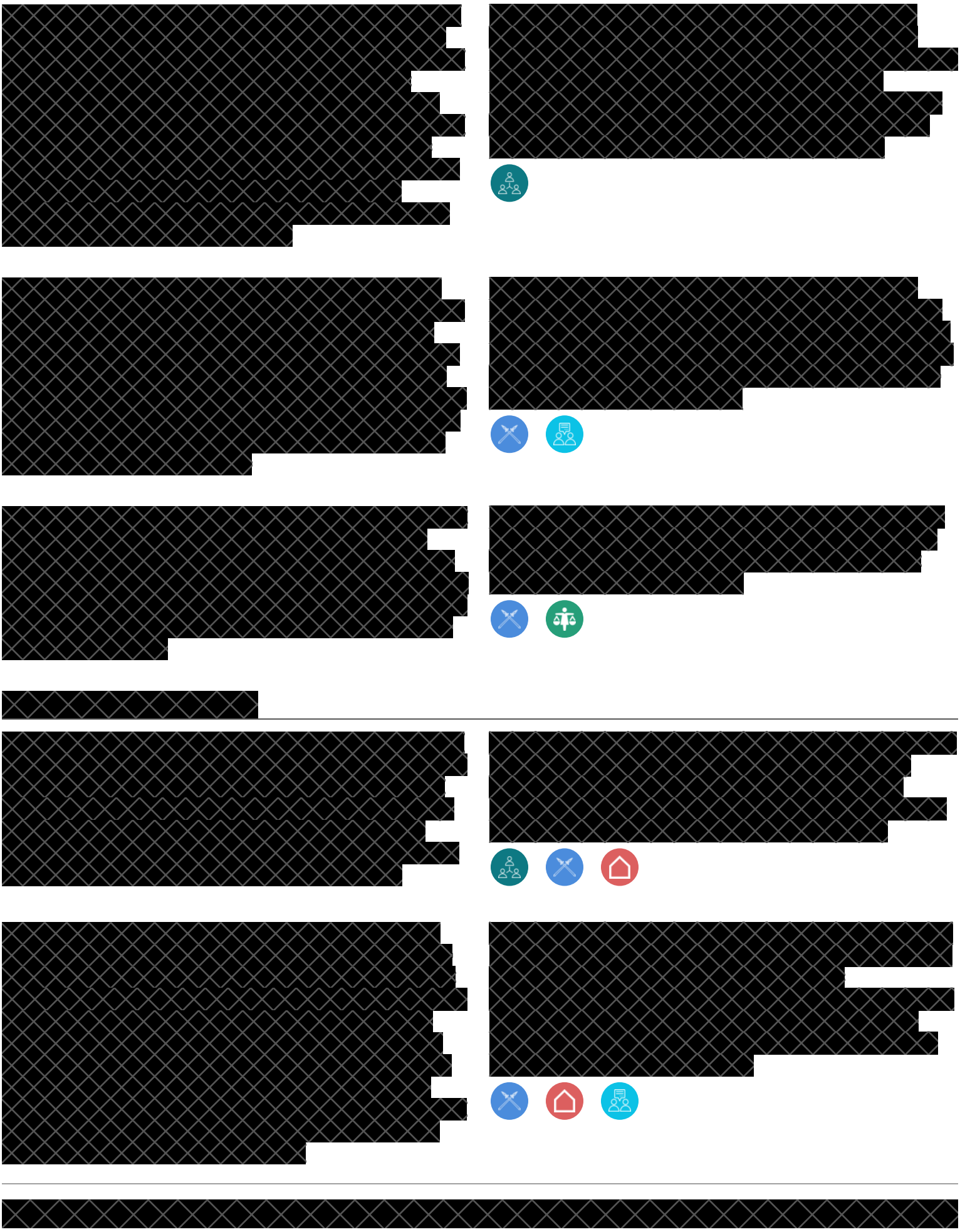












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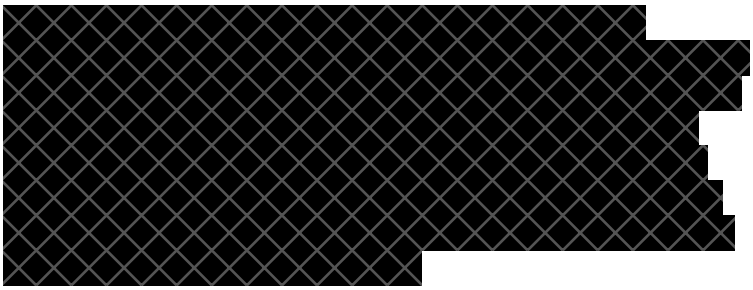

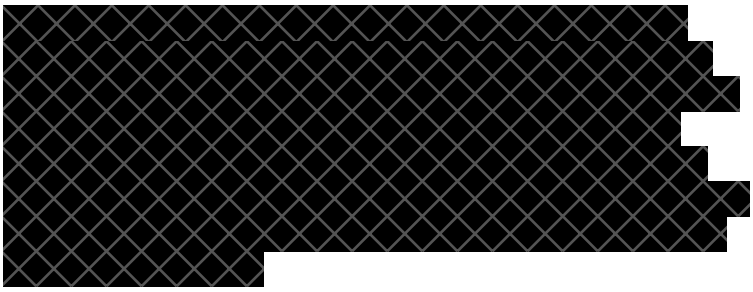

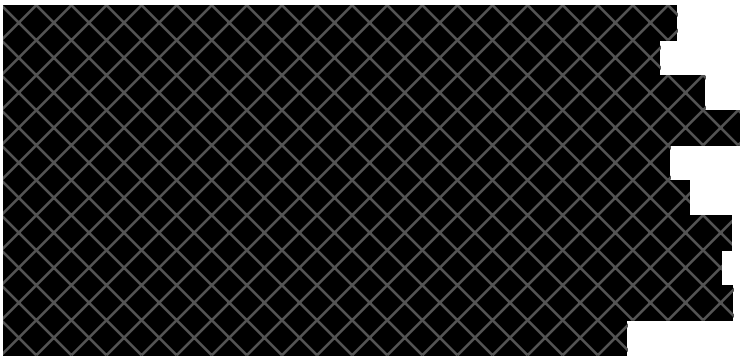

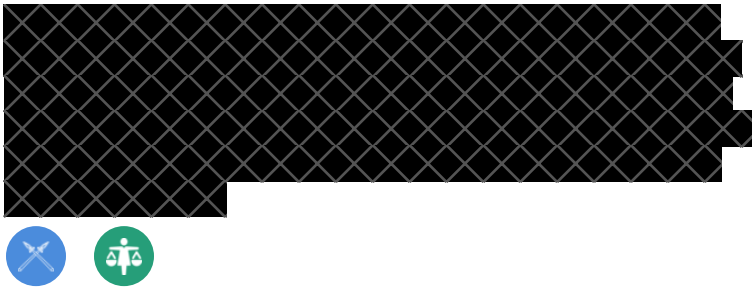

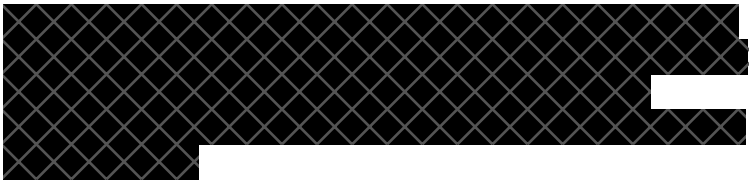

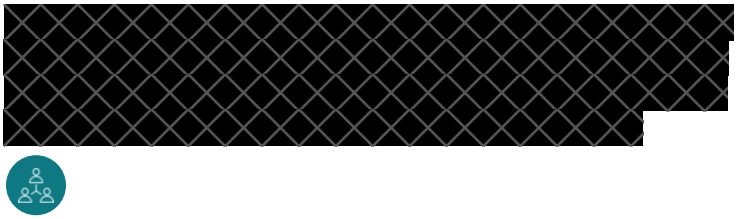

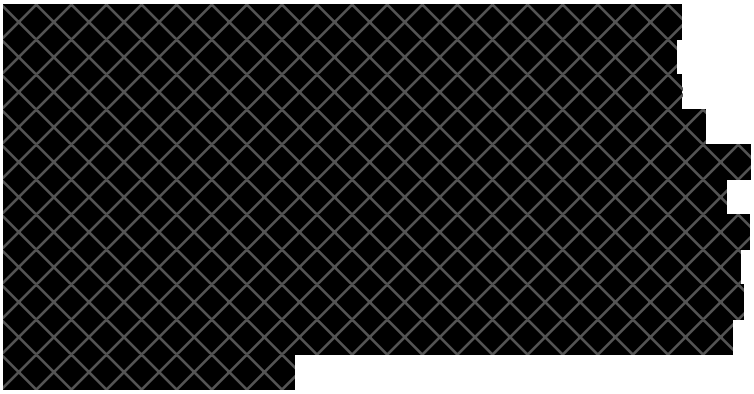

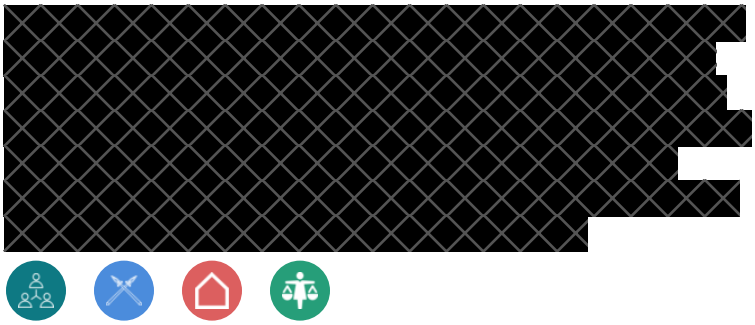

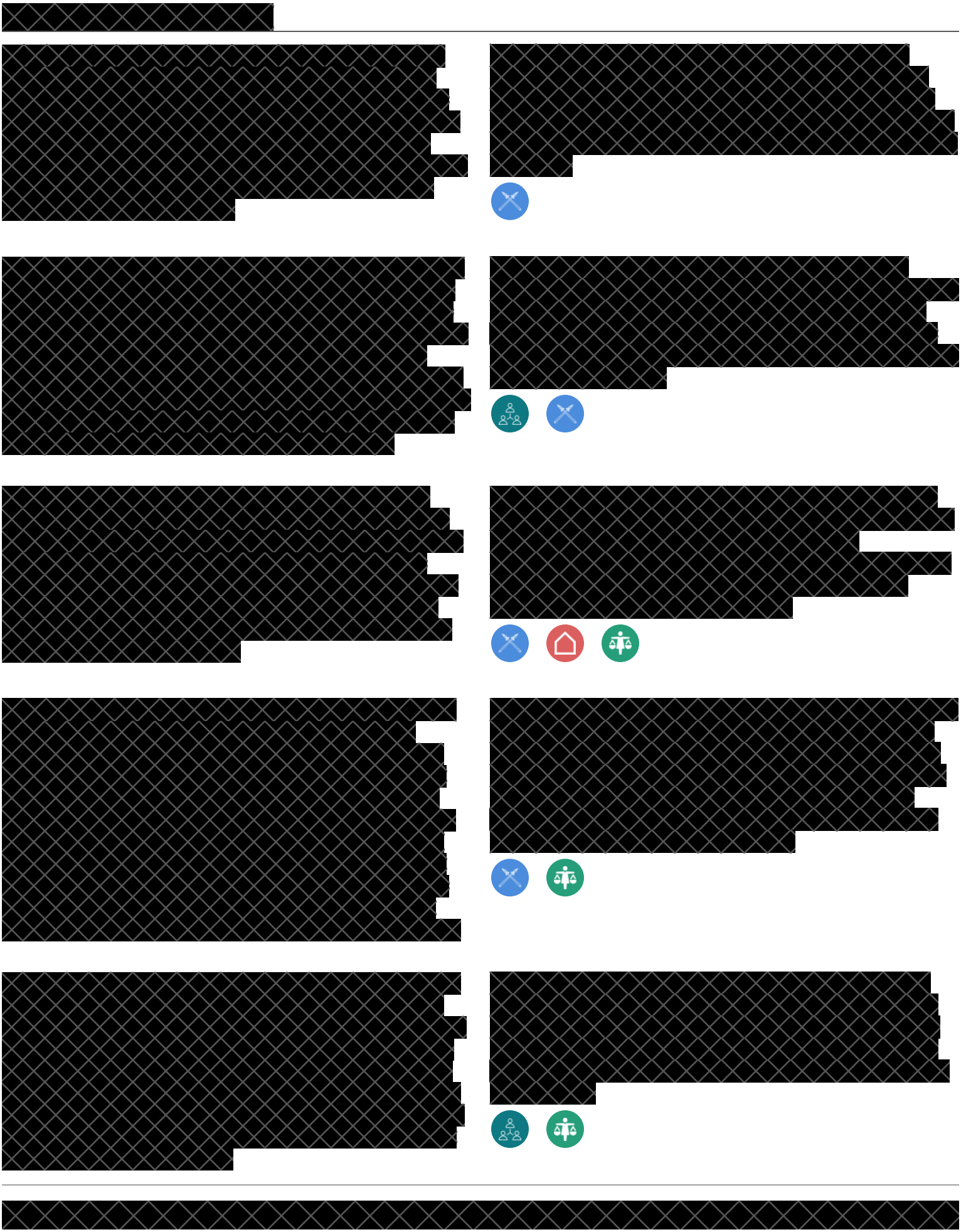

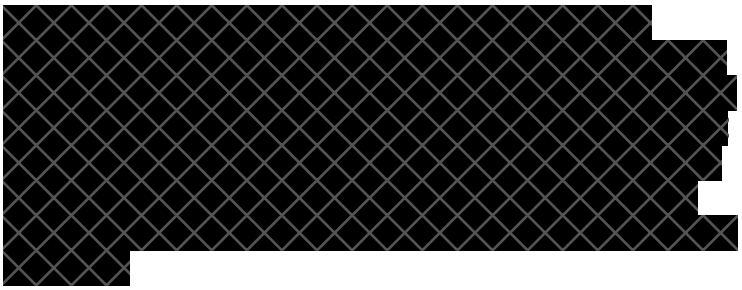

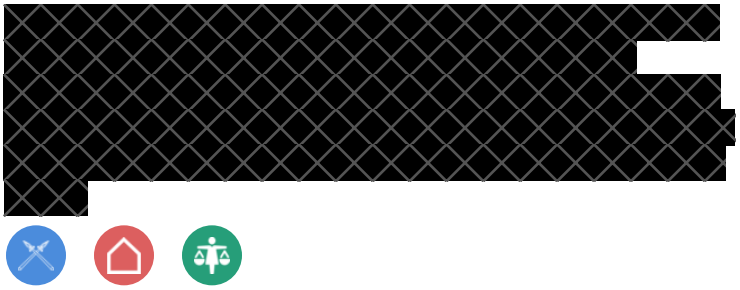

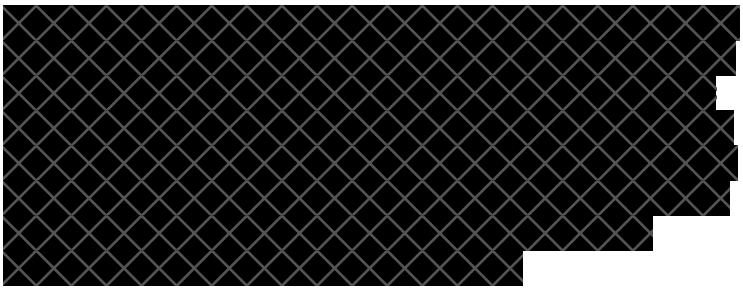

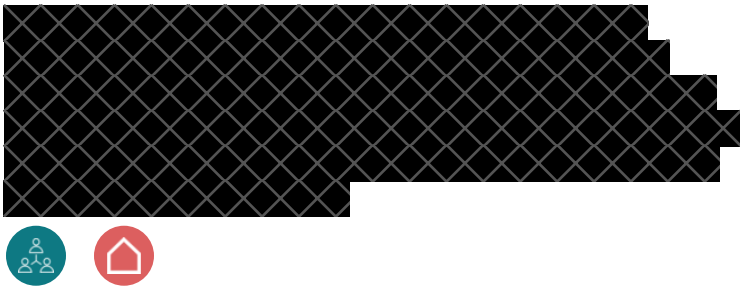

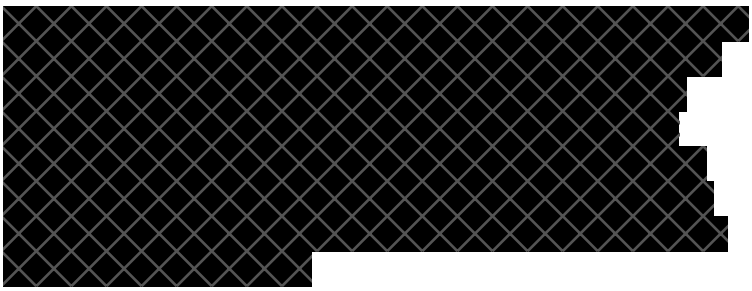

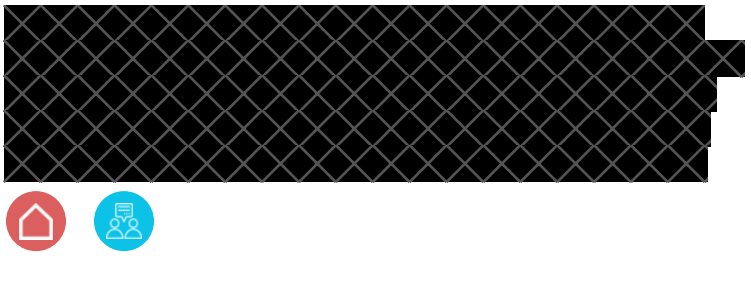

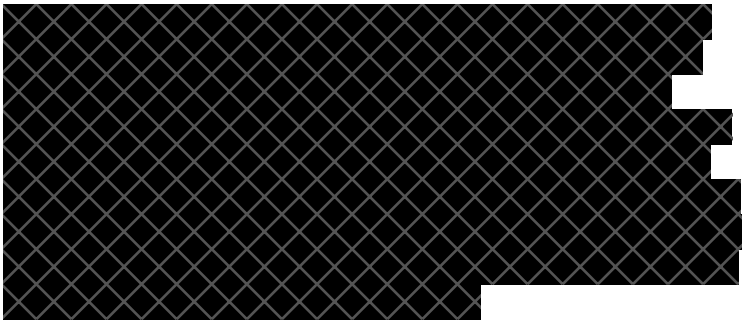

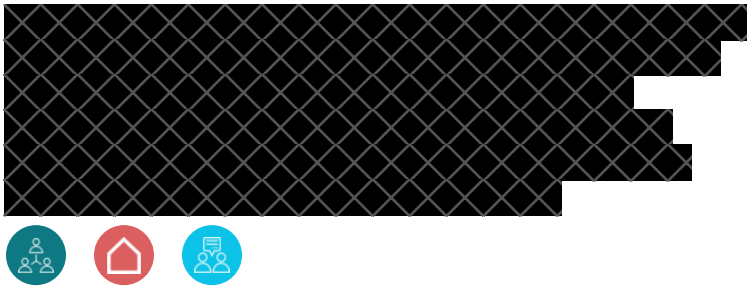

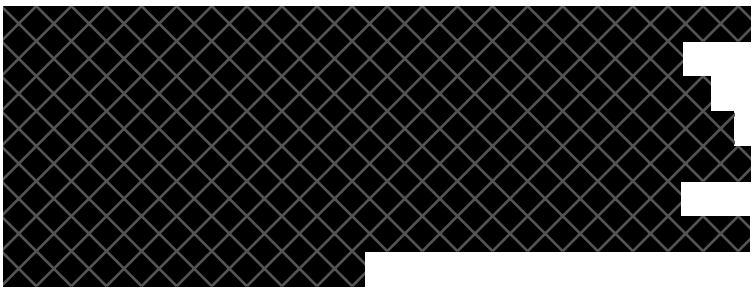

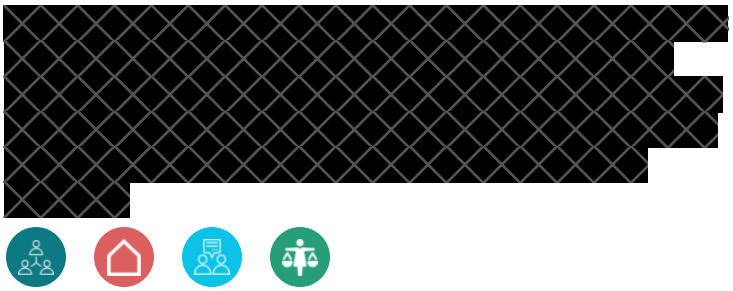

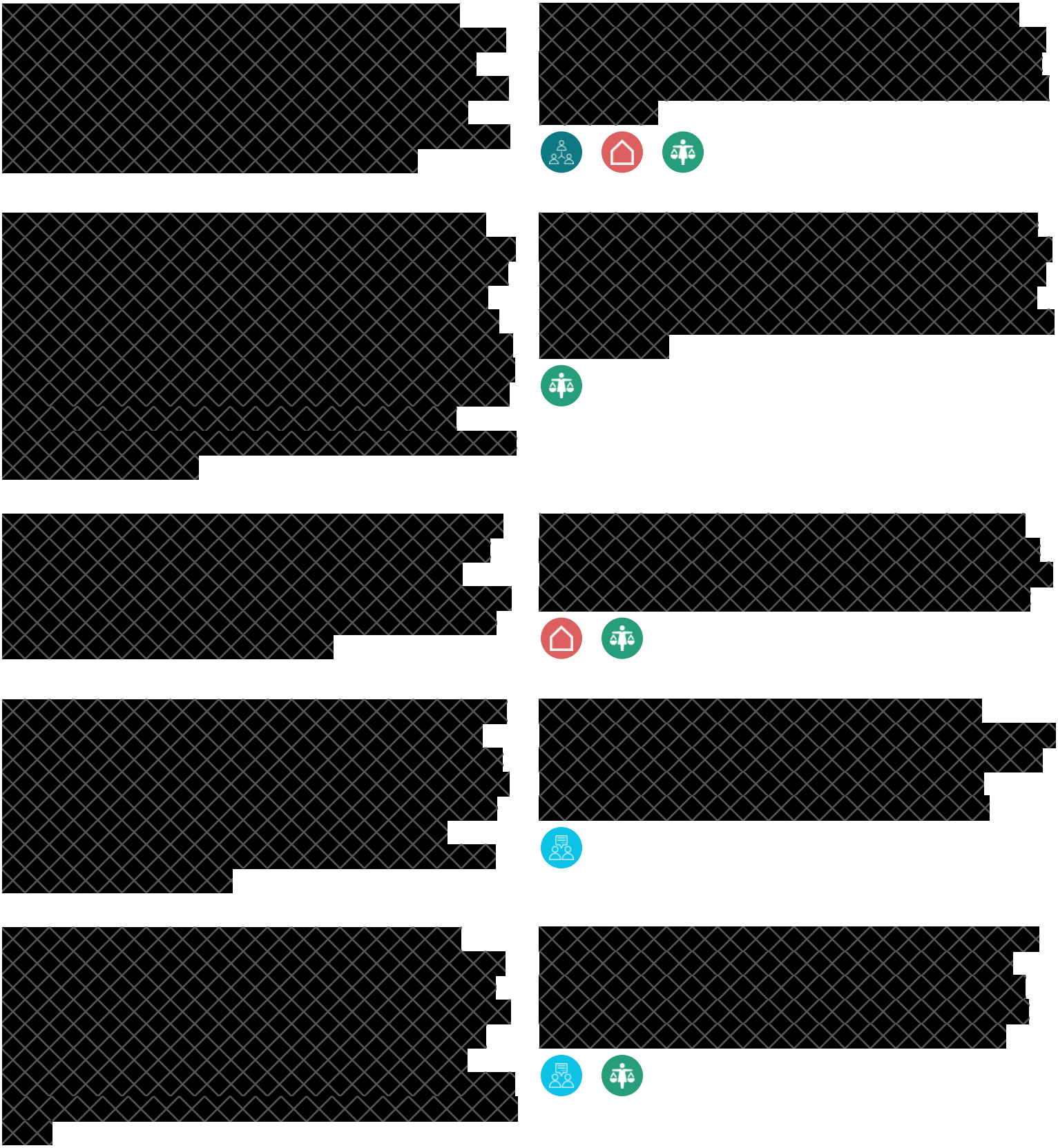

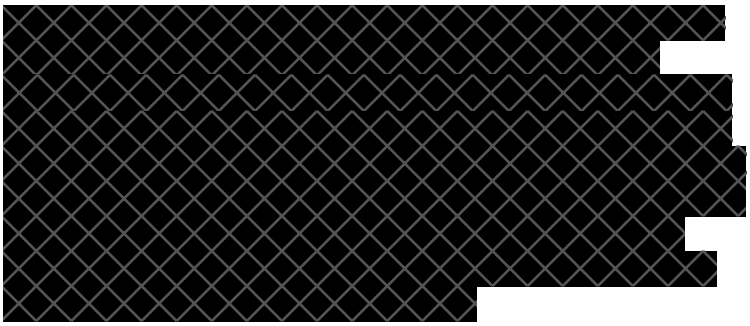

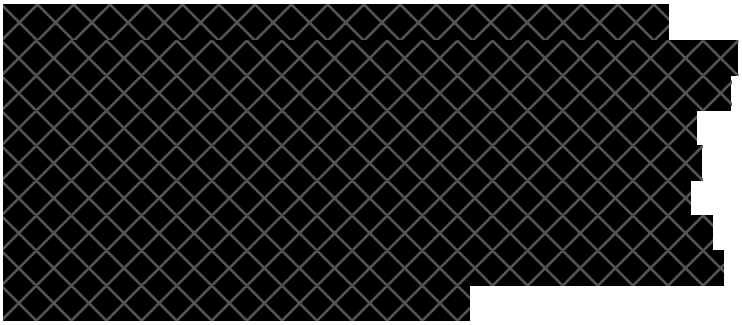

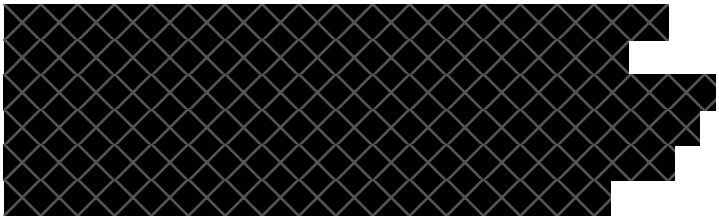

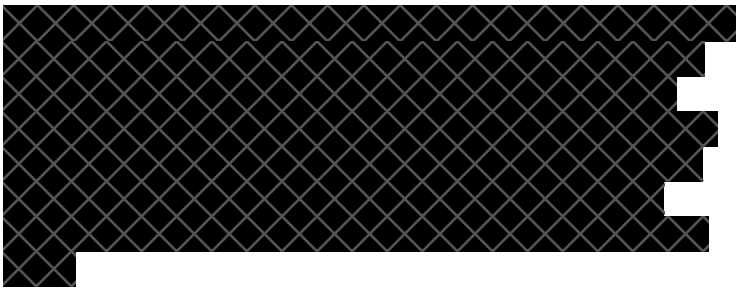

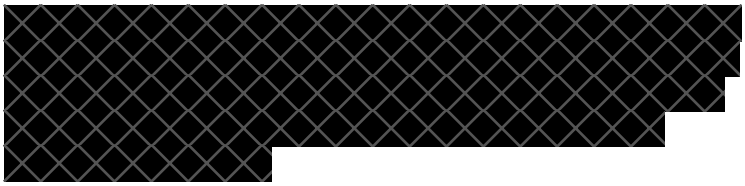

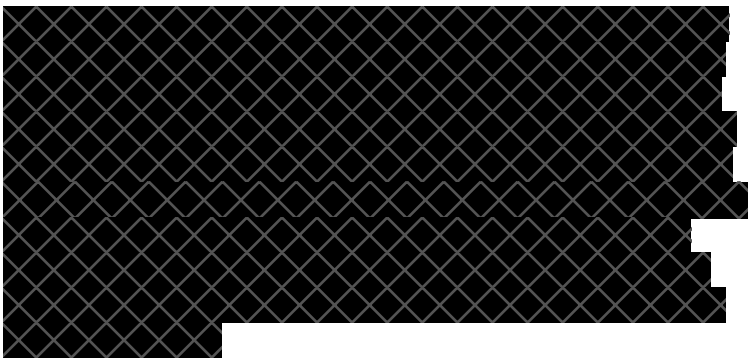

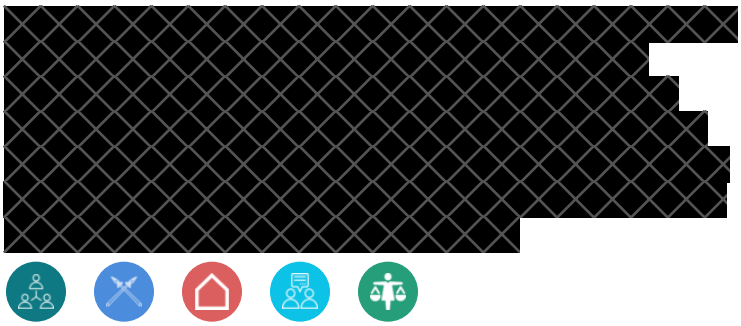

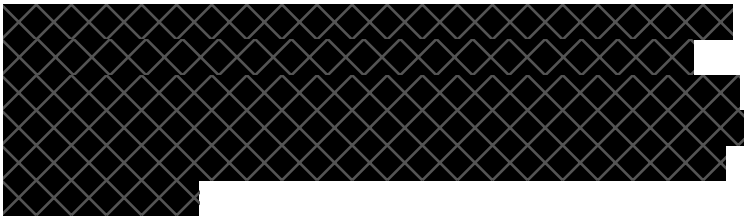

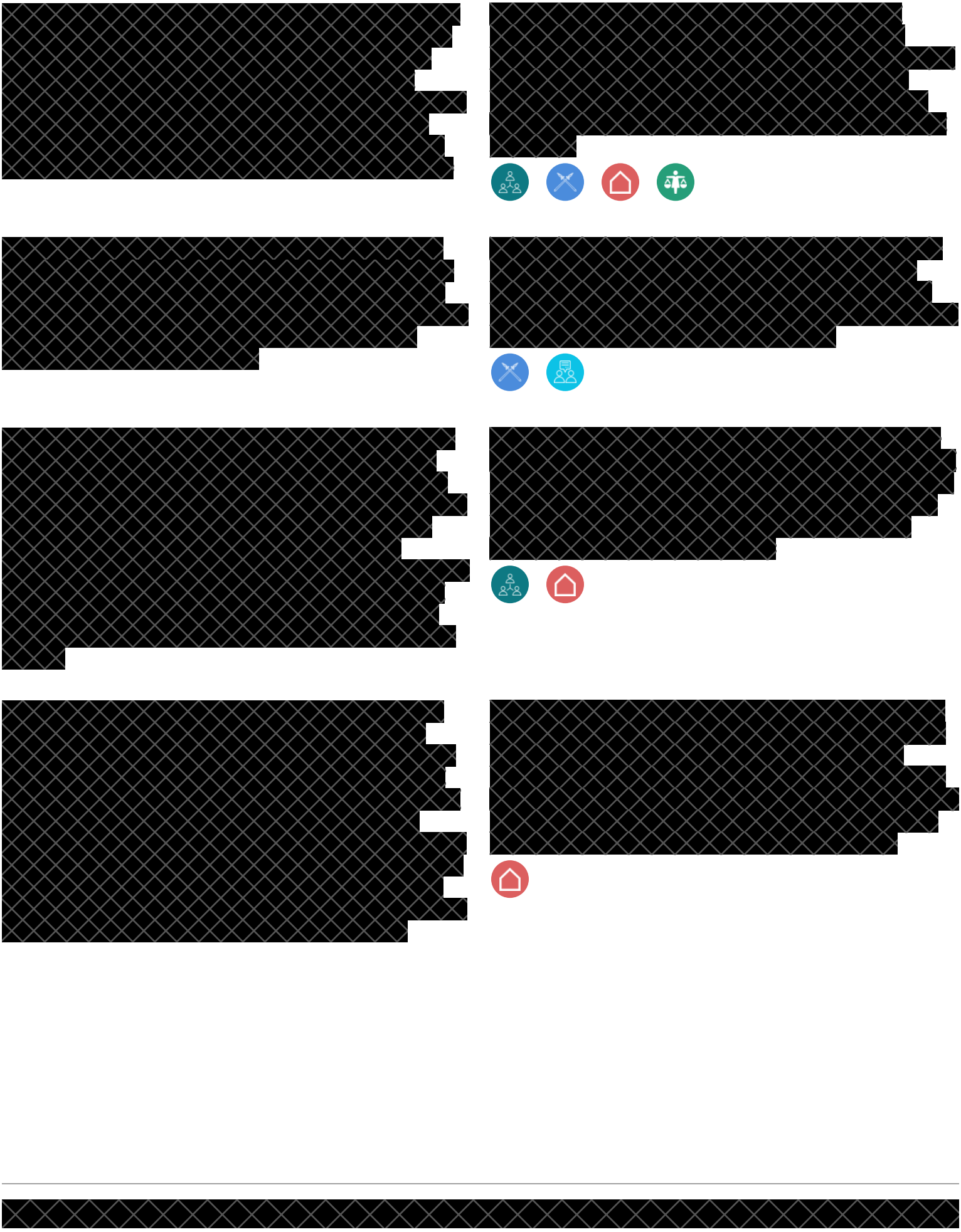

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