

# Polynesia

A Reading A-Z Level V Leveled Book  
Word Count: 1,372

## Connections

### Writing

Choose one Polynesian island to research. Write a report about the island. Include information about the island's location, geography, culture, and important historical events.

### Science

Research to learn more about traditional Polynesian navigational techniques. Create a poster about one of the techniques to share with your class.

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# Polynesia



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## Focus Question

What important aspects of Polynesian heritage are exhibited in their culture today?

## Words to Know

ancestors	navigation
archaeologists	Polynesia
artifacts	resourceful
culture	sacred
DNA	technology
heritage	tropical

Front cover: A Polynesian woman travels in an outrigger canoe in the lagoon surrounding Bora Bora, one of the Society Islands near Tahiti.

Title page: The sun rises over a beach on the Polynesian island of Samoa.

Page 3: Polynesian girls play jump rope in a park in the city of Papeete on the island of Tahiti.

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## Correlation

### LEVEL V

Fountas & Pinnell	R
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



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### Voyage of the *Hōkūleʻa*

The **culture** of **Polynesia** was fading by the early 1970s. The modern world had largely pushed aside the long-held beliefs and practices of these Pacific



The *Hōkūleʻa*, a modern replica of an ancient Polynesian ship, sails off the coast of Hawaii.

Islanders. Other countries had taken over most of their lands. Children were forgetting the languages and history of their elders. Engines had replaced sails on their boats. Modern entertainment was taking the place of traditional songs, dances, and other customs.

In 1973, though, a group of Polynesians began building a large ship in Hawaii. It was named *Hōkūleʻa* (hoh-koo-LEH-ah), the Hawaiian name for a bright star that passes over those islands. The finished ship was a 19-meter (62 ft.) canoe with two hulls. It was built to be as close as possible in design to the Polynesian ships of long ago. Such ships had carried Polynesians to settle islands all across the Pacific Ocean. However, none had been built in hundreds of years.

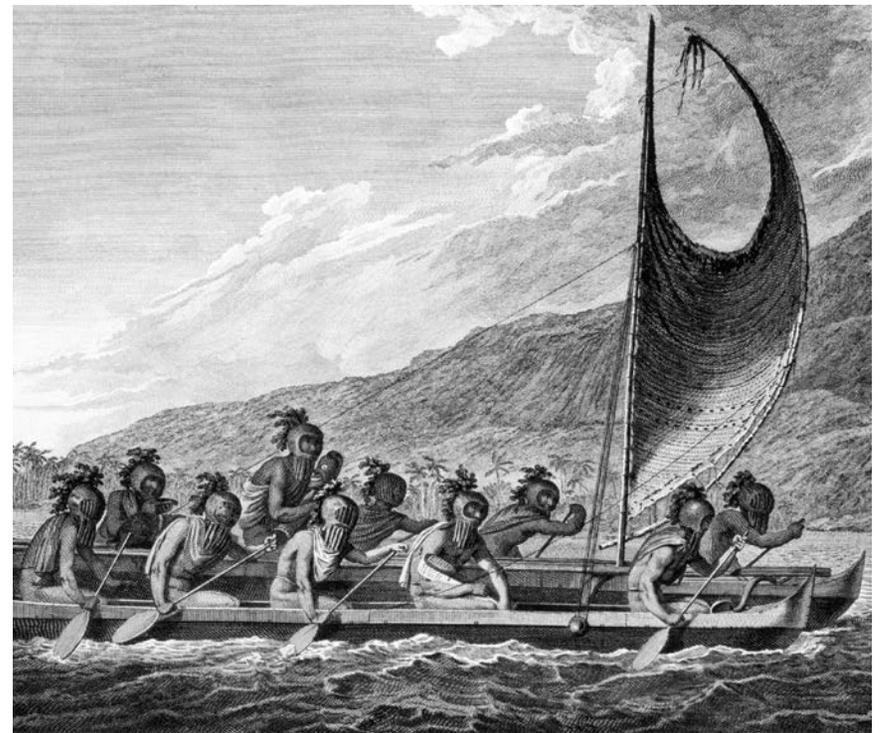
The canoe's creators wanted to study how Polynesian sailors found their way across huge distances with no land in sight. They asked Mau Piailug (pee-EYE-loog) from the Caroline Islands to help them. Piailug was one of the few people who still knew the old ways of **navigation**. He was an expert at using the stars, clouds, wave patterns, and other clues to keep a boat on course.



Mau Piailug was honored in a ceremony in 2006 for his work teaching the old ways of navigation to a new generation of Polynesian sailors.

On May 1, 1976, *Hōkūle‘a* set out on a 4,345-kilometer (2,700 mi.) voyage from Hawaii to Tahiti. It carried no engines or other modern equipment. The voyage was a success. The canoe and crew arrived in Tahiti's Papeete (pah-peh-EH-teh) Harbor about a month later. More than seventeen thousand people were waiting to cheer them into port.

The first voyage of the *Hōkūle‘a* was more than a stunt. It proved that Polynesian explorers of an earlier time could actually do what the legends taught. It also served as a symbol, helping to reawaken Polynesians' pride in their remarkable achievements.



A British sailor visiting the Hawaiian Islands in 1784 made this sketch showing Polynesian men rowing a traditional double-hulled canoe.

### Across the Great Ocean

The people of Polynesia have much to be proud of. Their **ancestors** made one of the greatest explorations in human history. From about 1500 BCE to 1400 CE, Polynesians explored millions of square miles of the Pacific Ocean. They settled island after island across a huge area.

For a long time, though, they did not get the credit they deserved. Many people did not believe that ancient Polynesians with basic **technology** had the knowledge to make such voyages.

Polynesians left behind stories but no written records of their achievements. Researchers had to use other ways to piece together their history. **Archaeologists** studied pottery and other ancient **artifacts** to find links between distant groups. Experts compared the languages of people from different islands for clues about who came from where. Recently, researchers have turned to **DNA** testing, studying the genes in people's cells. Genes offer important clues about where people's ancestors came from and have helped unlock the history of the Polynesians.

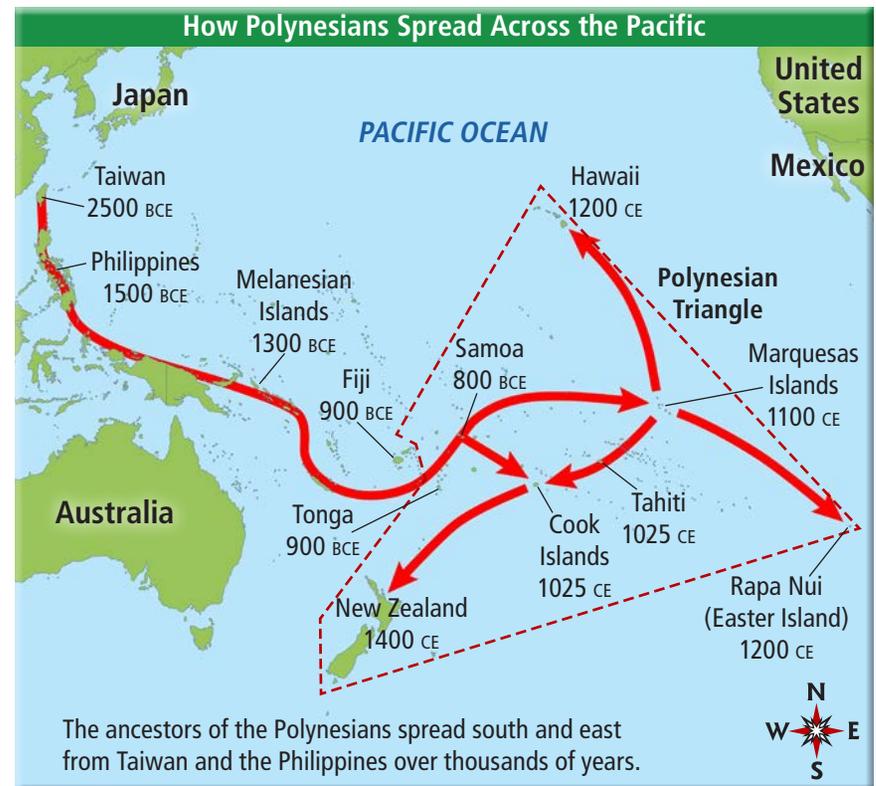
Taken together, these clues show that the Polynesians first came from Southeast Asia. They settled for a while in what are now Taiwan and the Philippines. These are both major island groups off the coast of mainland China.

Starting around 3000 BCE, Polynesian explorers began sailing to the southeast. They often followed strings of islands called *archipelagoes*. They reached Fiji and Samoa about three thousand years ago.

### Do You Know?

As with many other cultures throughout history, some Polynesians used tools and ink to permanently mark their skin with tattoos. British ship captain James Cook brought the word *tattoo* back to England to describe the practice after visiting Tahiti and New Zealand in 1769.

About 1,100 years ago, Polynesian exploration took a big leap into the unknown. In two main time periods, Polynesians sailed into huge areas of ocean no human had yet visited. First they settled Tahiti and its surrounding islands between 1025 and 1120. Then, from 1200 to 1400, their voyager canoes spread out in many directions. They settled islands as scattered as Hawaii, Rapa Nui (Easter Island), and New Zealand. These points mark the three corners of what is known as the Polynesian Triangle.





A Polynesian man gives another a traditional tattoo on the island of Savai'i in Independent Samoa.

### Traditional Polynesian Culture

Hawaii, New Zealand, Samoa, Tonga, Tahiti, and other Pacific Islands are all considered part of Polynesia. They are branches of the same cultural tree. As Polynesian groups split and spread out, they carried their culture with them. Some of these connections lasted, though the communities on each island also grew and changed in their own ways.

Polynesians brought their religious beliefs with them as they settled new islands. One belief was the idea of *mana*, which means “spirit” or “life force.” Mana can be good or bad; Polynesians believe all living things possess this **sacred** energy.

Polynesian religions also feature many gods. Stories about how Earth and its creatures were formed are similar from one corner of the Polynesian Triangle to another. The Maori of New Zealand, for example, believe in Rangī (Father Sky) and Papatūānuku (Mother Earth). Among the Hawaiians, these gods are named Ao and Po.

Maui is another character who appears often in Polynesian myths. He is a half-god, half-human hero. Full of mischief, courage, and cunning, Maui gave his name to one of Hawaii’s main islands.

Polynesian culture spread in other ways as well, including foods. Voyagers loaded their long, wide canoes with plants and animals to start gardens and farms. This cargo included dogs, chickens, and pigs. Breadfruit, taro, and bananas were among the crops Polynesian settlers grew wherever they settled. They were also experts at fishing and other ways of using the sea to meet their needs. Not surprisingly, one word is shared across much of Polynesia—*moana*, or “ocean.”

### Giants of Easter Island

Rapa Nui is Polynesia’s easternmost island. Archaeologists have found clues that it was first settled more than a thousand years ago. This remote bit of land is most famous for its moai. These giant statues, carved from volcanic stone, stand up to 10 meters (33 ft.) tall and weigh up to 75 metric tons (83 tn.). No one is sure why the islanders put so much time and energy into raising these massive monuments. Evidence suggests they may have been a way for families to honor their chiefs or ancestors.



A moai stands tall on Rapa Nui (Easter Island).



Members of the Maori tribe of New Zealand participate in a festival marking the new year.

Separated by so much distance, though, different Polynesian groups developed in their own special ways. New Zealand's two large islands became the home of the Maori. These people were known to be fierce warriors. They built fortresses of earth and stone called *pa*. Their foot-stomping dance, the *haka*, has become a proud symbol for all New Zealanders.

Polynesians changed depending on where they settled. They raised houses, villages, and forts where wood was in good supply. In **tropical** climates warmer than New Zealand's, they found new ways to dress and build. Still other Polynesians developed their own legends and cultural practices—like hula, the storytelling dance style created by Hawaiians.

## Polynesia in Modern Times

For centuries, Polynesians had much of the Pacific to themselves. More than five hundred years ago, though, European ships began reaching their islands. Their arrival changed Polynesian culture forever.

European powers seized some Polynesian lands. For example, New Zealand was claimed by the British in 1788. Ships from Peru captured people on Rapa Nui and made them slaves. Tahiti was taken over by France in 1880. Like many native peoples, Polynesians could not keep Europeans out of their territory. Their wood and stone weapons could not defend against steel and gunpowder. Even more deadly were new illnesses brought by Europeans for which Polynesians had no resistance or cure.

Native Hawaiians were nearly wiped out by disease starting in the late 1700s. Their islands, though, remained under their own control until 1893. Their queen, Liliuokalani, was then overthrown by the United States. Hawaii remained a U.S. territory until 1959, when it became the country's fiftieth state. Today, native Hawaiians make up about 10 percent of the state's population.



Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson

Mike Iupati

Auli'i Cravalho

All around the Pacific, Polynesians became second-class citizens on their own islands. Outsiders took their lands and pushed aside their traditions. In some instances, language, traditional religion, and other cultural practices were banned.

Since the 1960s, however, respect for Polynesian culture has grown. Many Polynesian islands have become popular with tourists because of their natural beauty and cultural traditions. From wood carving to dancing to surfing to fashion, Polynesian culture is now recognized and celebrated around the world.

People with Polynesian ancestry have also made their mark on the world. Examples include Hawaii's Daniel Akaka, the first U.S. senator of native Hawaiian ancestry. There are also wrestler and actor Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson (Samoan) and football star Mike Iupati (Samoan). Actress Auli'i Cravalho (Hawaiian) voices the title character in the movie *Moana*.

Major Polynesian Lands Today		
Country	Population	Profile
New Zealand (Aotearoa)	about 4,612,000; about 600,000 Maori	The Maori are the Polynesians of New Zealand. Today, they make up about 14 percent of the population. Their culture is visible and celebrated around the country.
Fiji	about 903,500; about 451,000 native Fijians	Fiji is a group of more than three hundred islands. Its native peoples are a mix of Polynesian and Melanesian, a different ethnic group that includes the people of Papua New Guinea.
Hawaii	about 1,454,000; about 300,000 native Hawaiians	Hawaii, the fiftieth U.S. state, honors its Polynesian past in many ways. The number of people with Hawaiian ancestry is increasing.
Samoa	195,418; about 181,000 native Samoans	Samoa was ruled by New Zealand from 1914 to 1962 before gaining independence. Nearby American Samoa is a U.S. territory.
Tahiti	288,750; about 192,000 native Tahitians	Tahiti is part of the Society Islands group and French Polynesia. It remains a territory of France.
Tonga	107,667; about 105,500 native Tongans	Tongans are a mix of Polynesian and Melanesian peoples. People live on 36 of its 169 islands, most on the main island of Tongatapu.



Schoolchildren in New Zealand say goodbye to each other with a *hongi* (HONG-ee). The hongi is a traditional Maori gesture made by pressing noses and foreheads together at the same time.

### Celebrating Polynesian Heritage

Today, Polynesian peoples are proudly taking back their **heritage**. Their young people are again learning old traditions, arts, and other parts of their culture. For example, the number of Maori language speakers in New Zealand is rising. Polynesians from Hawaii to Rapa Nui are being recognized for the brave and **resourceful** explorers they have always been.

The *Hōkūleʻa* still voyages throughout the Pacific as well. Everywhere this canoe travels, it carries the renewed spirit of the adventurous, seafaring legacy of Polynesian peoples.

### Glossary

<b>ancestors</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	family members from long ago (p. 6)
<b>archaeologists</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	scientists who study the remains of ancient cultures (p. 7)
<b>artifacts</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	objects made or used by humans long ago (p. 7)
<b>culture</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the ideas and customs of a certain group of people (p. 4)
<b>DNA</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a code that carries genetic information about a living thing; abbreviation of deoxyribonucleic acid (p. 7)
<b>heritage</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a way of life, tradition, or characteristic that is passed down from generation to generation (p. 15)
<b>navigation</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the act of steering a course toward a destination (p. 5)
<b>Polynesia</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	islands in the central and southern parts of the Pacific Ocean, including Hawaii, Samoa, and many others (p. 4)
<b>resourceful</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	able to find smart ways to overcome difficulties (p. 15)
<b>sacred</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to a god, religion, or spiritual purpose; holy (p. 9)
<b>technology</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the use of scientific knowledge or tools to make or do something (p. 6)
<b>tropical</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to the geographic region around the equator that has a hot, humid climate (p. 11)