



Teacher Resource
Suitable for teaching
KS1 and KS2

Oceania

Royal Academy of Arts

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Introduction

The Pacific Ocean covers one third of the Earth's surface. From space, a lot of this area looks like unbroken ocean, but it is in fact populated with thousands of islands. These islands are **clustered** together in **archipelagos** (groups or chains of islands), and **atolls** (ring shaped coral reefs with lagoons at the centre) that lie scattered across the Pacific Ocean.

More than 30,000 years ago, humans first moved from south-east Asia to New Guinea in the Pacific. Gradually people voyaged out to settle the furthest reaches of the region, from Hawai'i in the north, to Rapa Nui (Easter Island) in the east and New Zealand in the south (see map).

Although they started out with a common heritage, there are now hundreds of separate cultural groups in the region. Magnificent art traditions were developed on bodies in the form of tattoos and clothes, in the landscape and in daily life, including personal ornaments, weapons, canoes, houses, images of gods, masks and musical instruments. These art forms were, and in some cases still are, part of **rituals**, beliefs and social relationships. Pieces of art both express relationships with family and **ancestors** and create them. The act of gifting was, and still is, an important part of social life.

This means there is a huge range and diversity of what comes under the umbrella term of 'Oceanic art'. Objects were made to be visually very pleasing but also useful for people, whether practically through providing them with shelter or helping them navigate, or through appealing to greater forces, such as gods. We can look at such works as both fascinating artefacts and beautiful artworks, appreciating their use, and their appearance and how they were made.

Interaction with the wider world has also massively shaped the art of the region. In 1768 Captain James Cook began his first of three voyages of global exploration, eventually laying claim to (and renaming) many of the islands of the Pacific where people already lived and had done for thousands of years on behalf of the British crown. Other European nations followed in Captain Cook's footsteps throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, gradually claiming power over the area. Even the names commonly used to divide the region stem from this **colonial** period: Polynesia (literally 'many islands'), Melanesia ('black islands') and Micronesia ('small islands'). These divisions did not reflect history or cultural realities in Oceania, though many modern Islanders now identify with these terms.

This period brought lasting changes to the Pacific way of life, sometimes by force during wars or conflicts, but frequently through efforts of **Christian missionaries** to convert people from the local religions and traditions. However, the period was also one of huge creative richness, as Pacific peoples responded to and merged new influences with their own cultures.

Today, contemporary Pacific artists often deal with these historic issues and the impacts they continue to have. They also focus on more modern concerns, including **climate change**, rising **sea levels** and **pollution**. We can see from the art that Oceania is home to a living culture that is proud of its **heritage** and keen to communicate this to a global audience.

Key words

Cluster

Archipelago

Atolls

Ritual

Ancestor

Colonialism

Christian missionaries

Climate change

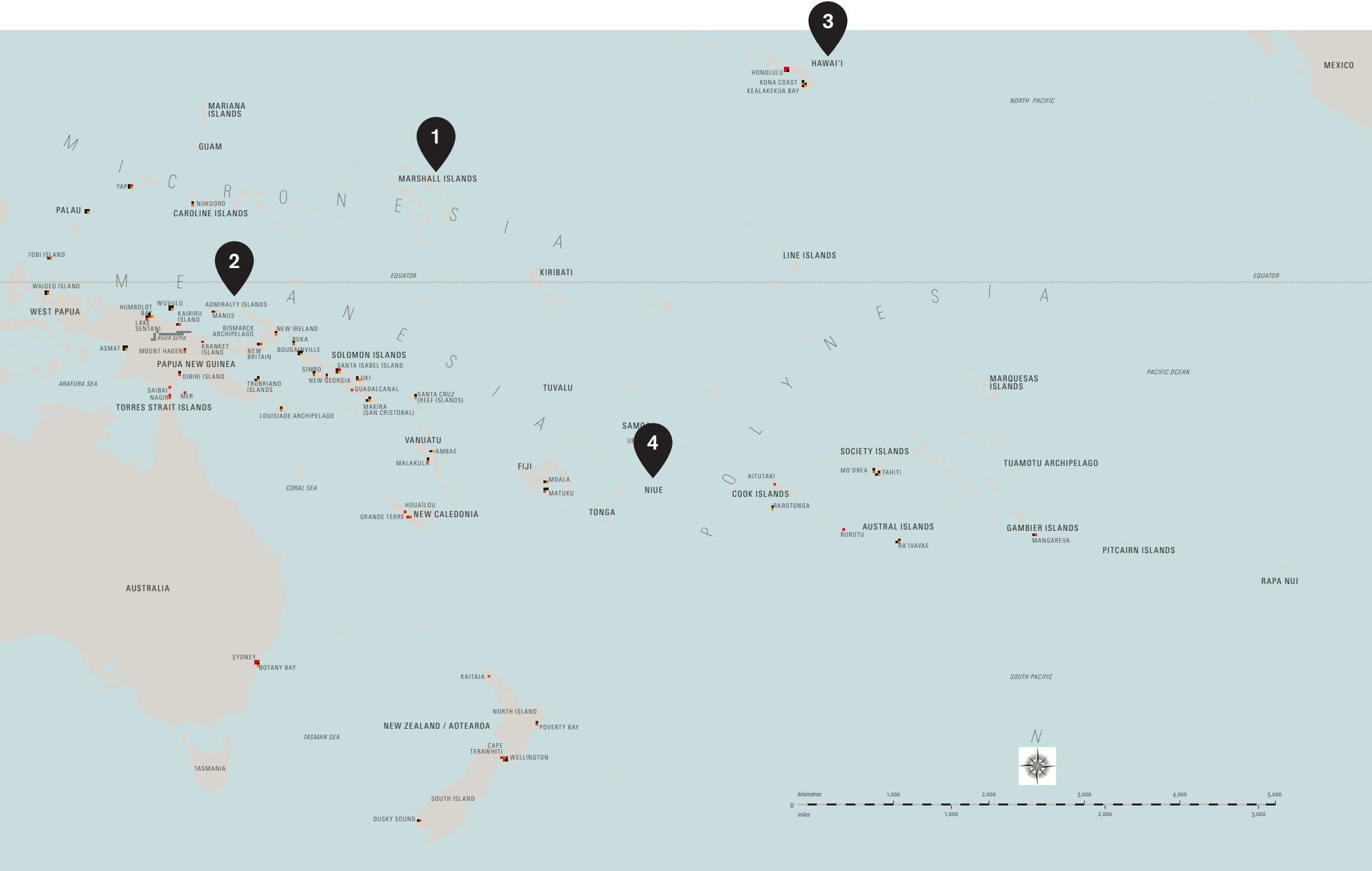
Sea levels

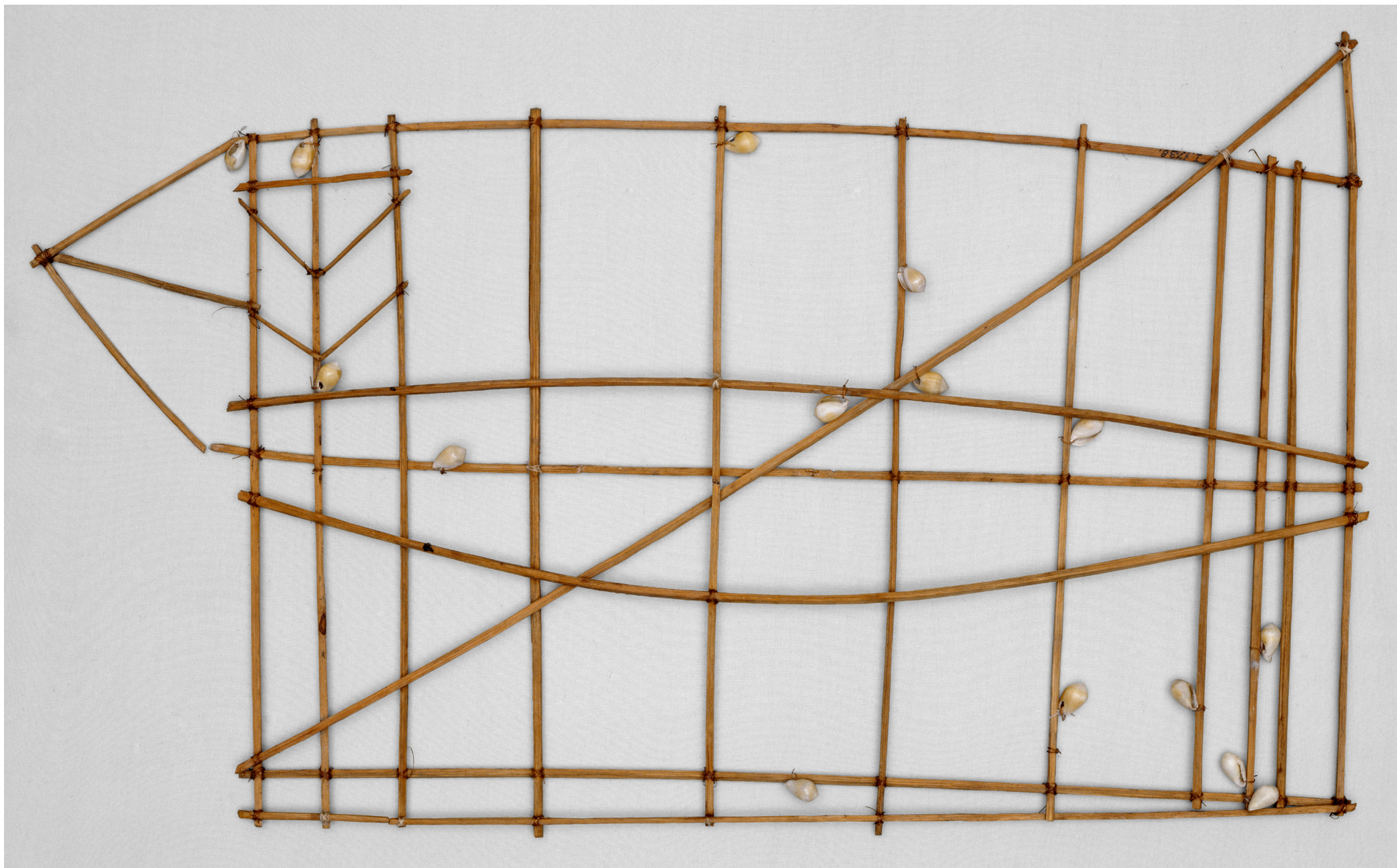
Pollution

Heritage

Map

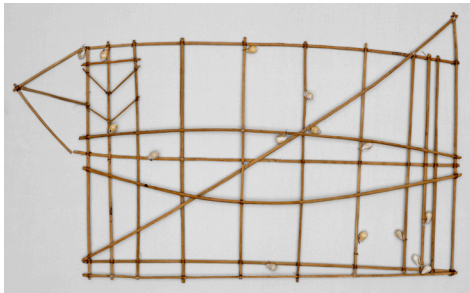
Use this map of the Pacific region to see where each artwork in this resource comes from.





Navigation chart, nineteenth century Marshall Islands

Wood, fibre, snail shells, 55.7 x 34.2 cm
National Museum of Denmark,
Copenhagen, l.1738



The people of the Pacific were **pioneers** of 'blue ocean' **voyaging**: they sailed in canoes for thousands of kilometres, without being able to see land behind or ahead of them for most of the journey. Over thousands of years, Pacific peoples travelled across the ocean to discover and build communities on thousands of islands. They could not leave their journeys up to fate. In order to find these tiny islands within the huge area of the Pacific Oceania, navigators needed the confidence to understand the signs around them. All the people travelling in a canoe would put a lot of trust in the person guiding their journey. For this reason, **navigation** was a highly prized skill, and the role of navigator was hugely important.

One tool to aid navigation was the stick chart, developed in the Marshall Islands. Stick charts are made with wood and shells, locally available materials. Rather than a literal '**map**' of an area, stick charts act as a teaching device and memory tool. Sailors only used them on dry land. Once at sea, sailors remembered the arrangement of sticks and the touch and feel of the charts. They could recall the information even when far away at sea.

The charts show that the sailors who used them had an incredibly complex understanding and knowledge of the natural world. They show the changing nature of the ocean itself, through currents and winds, the movement of fish, sea mammals and birds, islands and swell patterns rather than **to-scale** measurements and definite locations as we are used to in modern western maps. Before the arrival of Captain Cook, Islanders believed that islands themselves floated and moved, like the sea around them. The first European ships that arrived in the Pacific were often mistaken for moving islands. Although now known to not be factually 'true', ideas like this seem possible in the Pacific, where the ever-changing ocean is a big part of daily life.

Key words

Pioneer

Voyaging

Navigation

Map

To-scale

Questions

Does this look like any other map you have used? Why or why not?

If you lived in the Marshall Islands, how would you travel to other islands? How could this stick chart help you?

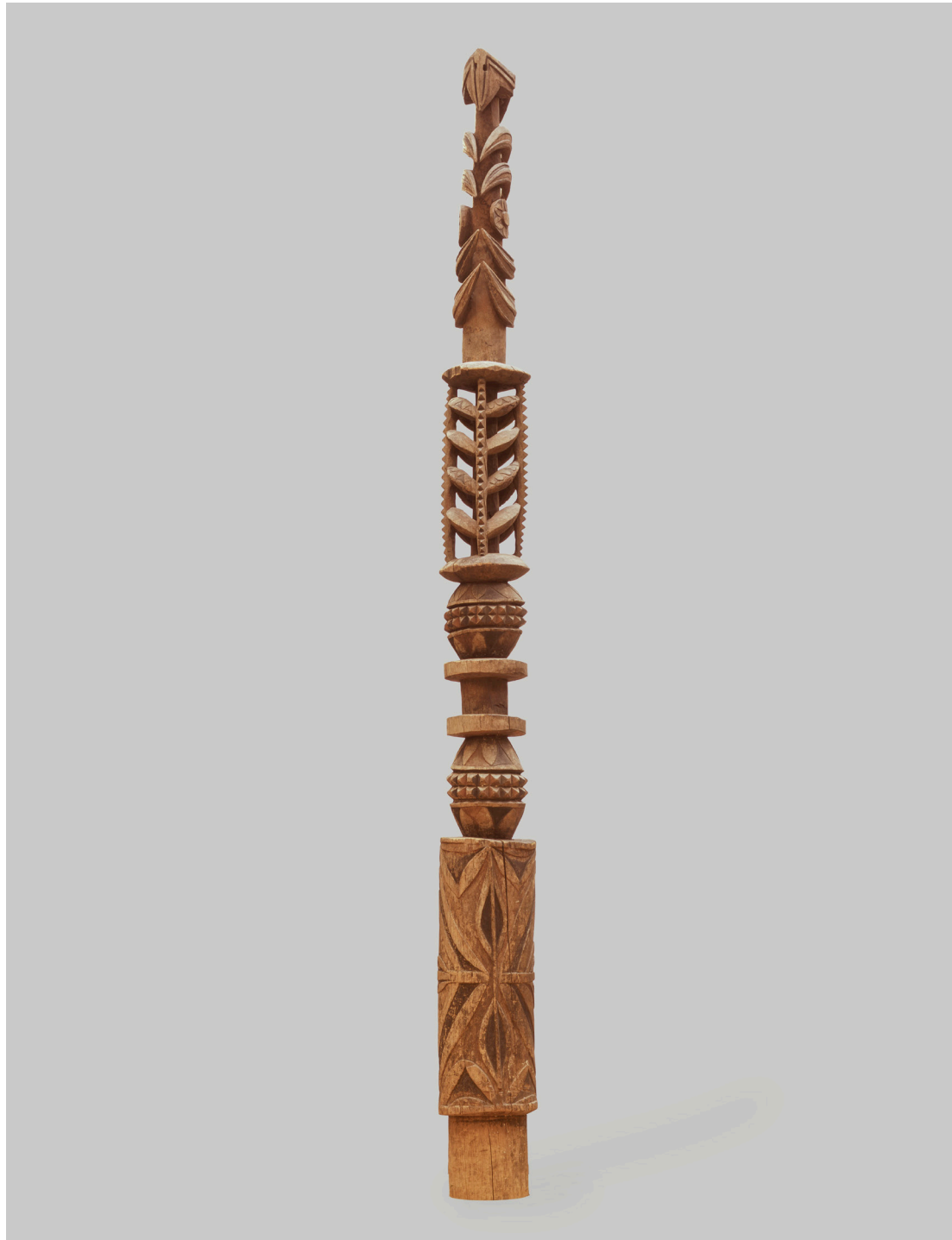
What do you think the shells are? What do you think the sticks are?

In the Marshall Islands navigators used more than just their sense of sight to help them. What other senses might have been useful to them?

How do you get to somewhere you don't know? What do you use to help you?

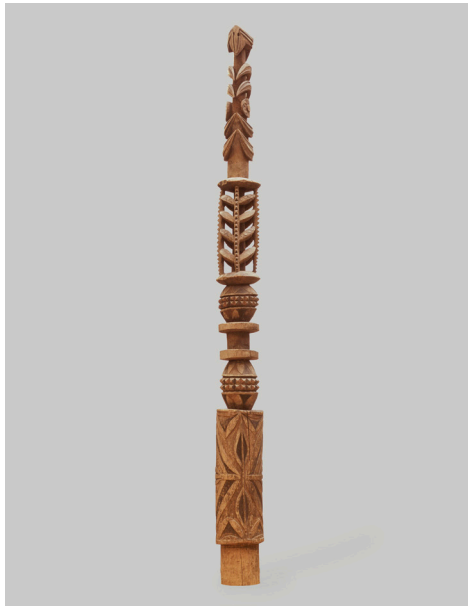
Give your partner directions from your house to your school, using words or drawings.

How can we find our way in the dark or if we are unable to see? Imagine walking from your classroom to the dining hall with your eyes closed. What senses do you use instead of sight?



***Tutulu*, chief's house post,
late nineteenth or early
twentieth century
Buliali, Emira Island,
Bismarck Archipelago,
Papua New Guinea**

Wood, pigments, height 371 cm
Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
University of Cambridge, 1927.1932



There was no metal on Pacific Islands before Europeans came to the islands in the 1700s, so when they built their homes Islanders had to use the materials available. They would have mainly used wood and other plant materials. This post would have been part of a chief's house. It is over three metres tall, which shows how big some of these buildings were. It is **intricately carved** but it also supported the structure of the house, showing the great skill of those who made it.

The carving on this post was not just done for **decoration**. The circular form at the top represents the moon, with the **moon's phases** shown by the crescents above and below this. Lower down the post are the seeds of a **breadfruit**, a fruit native to Oceania, and the ribs of a pig – both important sources of food for the Islanders. These reflect the importance of elements in the natural world in which the house itself was situated.

Throughout Oceania, houses for important people or groups were often decorated with **symbols** or stories known to that particular group. The decoration on this post may have a deeper meaning for people at the time who would have known how to 'read' it. Around 1910 it was collected from an abandoned house on Emira Island in Papua New Guinea. Once westerners arrived in Oceania some traditional ways of making stopped and the knowledge that went with them was lost. Posts such as this one had once been common for chiefs' houses but were no longer made. Like the navigational chart, there could be local knowledge represented in this post and others like it that we can no longer access, now that traditional **belief systems** cease to exist.

Key words

Intricate

Carved

Decoration

Moon phases

Breadfruit

Symbols

Belief system

Questions

In partners – lead your friend around the sculpture. What shapes can you spot on the house post? What patterns can you see? What different lines can you see?

Who might use this post? Where do you think you would find it?

Whose house do you think it would be in?

Would you like it in your house? Why, or why not?

What materials is your house made from? Why is this made from wood?

How is your school decorated? Does your school have a crest? What symbols are in it and what do they mean?



God image, probably Kū the god of war, late eighteenth century Hawaiian Islands

Fibre frame, human hair, pearl shell, seeds,
dog teeth, feathers, height 81 cm
British Museum, London, Oc, HAW.80



Throughout the Pacific, there were different religions that linked the people with their ancestors and their gods. In Hawai'i, there were two major gods, **Kū** (god of war) and **Lono** (god of peace), who ruled over the **seasons** of the year and the cycles of life. This feather head represents Kū, his teeth bared in a ferocious snarl. People worshipped objects like this and even carried them into battle to terrify their enemies.

Because Kū was such an important god, this object is made from one of the most **valuable** materials known in Hawai'i at the time: red feathers. They were so valuable because the colour red was thought to be **sacred**, and red feathers were very rare. The high value and importance of feather **god images** meant that they would have been given as **gifts** by high ranking individuals. The culture of giving gifts was an important part of relationships in Oceania. People would give gifts to cement peace, bond family and community relationships, and compete in shows of generosity.

So, when unfamiliar, powerful boats of Europeans arrived on the islands, many Pacific Islanders gave gifts to try and set up a good relationship with new arrivals. This god image was probably gifted to Captain Cook when he arrived in Hawai'i during the peaceful season of Lono. Although he did not fully understand the significance of the feather god, it is clearly impressive and so became one of several hundred objects to be brought back from his voyages. Cook himself did not return with his objects to England. Not realising it was dangerous, he went back to the Island during the season of Kū, and he was killed attempting to ransom a local chief for the return of a stolen boat.

Key words

Kū

Lono

Seasons

Valuable

Sacred

God image

Gift

Questions

What is this image of Kū made from? Try and find all the different materials.

How many feathers can you count? How many teeth can you count?

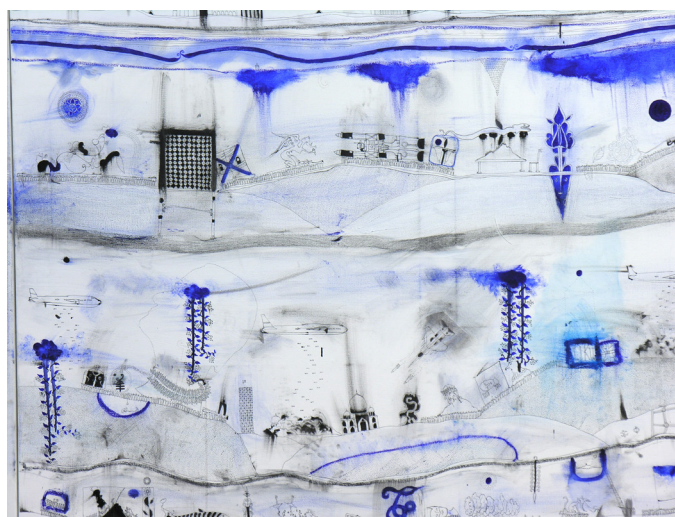
Who do you think Kū was? How does he make you feel?

Warriors would take objects like this into battle. How do you think they carried it?

Who do you think this was given to as a gift? Why?

Why do people give gifts?

The feathers were very valuable because they were really hard to find. What other gifts are given made from valuable materials?



John Pule (b. 1962)
Niue/New Zealand
Kehe tau hauaga foou (To all new arrivals), 2007

Enamel, oil, pencil, pastel, oil stick and ink
on canvas, five panels, each 270 x 200 cm.
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland,
2007/6.1-5



You can explore a zoomable version of
Kehe tau hauaga foou [here](#)



**Barkcloth (*hiapo* in Niue),
1888-1890.**

Barkcloth, 228 x 186 cm. Photo: © The
Trustees of the British Museum, Oc1953,+3



John Pule is a poet and artist whose work mixes **contemporary** ideas with Pacific traditions. Born on the tiny island of **Niue**, Pule's family moved to New Zealand when he was a child, and his experience there as a **Pasifika immigrant** has shaped his work, along with his Niuean **heritage**. The title of this work, *Kehe tau hauaga foou (To all new arrivals)*, reflects his having moved around and the idea of being addressed as a **newcomer**.

On the island of Niue where Pule was born there is a traditional artform called **hiapo** which has inspired John Pule. These are decorated barkcloths, sheets of cloth made from the pounded bark of trees. Like a hiapo, *Kehe tau hauaga foou (To all new arrivals)* is divided into sections. Despite being very big (the artwork is ten metres long), the canvas panels are delicately patterned. Finely drawn lines and small images of figures and buildings draw viewers in to understand the work's story. **Stories**, part of a rich oral tradition, have been important in the artist's work and part of his life since his childhood when his grandmother would tell him Niuean stories.

In the same way that stories have both universal and individual meanings, Pule's imagery combines personal symbolism with widely known **motifs** and images. Here he takes on major themes of war, global warming and nuclear testing, of vital importance to the Pacific region but also the wider world. Central to the message is Pule's inclusion of religious symbols, both Pacific and global, combined with worldly matters. He says 'I didn't want to show our gods safe in nice, clean, dark ... storage rooms I wanted to show these **taonga** (treasures) out in the open world'. By showing them in this way, Pule emphasises that the culture of Oceania is a living, ever-evolving part of the world, creating art that is at the same time universally human and deeply personal.

Key words

Contemporary

Niue

Pasifika

Immigrant

Heritage

Newcomer

Hiapo

Stories

Motif

Taonga

Questions

How many metres long do you think this artwork is?

What materials is it made from?

Walk up to the artwork and look at the detail.
What can you see?

Do you think the artist is trying to tell a story?
Where does the story start and end? How do
you read the story?

What symbols can you see?

John Pule's grandmother told him Niuean
stories. Are there any stories that you have
been told since you were very little? Were
these the same stories that anyone else in
your family were told?

The artist has drawn some stories that he has
grown up with. Can you guess which ones
they are?

The artist has drawn some stories about things
he cares about now. Can you find them?

What does the artist's use of colour blue
remind you of?

The feathers were very valuable because they
were really hard to find. What other gifts are
given made from valuable materials?

Glossary

Ancestor

Someone you are descended from (usually further back than a grandparent)

Archipelago

A group of islands, or many spread out islands over a large area of water

Atolls

A coral island made up of a reef around a lagoon

Belief system

A set of beliefs that a person or society have

Breadfruit

A round fruit that looks like bread (in colour and texture) when it is baked, that grows on trees in the Pacific

Carved

Cut with precision and care, e.g. a carved wooden sculpture

Climate change

Changes in the Earth's weather patterns, including more extreme weather such as droughts, ice storms, floods and heatwaves

Cluster

A number of similar things in the same place

Colonialism

A colony is a group of people from one country who build a settlement in another territory, or land. They claim the new land for their country, and they keep some control over the colony. The settlement itself is called a colony. The practice of setting up colonies is called colonialism

Contemporary

Living or occurring at the same time, or belonging to or occurring in the present

Decoration

An item that enriches the physical appearance of a thing, the act of making something beautiful

Gift

Something given from one person to another without compensation

God

A being or object believed to have more than natural human attributes or powers, and that inspires worship

Heritage

Valued objects and qualities such as historic buildings and cultural traditions that have been passed down from previous generations

Hiapo

Decorated barkcloths, which are sheets of cloth made from the pounded bark of the paper mulberry tree

Immigrant

A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country

Intricate

Very complicated or detailed

Kū

One of Hawaii's four major gods, the god of war

Lono

One of Hawaii's four major gods, the god of peace

Map

A representation of an area of land or sea showing physical features such as roads, mountains or cities

Missionaries

A person sent on a religious mission, especially to promote Christianity in a foreign country

Moon phases

Each month, the moon completes one orbit of the Earth. The phase of the moon is how much of the moon appears to us on Earth to be lit up by the sun – this is the phase of the moon

Motif

A single or repeated design or colour, or a thematic idea

Navigation

The science of getting ships, planes or vehicles from place to place

Newcomer

Someone who has recently arrived to a place

Niue

A small island in the south-central Pacific Ocean, which is a self-governing territory of New Zealand (population 1,625)

Pasifika

People living in New Zealand who have migrated from the Pacific Islands or who identify with the Pacific Islands because of ancestry or heritage

Pioneer

A person who is among the first to do something, e.g. arrive and settle in an area of land

Pollution

What happens when the environment is contaminated – or anything that makes land, air or water dirty or unhealthy

Ritual

A formal ceremony made up of a series of actions performed according to a set order

Sacred

Considered to be holy and deserving of respect

Sea levels

The average height of the sea where it meets the land. Rising sea levels are a result of global warming

Storytelling

The activity of sharing stories through spoken word or written down

Taonga

The Niuean word for treasures or prized objects

To-scale

All the parts the right size in relation to one another

Valuable

Worth a lot of money

Voyaging

Going on a long journey by boat or into space



Further reading

Peter Brunt & Nicholas Thomas (ed), *Art in Oceania: A New History*, Thames & Hudson, 2012

RA Publications, *Oceania* exhibition catalogue, 2018

Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *The Pacific Arts of Polynesia & Micronesia*, OUP, 2008

Nicholas Thomas (ed), *Huaga: The Art of John Pule*, Otago University Press, 2010

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Cover image and left: Female tattooed figure, eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Aitutaki, Cook Islands. Wood, pigment, height 58 cm. © Five Continents Museum, Munich; photo: Marianne Franke

Art activities for the classroom KS1 / KS2

Work of art	Related themes and curriculum links	Activity outline	Resources and materials	Learning outcomes
Navigation chart, nineteenth century Marshall Islands	<p>Themes Navigation Memory Unfamiliar technologies</p> <p>Curriculum links <i>Geography navigation</i> <i>DT design for a purpose</i> <i>Maths position and direction</i> <i>Science senses</i></p>	<p>Get pupils to sit in a circle with a roll of string. One child holds the string then moves across the circle to pass it to their friend. They switch places. Then their friend carries the string to another child in the circle and switches places with them. Continue until there is a network of strings across the circle.</p> <p>Discuss: How could we navigate back to roll up the string? What senses would you use? Revisit the idea of navigation through memory. How was the navigation chart used by the sailors?</p> <p>Ask pupils to think about their journey into school. How do they know the way? Could they draw it on a piece of paper with their eyes closed? Could they explain it to their friends? Encourage pupil to use position and directional language.</p> <p>Using matchsticks and Blue-Tack, ask pupils to create their own navigational chart sculpture to explain their journey to school. Have pupils to decorate and identify landmarks. Share the charts at the end of the lesson and evaluate their aesthetic and practical value.</p> <p>Go further</p> <p>Have pupils create a simple coding game on the computer to represent their sculpture. They can challenge friends to navigate their maps.</p> <p><i>*This lesson could be adapted for visually impaired pupil by focusing on the shapes and feel of the sculpture.</i></p>	<p>String</p> <p>Pencil</p> <p>Paper</p> <p>Matchsticks</p> <p>Blue tack</p> <p>Objects to decorate</p>	<p>Explore the purpose of a navigation chart.</p> <p>Create a sculpture taking influence from the navigation chart from the Marshall Islands.</p> <p>Experiment with a range of objects to create a sculpture.</p>

Art activities for the classroom KS1 / KS2

Work of art	Related themes and curriculum links	Activity outline	Resources and materials	Learning outcomes
<p><i>Tutulu</i>, ceremonial house post, late nineteenth or early twentieth century Buliali, Emira Island, Bismarck Archipelago, Papua New Guinea</p>	<p>Themes Decoration Signs and symbols Local values Interpreting stories Elements in the natural world</p> <p>Curriculum links PSHE <i>home & values</i> Literacy <i>symbols</i> Science <i>materials</i> Maths <i>repeated patterns</i></p>	<p>Looking at the image of the house post, as a class, create a list of the symbols and patterns you can see in the sculpture. Ask the pupils to talk about why they think those symbols would have been used. Think about where it would have been displayed in the house. Think about the aesthetic value of the sculpture along with its practical value.</p> <p>If your school has a crest, think about where it is displayed. What symbols are represented on the school crest. Why are they represented?</p> <p>Compare the crest and the house post considering decoration, symbols, materials, patterns and shapes.</p> <p>Have pupils design a crest for the classroom, choosing objects that are important symbols in school: e.g. books, pencils, rulers, favourite meal at school, favourite lesson.</p> <p>Pupil will draw their design onto a printing board thinking about line, shape and pattern when creating their design. Then print the designs. Once printed, teacher will present prints vertically like the house post. Then, all pupils will participate in a gallery walk around the classroom. Encourage them to discuss themes around identity, values and symbols.</p> <p>Go further</p> <p>Analyse a range of household objects thinking about their design and how the decoration represents cultural values.</p>	<p>Pencil</p> <p>Paper</p> <p>Printing paint</p> <p>Printing polyester boards</p> <p>Rollers</p>	<p>Explore the meaning of different signs and symbols.</p> <p>Understand how symbols are used to tell stories.</p> <p>Create a print including a range of symbols and patterns.</p> <p>Experiment with line, shape and pattern within the print.</p>

Art activities for the classroom KS1 / KS2

Work of art	Related themes and curriculum links	Activity outline	Resources and materials	Learning outcomes
God image, probably Kū the god of war, late eighteenth century. Hawaiian Islands	<p>Themes</p> <p>God Gift Culture Trade Worship</p> <p>Curriculum links</p> <p>Science <i>materials</i> Literacy <i>storytelling</i> RE <i>worship</i></p>	<p>In a class discussion, analyse the sculpture of Kū, the Hawaiian god of war and revisit questions about the materials that were used and their value in the Hawaiian Islands. Remind pupils that this sculpture would have been given as a gift and taken into battle. Encourage pupils to think about what material they would use if they were making a sculpture as a special gift to someone.</p> <p>Ask pupils to brainstorm their school's values (e.g. resilience, cooperation, determination and challenge). Pupils will then make a finger puppet based on one of these values, considering how to represent facial features. Once complete, each pupil will give their finger puppet to a classmate.</p> <p>Go further</p> <p>Role play with finger puppets. Read further into stories about Hawaiian gods.</p>	<p>Paper</p> <p>Scrap paper in a range of colours</p> <p>Scissors</p> <p>Glue</p> <p>Paint</p> <p>Paintbrushes</p> <p>Feathers</p>	<p>Understand why different materials were used in a Hawaiian god sculpture and the importance of their value.</p> <p>Understand how to mix media to create a finished sculpture.</p> <p>Create a finger puppet using a range of skills.</p>

Art activities for the classroom KS1 / KS2

Work of art	Related themes and curriculum links	Activity outline	Resources and materials	Learning outcomes
John Pule (b. 1962), Niue/New Zealand <i>Kehe tau hauaga foou (To all new arrivals)</i> , 2007	Themes Memory Contemporary art Immigration Storytelling Curriculum links <i>Maths measurement and scale, patterns and repetition</i> <i>Literacy poetry, storytelling</i> <i>Geography global warming</i> <i>RE religious symbols and buildings</i> <i>PSHE conflict</i>	<p>Discuss: Why do we tell stories? What are the pupils' favourite stories? Why do they like stories? How do they read stories?</p> <p>Think about different ways of storytelling. Stories can be told through music, spoken word, dance, narrative, poems, sculptures, film and pictures. Collect feedback and share pupils' favourite stories.</p> <p>Zoom in on section of Pule's artwork. Try to read the artwork together. Look at the different symbols and images. Make a mind map of themes they can see in the artwork and the different stories that he is sharing.</p> <p>Have pupils create a collaborative composition to represent the stories of their culture.</p> <p>Start by encouraging the pupils to draw on A4 sheets of paper focusing on the style of John Pule. Encourage pupils to be creative with their composition. Focus on soft and delicate pencil work. Encourage pupils to draw a range of religious symbols, buildings and important landmarks. Ask pupils to share images from their own cultures. Teacher will create a long canvas, either cloth or three A1 pieces of paper joined horizontally at the side. Create a composition together and think carefully about positioning of the pupils' work to reflect the story that they want to tell.</p> <p>Go further</p> <p>Research how global warming has changed the environment the Pacific Islanders live in. Look at <i>Blue Planet</i> clips about plastic in the ocean. Take the pupils on a litter walk. Collect litter and present in a frame around the artwork to encourage pupils to reflect on themes of climate change and the environment.</p>	Paintbrushes Pencils A1 paper A4 paper Glue Scissors Paint	Explore how stories are told in artworks. Choose a range of techniques to depict movement, perspective, shadows and reflection in drawings. Create a collaborative collage.