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FOLKLORE & LANGUAGE

MAORI LEGENDS

New Zealand is made up of the North, South, and Stewart Islands. One Maori legend tells of Maui [mao-ee], an adventurous and resourceful demigod who pulled up the North Island of New Zealand from the bottom of the ocean with his fishing pole. Maui’s canoe became the South Island and his anchor became Stewart Island. Although these legends about Maui are fictional, they embody the true nature of New Zealanders, who are adventurous, resourceful, and sea-loving.

Starting Points

1. Look at the map of New Zealand. Do the islands that make up New Zealand look like anything more than islands to you? How would you creatively explain how New Zealand’s island chain was created? One storyteller thought these islands resembled a fish, a canoe, and an anchor.

2. How does the geography of the United States influence its culture? How does the geography of the United States affect the culture of its different regions? New Zealand’s geography impacts its culture. The impact of geography is illustrated in the Maori legends about Maui.

3. Maori legends, to some, might only be interesting fictional stories; however, when studied closely, we see that the legends depict the adventurous and resourceful nature of the people. As you study the legends of Maui and Kupe, think about how they reflect characteristics of New Zealanders.

Information

The Legends of Maui and Kupe

Legends of Maui explain the creation of New Zealand, and the legend of Kupe [coo-pay] explains how the Maori first arrived in the islands. Maui is a well known Maori demigod. Kupe is considered the first person to discover New Zealand, and his descendants were the first settlers of the islands. Stories about Maui and Kupe are important to the people of New Zealand, and they portray characteristics that are typical of New Zealanders today.

Maui Fishes up the North Island

One day Maui’s brothers, who were jealous of him, decided they were going to go fishing without telling Maui. But Maui discovered their plan and hid himself in his brothers’ waka [wa-kah], or canoe, because he was determined to go fishing with them. Soon after Maui hid, his brothers paddled out to sea.

After paddling a short time, the brothers found what they thought was a good place to fish, but Maui did not think the spot they had chosen was good enough. So Maui boldly jumped up from his hiding place and demanded that they find a different spot.
His brothers were shocked and displeased to see Maui, but they obeyed his order to find a better fishing spot. When the sun began to set on the ocean, they still had not found a spot to fish, and because Maui’s brothers were tired, they slept. Maui kept paddling the waka while his brothers slept.

The next morning Maui’s brothers were grumpy and would not give Maui a hook or bait. Maui struck himself on the nose and used his blood as bait. He did not have a hook either, so Maui took out the magical jawbone that had belonged to his ancestor, smeared his blood onto the jawbone, and tied it to his line. He cast the jawbone out into the sea.

Immediately, Maui hooked something very large. As he heaved on the line with all his strength, the ocean bottom began to rumble. Maui chanted karakia [kah-rah-key-ah], or prayers, as he called for the great fish to rise. The fish fought against Maui’s karakia and his pulls, for it knew that the sea was its home. But Maui braced himself and pulled harder against the fish, until he finally pulled the great fish to the surface. The fish’s tail stretched to the north, and his head lay far in the south. Maui said to his brothers, “Do not touch the fish until I get back. I must get my hook.”

But Maui’s brothers did not listen. While he went to get his hook, his brothers hacked up the fish, each one trying to get his share of it. Because of their hacking, the fish soon resembled a mass of valleys, ranges, and hills (see Folklore & Language Visual 1).

The fish’s body, as legend describes, became North Island of New Zealand. Maui’s canoe is said to be the South Island, and the canoe’s anchor is Stewart Island. As you look at a map of New Zealand (see Map of New Zealand), notice that the North Island resembles a fish with its head facing south. With a little more imagination, you can see that the elongated rectangular shape of the South Island resembles a canoe. Stewart Island, below South Island, resembles a canoe anchor.

**Kupe and Ngahue**

Through oral history, the Maori have also kept alive the story of New Zealand’s discovery. According to tradition, Kupe and his friend Ngahue [na-hoo-ay] first discovered New Zealand. Kupe and Ngahue were natives of Hawaiki [ha-wa-ee-key], the ancestral homeland of the Maori. They wanted to explore what was beyond their homeland, so they left Hawaiki in two wakas. Kupe brought his wife with him. One day while they were exploring, Kupe’s wife called out, for she saw a large white cloud lying close to the surface of the water over an island.

The island that they had discovered was New Zealand, and they called it Aotearoa [ah-oh-tay-aroe-ah], which means “land of the long white cloud.” After collecting a few things from the island, Kupe, his wife, and Ngahue returned to Hawaiki; they never returned to Aotearoa. Many years later, Kupe’s descendants returned and settled in Aotearoa in order to escape wars on Hawaiki.

Research done at Massey University (in New Zealand) on Maori DNA has confirmed that this history of coming from Hawaiki is possible because various Polynesian peoples (Maori, Hawaiians, and Samoans) have similar DNA, and these cultures trace their ancestry to a place with a name similar to Hawaiki.
An Ocean People
New Zealand is surrounded by the South Pacific Ocean, and as a result, New Zealanders have developed remarkable skills as sailors, similar to those that Maui and his brothers had. Even Kupe’s initial discovery of New Zealand required skilled seamanship. The Maori people were very gifted at using the stars of the southern sky to navigate the South Pacific.

Today people race against each other in canoes or outriggers in annual competitive regattas, or boat races (see Folklore & Language Visuals 2 and 3). These regattas continue the traditions and the culture of the Maori whose seamanship contributed to the discovery of New Zealand. Most New Zealanders also utilize their easy access to the ocean; they are heavily involved in fishing, yachting, surfing, and diving. This love for the ocean is one of the reasons that New Zealand is one of only two countries (the other country being the United States) to consecutively win the America’s Cup, which is the oldest yachting competition in the world. New Zealand won the America’s Cup in 1995, and then returned to defend their title by winning again in 2000. Even when New Zealand lost to Switzerland in 2003, the Swiss team’s helmsman, Russell Coutts, and tactician, Brad Butterworth, were both New Zealanders.

An Adventurous People
In the legend of New Zealand’s origin, Maui’s brothers cut up the big fish, creating many valleys and hills. Mainland New Zealand is full of magnificent mountains, breathtaking lakes and fjords, and picturesque landscapes. This beautiful environment makes New Zealand a place for adventure. Hiking, skiing, snowboarding, surfing, mountain biking, canoeing, mountain climbing, snorkeling, and bungee jumping are only some of the extreme activities New Zealanders love. It is no wonder that bungee jumping was first made popular in New Zealand (see Folklore & Language Visual 4) or that Sir Edmund Hillary, the first person to climb Mount Everest, is from New Zealand.

A Resourceful People
Maui’s resourcefulness was evident when he struck himself on the nose and smeared his blood onto the magic jawbone of his ancestor. In New Zealand, the term for resourcefulness is “kiwi ingenuity.” This is a nickname that comes from the national bird, the kiwi, a bird that cannot fly but can still outrun a human. Kiwis are native only to New Zealand. They first became a symbol for New Zealanders in the nineteenth century, when New Zealand military groups wore depictions of the bird on their regimental badges (see Folklore & Language Visual 5). The kiwi continues to symbolize New Zealanders today. People such as Morton Coutts (who invented the continuous fermentation beer system) and Peter Witehira (who doubled the life of the car battery) are examples of New Zealanders with kiwi ingenuity.

A.J. Hackett, another man with kiwi ingenuity, earned a name for himself and for New Zealand when he jumped off the Eiffel Tower using a rubber cord in 1987. Despite being immediately arrested by the French police, Hackett later started a bungee jumping business in Queenstown, New Zealand. Soon after, other entrepreneurs from all over the world copied Hackett’s idea, and today bungee jumping is an international sport.
Rugby is another sport in which kiwi ingenuity has flourished. In 1905, the All Blacks impressed the established European rugby teams with their innovative playing methods. Since then, the team has continued to build a reputation for itself, earning great respect for New Zealand.

Activities

1. Have a kiwi ingenuity invention fair. Invent something and display it at the kiwi science fair (see Folklore & Language Visual 6).

2. Research the America’s Cup. In small groups, prepare a five minute news segment about the competition. In your segment, highlight New Zealand’s victories in 1995 and 2000. Find pictures or video clips to present in your segment, and include at least one interview (e.g., New Zealand’s helmsman). To prepare your segment, consider these questions: When did the America’s Cup begin? How does a country enter the competition? How is the competition run? What is the significance of winning the America’s Cup? Who did New Zealand defeat in 1995? In 2000? How did New Zealand win the America’s Cup?

3. Create a fictitious continent or island by drawing, painting, or sculpting a model. Write a legend explaining its geography. Share your continent or island and the story of its creation with your class in a short presentation.

4. Watch the movie Whale Rider (see Additional Resources). How does the legend of Paikea compare to the legends of Maui? What examples of kiwi ingenuity do you notice in Whale Rider? How does the ocean influence Maori culture?

5. Play the game “Kiwi Ingenuity” and create your own game cards (see Folklore & Language Visual 7).

Discussion Questions

1. Imagine you lived in the days of American colonization. In groups, discuss how you would prepare to move west. What would you use to orient yourself? What provisions would you have to take? How could you use inland waterways to travel? Would explorers in New Zealand have used the same methods?

2. Choose one region within the United States, and explain how its geography influences the activities, skills, and characteristics of the people who live there. How do these geographic influences compare to the geographic influences that affect New Zealand?

3. How do the characteristics of people differ from region to region in the United States? How does geography influence this? How do differences among people throughout the United States compare to differences between people in the United States and New Zealand? What do your findings say about the similarities and differences from region to region compared to differences from nation to nation?

4. How do people integrate cultural legends into real life? Discuss specific examples.
5. the legends of Maui were originally passed on through oral storytelling. Modern technologies have created new ways of telling stories. What could be considered modern-day folklore? Which modern folktales are your favorites? Consider the influence of television, radio, and cinema on storytelling. How does modern folklore reflect the people of today? How does folklore from the United States and New Zealand compare?

6. New Zealanders use the geography of the land for such activities as bungee jumping and mountain climbing. Have you ever used your surroundings when creating or participating in a physical activity? Based on the local geography, discuss what types of activities or sports could be created or practiced in the area where you live.
FACTS ABOUT NEW ZEALAND

Official Name: New Zealand
Capital: Wellington
Government Type: parliamentary democracy
Area: 268,680 sq km
Land Boundaries: coastline 15,134 km
Climate: temperate with sharp regional contrasts
Lowest Point: Pacific Ocean 0 m
Highest Point: Aoraki [ah-oh-rah-key] (Mount Cook) 3,754 m
Natural Resources: natural gas, iron ore, sand, coal, timber, hydropower, gold, limestone
Natural Hazards: earthquakes are common, though usually not severe; volcanic activity
Population: 4,115,771 (July 2007 est.)
Ethnic Groups: European 69.8%, Maori 7.9%, Asians 5.7%, Pacific Islander 4.4%, others .5%, mixed 7.8%, unspecified 3.8% (2001)
Religions: Anglican 14.9%, Roman Catholic 12.4%, Presbyterian 10.9%, Methodist 2.9%, Pentecostal 1.7%, Baptist 1.3%, other Christian 9.4%, other 3.3%, unspecified 17.2%, none 26% (2001)
Languages: English and Maori and sign language (all are official)
GDP: $106 billion (2006 est.)
GDP Per Capita: $26,000 (2006 est.)
GDP Composition by Sector: agriculture: 4.3%; industry: 26.9%; services: 68.8% (2006 est.)

Labor Force: 2.18 million (2006 est.)
Unemployment Rate: 3.8% (2006 est.)
Industries: food processing, wood and paper products, textiles, machinery, transportation equipment, banking and insurance, tourism, mining
Agricultural Products: wheat, barley, potatoes, pulses, fruits, vegetables, wool, beef, lamb, mutton, dairy products, fish
Exports: $23.69 billion (2006 est.) dairy products, meat, wood and wood products, fish, machinery
Imports: $25.23 billion (2006 est.) machinery and equipment, vehicles and aircraft, petroleum, electronics, textiles, plastics
Trade Partners: Australia, U.S., Japan, China, Germany, U.K.
Currency: New Zealand dollar (NZD)
Exchange Rate: $1.54 NZD = $1 U.S. (2006)