

Intended for Grades: 4-6 Est. Time: 45-60 min.

Lesson Title: TAKE CARE OF THE WATER - Mālama I Ka Wai

Lesson Purpose: Students will:

- Learn why Wai (water) is at the core of Hawaiian culture and the ahupua'a

Materials & Preparation:

Wai/Ahupua'a reading - See below

Ahupua'a diagram (See Lesson Resource, black/white & color); make B & W copies for each student

Steps:

1. Project the ahupua'a diagram and ask haumana if they know what the name of this land division is from the mountains to the sea. (Ahupua'a) Ask students to share anything they know about an ahupua'a or observe on the picture. Make sure the water flowing in the center is mentioned.

2. Read the Ahupua'a information below as a whole class or in small groups. Discuss information shared.

3. Pass out the ahupua'a diagram to each student and place one on the overhead. Go over the terms: ahupua'a, kahawai, 'auwai, loko 'ia. Invite students to color their ahupua'a diagram during this discussion.

ahupua'a – Land division usually extending from the mountains to the sea.

kahawai – stream

'auwai – ditch, canal

loko i'a – fishpond

waiwai – wealth, valuables

lo'i kalo – wetland taro patch

Teachers note: For older grades, share about Hawaiian's struggles over water rights, as wai was diverted to other communities instead of into their lo'i kalo. Use these sites:

<https://ecotippingpoints.org/our-stories/indepth/usa-hawaii-waiahole-ditch-water-restoration.html>

<https://heeianerr.org/restoration/>

<https://www.civilbeat.org/2022/03/a-struggle-over-water-lawmakers-push-to-protect-kalo-cultivation/>

Reflection Questions

* What might happen if the heavens didn't weep (rain)? Would we have life?

* What can we do to help preserve wai for the future?

Resources:

Illustration of an Ahupua'a by Robin Y. Racoma - From the Mountains to the Sea - Early Hawaiian Life by Julie S. Williams, 1997, 177 p. Published by Kamehameha Schools Press, Honolulu, HI. Courtesy of Kamehameha Schools.

IMPORTANCE OF WAI (WATER) IN HAWAIIAN CULTURE/AHUPUA'A

From the earliest days, streams (wai) were one of the most important natural resources for native Hawaiians. Battles were fought and lives sacrificed for the right to use fresh stream water. Fresh water was considered to be sacred. People using wai from streams took only what they needed, without selfishness. Water was so valuable to our ancestors that the word waiwai meant wealth and abundance.

Native communities were arranged in land divisions called ahupua'a, which were sections of land from mauka to makai (mountain to the sea). Streams would begin up in mountain forests, flow into the plains or flatter land, and then empty out to sea. These streams provided the people living in the ahupua'a their wealth. Streams allowed certain mountain plants to grow and flourish. These plants provided the material for native Hawaiians to produce medicine, build canoes, and make nets and fishing lines.

In these plains, ancient Hawaiians used the wai from the streams to grow their food crops. They constructed ditches called 'auwai to divert water to fields where taro, banana, breadfruit, sugarcane, sweet potatoes, and yams grew. Taro, or kalo, was one of the most important food plants used by native Hawaiians. It was carefully cultivated in flooded fields called lo'i kalo. These lo'i kalo required continuously flowing wai from streams in order to grow. After watering their crops, Hawaiians allowed the excess wai to return to the streams. This practice allowed others downstream to also use the wai to irrigate their plants. Often at the shoreline and close to the mouth of streams, Hawaiians built fishponds called loko 'ia. In these fishponds, certain kinds of fish, crabs, shrimps, and seaweeds thrived in the mixture of fresh and ocean water, called brackish water. At one time there were some 300 loko 'ia in Hawaii, which supplied plenty of fish to sustain our ancestors.

As you now see, wai played an extremely important role in the lives of ancient Hawaiians. Great care was taken not to pollute the wai that flowed down from mountains through the valleys and out to sea. Without clean and ample free flowing streams in ahupua'a, native plants and animals could not have survived. Without these plants and animals, native Hawaiians could not thrive. As you can imagine, streams were and still are extremely important to the lives and culture of native Hawaiians.

