

Who Are the Maori?

Enduring Understandings:

- The Maori originally came from other islands and had to survive in a new land.
- Maori culture was essentially a warrior culture.
- Contact with the West changed Maori history and culture.
- Some contentions continue to this day between the Maori and people of European descent.

Essential Questions:

- Where did the Maori come from? How did they interact with their new environment?
- How did contact with the West change the Maori?
- In what ways were the European and Maori cultures different? In what ways were they similar?
- How can we understand someone whose worldview is very different from our own?

Notes to the Teacher:

While the study of the history of New Zealand brings up the well-known conquest of land and people by European explorers, it is important to recognize all the complexity of such an interaction of multiple peoples over many years. Maori (pronounced Maur'-ee) culture was essentially a warrior culture, as becomes clear in the film *Whale Rider*. The Europeans who reached New Zealand in the aggressive pursuit of empire also used military means and a very different technology to accomplish their goals. Across this cultural divide, people traded, carried out scientific observations, learned foreign languages, baffled each other, laughed at each other, stole from each other, made treaties, broke them, made war, wore themselves out, and made it into the modern age in better shape than many nations. With two essentially aggressive cultures meeting like that, it is amazing that they didn't fight with each other more than they did. The Maori lost land and power after the European settlers began to threaten their old way of life (a way of life which included the utter decimation or enslavement of their enemies).

Key words you will want to teach during this lesson are the geography terms *Oceania*, *Polynesia*, *Micronesia*, and *Melanesia* and the Maori words: *mana* (power/prestige), *utu* (revenge/retribution), *tapu* (taboo), and *marae* (open space in front of a temple or community building or *wharae*).

There is an excellent website called "100 Words Every New Zealander Should Know" at <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/Gallery/tereo/words.htm>.



This gives not only a definition but also a recorded pronunciation of many words used in the film and this unit.

Try to print **HANDOUTS 1** and **4** in color to increase legibility (**HANDOUT 1**) and help students understand color symbolism (**HANDOUT 4**). If you cannot reproduce these in color, try to print larger copies of the two flags to display in the classroom.

DURATION OF LESSON:

One or two periods

ASSESSMENT:

Journal entry

Skits

PMI worksheet

Class discussion



GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

Indicators addressed by this lesson:

STANDARD 3. Understands the characteristics and uses of spatial organization of Earth's surface

LEVEL III (GRADES 6-8)

1. Understands distributions of physical and human occurrences with respect to spatial patterns, arrangements, and associations (e.g., why some areas are more densely settled than others, relationships and patterns in the kind and number of links between settlements)

STANDARD 14. Understands how human actions modify the physical environment

LEVEL III (GRADES 6-8)

1. Understands the environmental consequences of people changing the physical environment (e.g., the effects of ozone depletion, climate change, deforestation, land degradation, soil salinization and acidification, ocean pollution, groundwater-quality decline, using natural wetlands for recreational and housing development)
3. Understands the ways in which technology influences the human capacity to modify the physical environment (e.g., effects of the introduction of fire, steam power, diesel machinery, electricity, work animals, explosives, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, hybridization of crops)

STANDARD 15. Understands how physical systems affect human systems

LEVEL III (GRADES 6-8)

1. Knows how humans adapt to variations in the physical environment (e.g., choices of clothing, housing styles, agricultural practices, recreational activities, food, daily and seasonal patterns of life)

BEHAVIORAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Indicators addressed by this lesson:

STANDARD 2. Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function

LEVEL III (GRADES 6-8)

5. Understands that a variety of factors (e.g., belief systems, learned behavior patterns) contribute to the ways in which groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and to 6. Understands how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture

STANDARD 4. Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions

LEVEL III (GRADES 6-8)

3. Understands how various institutions (e.g., banks, schools, hospitals, the military) influence people, events, and elements of culture and how people interact with different institutions
4. Understands how role, status, and social class may affect interactions of individuals and social groups
5. Understands how tensions might arise between expressions of individuality and group or institutional efforts to promote social conformity

Materials needed:

- Pen or pencil
- Notebook paper
- HANDOUTS 1 – 4**

Procedure:

ACTIVITY 1: Polynesia: Spread of a Culture

1. Give all your students a copy of **HANDOUT 1: THE MAP OF POLYNESIA.**
2. Geographical vocabulary: Have them circle the islands labeled “Micronesia” and “Melanesia.” Explain that the three sections of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia make up the region of Oceania, which includes some 20-30 thousand islands. These categories were adopted in the 1820s based on observations of physical and linguistic culture. If the root of these words “-nesia” means islands, what do these three words mean? (Before telling them that the Greek roots poly = many, micro = small, and melano = black, give hints by giving other words students might know with the same prefixes: polygon, polygamy, polytheism, microscope, microcosm, microwave, melanoma, melancholy.)
3. Explain that Polynesians from Hawaii to New Zealand all share a similar culture, including their language, physical characteristics, and mythology. For example, both Hawaiians and Maoris believe the god Maui created their islands by catching them on a fishhook and pulling them up from the sea. There have been various theories and lively debates about how people got to Oceania in the first place. Did they come from the direction of Asia, or from somewhere in South America?

Explain to students that the generally accepted theory now is that people came through Melanesia to the

western region of Samoa and Tonga, around 1200 BC. Over a long period of time they developed their own culture, and then they spread relatively quickly across all of the islands of Polynesia. Between 500 and 700 AD they spread to Hawaii, Tahiti, Easter and Cook Islands, and by 1300 they reached New Zealand.

4. Discussion: Ask the students why they think the Polynesians kept leaving everything they had at home (each one an island paradise) to go exploring for new islands. What was the risk? What was to be gained? (Overpopulation, disputes, and wars are all possible reasons; but these are not sufficient to explain the consistent and sustained amount of expeditions. Did they develop a love for adventure? Was part of their culture an intellectual curiosity about the world, pushing them to explore? Research shows the voyagers who reached New Zealand were young, and so it was a planned attempt at colonizing other islands. They brought tools, plants, and domestic animals. However, they did not make a return trip, and so they ended up isolated.)

5. Assignment: Journal Reflection. Give students the following assignment:

“Before the European empires were built, the Polynesians were the most widely dispersed racial group on earth. James Cook wrote in his journal in 1774, ‘It is extraordinary that the same Nation should have spread themselves over the isles in this vast Ocean from New Zealand to this island [Easter Is.] which is a fourth part the circumference of the globe.’ Brainstorm what you know about the Polynesian people, and what you can infer about them from their physical environment and accomplishments.”

ACTIVITY 2: Warrior Culture Among the Maori (*Mana, Tapu, and Utu*)

1. Explain to the class that they are going to do an improvised skit to illustrate the experience of being part of a Maori tribe. (Note to teacher: Depending on your class size and time available, you may want to walk through this as a whole class in one session, or you may divide the class into smaller groups, and have each group prepare its own skit.)
2. Divide the class, or the small groups, into two tribes. Name them North and South, Big and Little, Coastal and Inland, or another creative pair of opposites. Then explain to the groups the following rules and motivations.
 - a. You have many gods (polytheism) like the ancient Greeks did. You must keep them happy, by sacrificing to them to maintain the order of society. You build *wharae*, or temples, with open spaces called *marae* in front of them, where people come for religious ceremonies. Women, though normally subordinate to men, are the only ones who make the formal call to join at the *marae*. You have one chief and many commoners.
 - b. You want to get *mana*. *Mana* is power, prestige and respect, and could be affected by your actions or those of others. Like a member of a modern gang, if you are disrespected you lose face, and if you allow this, your authority will be undermined.
 - c. You must avoid what is *tapu* (taboo). Doing something *tapu* is strictly prohibited. Places and foods can be *tapu*, and different things are *tapu* for different classes of people. It is *tapu* to touch the

head of a chief, or his ornaments, weapons and clothes. In some islands it is *tapu* for a woman to get into a canoe.

- d. Not only do you want to increase your *mana*, but disturbances in the order of things require *utu* to restore the balance so the gods won't be upset. *Utu* is payback or revenge. For smaller offenses like thefts or insults plunder of property is accepted. For serious offenses payback could be deadly. Of course that would require its own revenge, and because you may take *utu* on anyone in the offending tribe, not just the individual who committed the offense, your cycle of revenge will continue.
3. Give students time to write a skit based on these concepts.
4. Have each group perform its skit.
5. Discuss: Given these basic concepts, how often did the skits end in full scale war? Why?

ACTIVITY 3: Evaluation of historical events.

1. Provide the students with copies of **HANDOUT 2: PLUS-MINUS-INTERESTING** sheet and **HANDOUT 3: MAORI HISTORICAL EVENTS**.
2. Read through the list of events together with them, and then have them fill in **HANDOUT 2** individually. Have them write the names of the events in the first column, something that is positive about that event in the second, something negative in the third, and something that is interesting in the fourth column. (Note to teacher: PMI is a creative thinking tool that causes people to think from multiple points of view.

Not only does it stretch them to see both a pro and con side to each idea or event, but then the third column “Interesting” allows them to go beyond pro and con to see farther reaching consequences, hidden analogies, and possible connections.)

3. Depending upon your time, you may have a discussion with the whole class about their observations while making the chart, or split them into small groups to let more of them share their ideas with each other, or you may simply collect the charts and assess them.

ACTIVITY 4: The New Zealand and Maori Flags

1. Explain to the class that over the years after the Treaty of Waitangi, Maori were often treated as second-class citizens in their own land. Some were cheated and lost their land. Their status in terms of education, wealth, and health statistics fell relative to the New Zealanders of European descent. In recent years, there has been a tremendous interest in reviving Maori culture, including language studies.
2. Give students copies of **HANDOUT 4: TWO FLAGS FROM NEW ZEALAND**. Have them read the information about the history and symbolism of the official national flag of New Zealand.
3. Ask them: If you were one of the people trying to promote Maori culture, how would you feel about this flag?
4. Now have them look at the Maori flag and read about the Maori symbolism that appears on it.
5. Explain that they are soon going to see a film about two people who care very much about the future of

the Maori people. One is an older man, a chief named Koro. The second is his granddaughter, Paikea or Pai. They have very different ideas, though, about how this future should be accomplished.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

1. Read *Kon-Tiki* by Thor Heyerdahl. Because of the existence of the sweet potato (a food native to America) on Polynesian islands, he developed a theory that Polynesians migrated from South America rather than Southeast Asia. In 1955 he built a raft in South America and floated across the Pacific to some of the easternmost islands in Polynesia. It was an amazing adventure and accomplishment. Does this *prove* that Polynesians originally came from the South American continent? (It shows the possibility, but that is itself not proof. The overwhelming bulk of Polynesian foods come from Southeast Asia; their language is in the same family – Austronesian – as that of their neighbors, and so most scholars still believe they came from the west, not the east.)
2. Compare tribal warfare with the gang rivalries in the news, such as the Bloods and the Crips, or with the drama *West Side Story*. Or compare to a family feud, such as the one Shakespeare made famous in *Romeo and Juliet*. (To tie this to the modern gangs, see the version set in California with Leonardo DiCaprio.) For more mature students, compare to international relations, with border and territory disputes, ethnic wars and genocide, and carefully worded statements aimed at saving face.

3. Essay questions:

- a. What key traits characterize Maori culture?
How are the Maori similar to other Polynesians?
- b. How was their history affected fundamentally by outsiders?
- c. Why did they finally welcome the Treaty of Waitangi?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

A. Print Materials (books, magazine articles, etc.)

Chambers, John H. *A Traveller's History of New Zealand and the South Pacific Islands* (New York: Interlink Books, 2004)

Stafford, D. M. *Introducing Maori Culture*. (New Zealand: Reed Publishing, 1997)

B. Internet Resources

<http://www.pbs.org/wayfinders/polynesian.html>

An extensive and well-researched website on the Polynesian migrations and culture

http://www.nzbooks.com/nzbooks/author.asp?author_id=witiihimaera

A list of additional books by Witi Ihimaera

<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/refpages/RefMedia.aspx?refid=461533002>

Hear an authentic Maori chant

<http://www.maori.org.nz/>

An extensive collection of Maori cultural links

<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/Gallery/tereo/words.htm>

A glossary of Maori words with pronunciation audiofiles

<http://history-nz.org/maori.html>

A history of the Maori from prehistoric times

HANDOUT 1

Polynesia



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HANDOUT 3 ► P.1 Events in Maori History

- 1. Adapting to the Environment. AD 1300.** New Zealand has a much different environment from the one the early Maori had known. (Imagine the warm, lush tropical climate of Hawaii or Tahiti and then compare that to the landscape in the film *The Lord of the Rings*, which was shot in New Zealand.) The differences found by the Maori affected plant life (some of their plants would not survive in the temperate climate), trees (New Zealand had taller and stronger trees than tropical trees, so Maori could make even more amazing ocean canoes), houses (they needed walled houses rather than open-sided ones), and clothes (they needed to fashion more clothing). They had no words for the snow that covered the mountains or the lakes in the middle of the islands.
- 2. Affecting the Environment. AD 1300-1500.** The early Maori in turn affected the environment they found. It was rich with fish and shellfish, sea lions, and moa birds. These large flightless birds, cousin to the emu and ostrich, evolved together with a large eagle that was their only predator, and they lived in a balance. The birds were so plentiful that the Maori had the nickname of moa hunters. But they wasted the moa, killing the birds and their eggs in much greater number than was necessary. By 1500 moas were scarce, and sometime in the 1500s the moa became extinct. This caused their predator, the great eagle, to vanish as well. Maori also hunted the sea lions there to extinction. Loss of these protein sources made life much harder, and there were times of famine.
- 3. First Contact. AD 1642.** Abel Janszoon Tasman, a Dutch sea captain, came upon the northern part of the South Island of New Zealand. Maoris attacked their small landing craft and killed several Dutch sailors. Tasman named the island after the province Zeeland in the Netherlands.
- 4. Second Contact. AD 1769.** The British Captain James Cook came to New Zealand looking for a Southern Continent that Europeans thought was somewhere in the South Pacific. By circling and mapping New Zealand, and sailing farther south, he showed there was no other large continent out there. But he sparked interest in New Zealand.
- 5. White Potato. AD 1769.** Captain James Cook introduced the white potato, which solved the Maori food problem. It grew earlier and with less careful attention than the more common sweet potato. One writer even says, "It is likely that the introduction of the white potato by early European explorers such as Cook saved many Maori from starvation." (Chambers 76)

HANDOUT 3 ► P. 2

6. **Whaling and Seal Ships. AD 1800s.** Increasingly whaling ships and seal hunters visited the island, and Maori coastal tribes worked cutting timber, loading ships, and even sailing in whalers. Food and services were traded for blankets, knives, and any iron tools, which were valued by the Maori.
7. **Musket Wars. AD 1818-1840.** Trade allowed Maori to get cheap muskets from Westerners, and muskets allowed the warriors more powerful ways to get *mana*. However, this made their tribal warfare more deadly than ever. During these decades of fighting, tens of thousands of Maori died, possibly a third to a half of the total Maori population.
8. **Destruction of the Moriori. AD 1835.** Perhaps 400 years earlier a group of early Maoris sailed to the Chatham Islands, 500 miles south of New Zealand. Later known as the Moriori, they had lost contact with New Zealand until Maori sailing on European ships found out about them. They had developed a peaceful hunting and gathering society, and controlled their population to prevent famine. In 1835 two tribes of Maori sailed there to escape the Musket Wars. The Moriori had no warrior tradition, and no real weapons, so they offered to share the islands peacefully. But the Maori attacked, killed many and took others prisoner, according to their warrior tradition. It is estimated the Moriori population went from 1600 to about 160.
9. **Treaty of Waitangi. AD 1840.** Tired of their own wars, and vulnerable to the increasing number (now thousands) of European settlers, many Maori chiefs signed the Treaty of Waitangi with Captain William Hobson of the British Navy. It gave Britain sovereignty or control over New Zealand in exchange for providing law and order, and protecting all Maori rights, including property rights.



HANDOUT 4 Two Flags From New Zealand



The modern New Zealand flag was adopted in 1902. The flag is based on the British blue ensign flag, which has the Union Jack (the flag of Great Britain) in the upper left-hand corner; the New Zealand flag adds four red stars laid out in the pattern of the Southern Cross. The traditional flag measures twice as wide as it is high.



In 1990, a contest was held to create a Maori flag. The winning flag (above) has colors representing Maori beliefs:

- **BLACK** represents the darkness from which the earth came and is associated with *Rangi*, the god of the sky.
- **RED** represents coming into being and symbolizes *Papatuanuku*, the earth-mother.
- **WHITE** represents the realm of being and light, the physical world, purity, harmony, enlightenment and balance. The white is in the shape of a curling fern frond, representing the unfolding of new life. It also symbolizes a white cloud rolling across the face of the land; the Maori name for New Zealand is *Aotearoa* (“Land of the long white cloud”).