

**Intended for Grades:** 4-12 **Estimated Time:** 60 -75 min.

**Lesson Title: 'AHA – Working Together**

Adapted from *Ka Hana 'Imi Na'auao – A Science Careers Curriculum* found at:  
<https://cds.coe.hawaii.edu/growingponoschools/culture-%ca%bbaina-based-curriculum/>

**Lesson Purpose:** Students will:

- Learn a way of leadership in Hawai'i before the *ali'i* system of governance
- Create an 'Aha where each *aho* has meaningful representation
- Apply understanding of 'Aha to support health and well being for individuals & groups

**Materials & Preparation:**

- \* Reading entitled *The 'Aha (See below)*
- \* Cord for weaving: (2mm rattail cord works well) - Estimate 24" pieces; 4 pieces for each person (*use two colors if possible*)
- \* Key ring circles – 1 per student (or any other type of fastener)  
(*Supplies available at craft stores and on line*)
- \* 'Aha Weave Instructions (See Lesson Resource)
- \* Completed 'Aha Cord as example

**Before teaching this lesson:**

Decide the best way for you to facilitate this lesson. You can find a guest cultural resource specialist who can teach students how to weave an 'aha rope; learn how to do the weave beforehand yourself; or find students, a friend, or parents who might want to learn how to make an 'aha by watching the video and using instructions on the "How to Weave 'Aha" Handout.

**Background Information:**

This concept of Hawaiian governance stresses that those promoted to be a leader were not only highly skilled in their area of expertise, but they also were *pono* in their daily life. The strength of the 'Aha is in the combining of the individual smaller cords.

**Steps:**

1. Introduce lesson by showing students an 'aha cord and asking them to describe what they see. Explain that this 'aha represents a traditional Hawaiian way of caring for each other and the land.
2. Ask students to think how they might tie this old tradition that they are going to learn about to current times.
3. Distribute the 'aha handout; read and discuss information via small groups or any way appropriate for your students. Invite the class to discuss the following:
  - a. *What were the benefits of the 'Aha Council in historical times?*
  - b. *What group of people do you know of who are like an 'Aha?*
  - c. *Why do you think an 'AHA is so much stronger than an AHO?*
  - d. *What could you weave together to create something strong that will support the well-being and health of yourself or others?*

4. Show the video entitled 'Aha (Council), available on the *Pono Campaign* website ([www.growingponoschools.com](http://www.growingponoschools.com)) (Note: A fuller understanding is shared in the video "A Mau A Mau". (See resources below.)
5. Debrief the video by discussing what students learned and how this concept might be relevant in life today.
6. Choose a focus for students so they can think about what they want each *aho* to represent as they weave their 'aha. This analogy can be applied to a variety of concepts, including the following ideas:
  - a. Students pick 8 values they want to live by, one per *Aho*, and they weave together this rope or 'Aha to help remember these guiding principles.
  - b. The group identifies 8 "elements" important to having a *pono* school (I.e.: dedicated leaders, caring teachers; interested students; supportive parents; active community partners; abundant resources, etc.) These are woven together to represent their vision.
  - c. Using health of the school or health of individuals as the focus, the group names 8 different positive actions they can promote at their school to make it healthier, or 8 elements that sustain life and help people stay healthy (air, water, exercise, food, etc.).
  - d. Students think of goals, dreams, and who will support them (total of 8). These ideas and people then become an *aho* of their 'aha.
7. Demonstrate how to weave an 'aha. Simultaneously talk about the things you are having each *aho* represent. (Beforehand, learn how yourself, ask a student to learn, or find a guest who can do this; See Lesson Resource "How to Weave 'Aha")
8. Distribute a ring and four strings to each person. Ask participants to partner up and have one person hold the ring while the other weaves. Students who catch on quickly can be asked to help others. Encourage discussion between partners about what each *Aho* represents.
9. Brainstorm any project or activity the group can do to share this concept of 'Aha.
10. Review big idea of the 'Aha and what students might find important to remember. See reflection questions below.

**Reflection Questions:**

- \* What did you learn about the way Hawaiians of old were leaders in their communities?
- \* How can the 'AHA help you remember important ideas?

**Resources:**

*A Mau A Mau -To Continue Forever*: DVD with Kumu John Ka'imikaua: 50 minute video features John Kaimikaua, Hawaiian culture expert from Molokai, "talking story" about past traditions. View one segment at: [www.growingponoschools.com](http://www.growingponoschools.com) as well as in the Unit 1 video 'Aha (Council) on the DVD for the *Ka Hana 'Imi Na'auao* curriculum.

To purchase a DVD: Cost \$30 Contact: Ka'ana Kapu [dion.dizon@gmail.com](mailto:dion.dizon@gmail.com)  
808 291-2626 92-119 Puliko Place Kapolei, HI 96707

### The 'Aha

*(Information adapted from Ka Hana 'Imi Na'auao -  
A Science Careers Curriculum found at:*

<https://cde.hawaii.edu/growingponoschools/culture-%ca%bbaina-based-curriculum/>)

Before the arrival of the ali'i, the people of Hawai'i governed themselves with 'Aha (councils). Each island was divided into moku (districts). For example, on Moloka'i, there were 4 moku: Kaluako'i, Pala'au, Kawela, and Ko'olau. Each moku formed and set up their own 'Aha to meet the needs of that particular moku.

One practice which linked all of the 'Aha of each island involved choosing practitioners to sit on the councils. These 'Aha of experts used their knowledge to preserve and manage the natural resources of the land. This helped the people produce more food for the living, and for the generations unborn.

#### *Life Under The 'Aha*

The people governed themselves under the 'Aha for 700 years before the arrival of the ali'i during the ending of the 9th century. After the first 7 generations under the 'Aha, war was unheard of amongst all families - peace was established. After 16 generations passed from the time the first 'Aha were established, there was no manufacture of weapons, no knowledge of war. Under the 'Aha, society was so proficient the needs of all the people were provided for - there were no rich, no poor, everyone had enough food and materials for housing, and everyone lived upon the land in peace.

Because of the 'Aha, the people were able to progress, expanding their knowledge and abilities in farming and fishing and connecting spiritually with the things of the 'āina. They traveled and visited each other's 'Aha for religious, spiritual, and educational exchanges. In this way they gained knowledge and learned from each other in order to better help the people of their moku. Ideas and knowledge were exchanged many times, all of it through speaking, listening, practice and remembering.

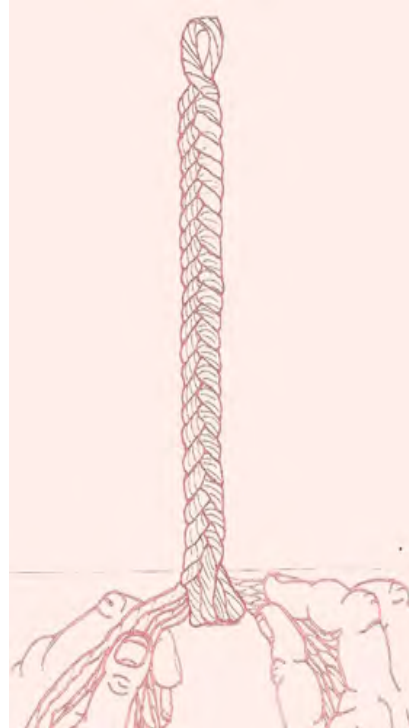
The land and people flourished greatly. After the first 300 years or so, the population of all islands grew immensely. This affected the guidance of the 'Aha in each moku. So, all the 'Aha gathered together again in Moloka'i to devise a plan to better provide for the people. They decided that each moku should be divided into ahupua'a, each having its own 'Aha of practitioners who lived in that ahupua'a. In this way, total control of each ahupua'a was decided upon by the people living there. The only time moku 'Aha were called upon was when a decision affected all the ahupua'a in that moku.

### *Concept of the 'Aha*

'Aha is also the word used for a type of woven cord. The ancients chose the woven cord as a symbol of the 'Aha because it teaches all of us the pono (appropriate) way and the function of the ancient 'Aha.

When Hawaiians take the bark of the 'olonā, prepare it, and weave it into a single cord, that single cord is called an aho. When they take the single cord and join it with other aho and begin to weave a stronger cord, that cord that is woven of many aho is called an 'aha.

This is highly significant in the mana'o of our kūpuna because the aho used in the 'aha cord represent each expert sitting on the 'Aha Council. An expert of fishing, with his expertise, is like a single strand of aho. A healer is like a single strand of aho. One who studies the land is a single strand of aho. One who researches water preservation, forest preservation, architecture, astronomy - each of these people, all these experts - are like individual aho.



When each expert is brought into an 'aha they weave their expertise together. This combining of expertise together has one purpose: to help to preserve the lands and those things which sustain life for the community. This prepares the way spiritually for the land to flourish physically.

In this way, the resources on the land, and the land, become pono (righteous). When both the land and the people flourish - when there is abundant food and many descendants - then the concept of 'Aha has been understood. Today, experts are sometimes called together to manage resources, but this is usually done through government and/or private or business groups.

## How to Weave 'Aha

**'Aha** - 1. rope woven from many cords

- 2. a council of experts

**Aho** - a single strand of a rope

1. Loop 2 strings of equal length through a key ring & lay them flat as 8 aho or cords (4 on each side)



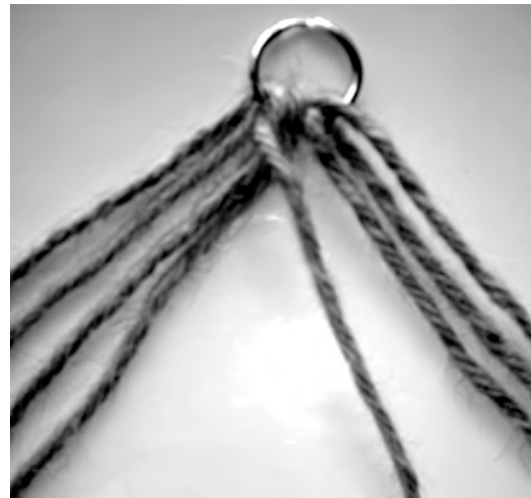
2. Take the outside aho under the other 3 aho on that side ...



3. Take the same aho under the 1<sup>st</sup> two aho on the opposite side ...



4. Pull this aho over the inside 2 cords on the opposite side, then lay this aho on the inside row on the same side it started from.



Be sure to pull the cords tight as you weave each step so the 'aha will be strong!



Name:

Class:

5. Repeat steps 1-4 for the outside aho on the other side. Work from one side to the other repeating these steps.



6. As you weave, a box-like pattern will emerge in the 'aha. When you are done, simply tie off the ends (you may want to burn them or dip them in wax to prevent unwinding).



TIPS:

Try to keep 4 aho in each hand to prevent making errors.

Using different colors may help you keep the aho organized, and it will create a unique pattern!



Ask a friend to hold your key ring as you work, or loop it around your toe or other object that will stay in place.

Bonus Question: Why do you think Hawaiians used the same word for a rope and a council? What is important about this metaphor?