

Waka – Maori Boats and Woodworking

TEACHER: *Take a close look at this photo. This is a picture of a “waka.” Can you guess what a waka is? Here is a clue...they are usually found by the water.*

STUDENTS: *A boat*

A waka is a kind of boat. It is a special boat that has been made in New Zealand and other Pacific Islands for almost one thousand years. These boats are very special to the Maori people of New Zealand, and hold a lot of meaning in their culture. What you see in the picture is just part of the boat. What do you think this boat is made of?

Wood, metal, plastic, etc.

Waka are traditionally made from wood. For hundreds of years, the Maori people have carved the waka from a special tree that grows in New Zealand. The tree is called a “totara.” Totara trees grow very straight, smooth, wide and tall. Why do you think the Maori wanted a straight, smooth, wide and tall tree to make their boat?

It is easier to cut/carve; the waka are long and straight; etc.

Waka are usually very long and thin. The Maori needed a tree with a trunk that was big enough to make the whole boat! Hundreds of years ago, the Maori didn't have power tools and factories to help them build their boats. They had simple tools, and wanted a tree that would be easy to carve. They used small axes with sharp stone blades, called “adzes,” to help them cut the tree down and carve into the wood. The Maori greatly respected the totara trees. They would select and prepare a totara tree years before cutting it down. The Maori would say prayers and make offerings to the spirits they believed watched over the tree. They started making the boat by stripping the bark off of one side of the tree. They would burn parts of the tree with small fires and use their adzes to slowly cut it down. The tree was so big, that it would sometimes take two or three weeks to cut it to the ground. Do you know what most people in the world use to cut trees today?

Saws, chainsaws, machines, etc.

Most trees today are cut by tools made from metal, like saws. Metal can cut through wood much faster than stone or fire.

Once the totara tree was on the ground, the Maori spent a long time carving wood out of the middle of the trunk to make a place for people to sit in the boat. They also had to shape the outside of the boat so it wouldn't tip over in the water.

(Draw a picture on the board of a tree trunk lying on its side.)

This is what the trunk of the totara tree looks like when it has been cut to the ground, and all of the branches are gone. I need someone to help me draw what shape you think the Maori make their waka, so they don't tip in the water.

(Call on a child to come up and help you with the picture. Have them draw the shape on the board next to your picture. Assist the child until they come up with a shape that is similar to a long, wide smile. Once the shape is correct, use a different colored marker to draw the shape over the top of your original trunk drawing. Have the child be seated.)

This drawing shows us all of the wood that needs to be removed on the outside of the boat, but don't forget, the wood in the center of the boat needs to be cut out too! Once the wood is all cut, the boat isn't finished. The Maori are amazing wood carvers, and love to make beautiful designs and pictures on their boats. Look closely again at the photo. What do you see carved into this waka?

Faces; swirls, a person, etc.

Everything you see carved in the boat has a special meaning to the Maori. The Maori often decorate their boats, houses, tools, and weapons with designs and symbols to represent important spirits, animals, natural objects, and even sea monsters! The Maori tell a story that the people who carved the first waka had help from the creatures in the forest. According to the story, it was the spider that helped to carve the spiral designs on the boat. Raise your hand if you see the eyes on the side of the boat in this photo.

(Give the kids a second to respond. Then point to them to be sure they see.)

These eyes were not carved out of wood. Can you guess what they are made from?

Paint, shells, jewels, etc.

The Maori liked to make the eyes on their woodcarvings from a special kind of shell, called a "paua." The paua are very shiny and beautiful. What else do you see on the waka that doesn't look like it is made of wood?

Ropes

The ropes are made of flax. Flax is a kind of plant that grows in New Zealand. The ropes were used to join interlocking pieces of wood together (like a big puzzle). Because the ropes made holes in the boat, wooden plugs with a special kind of tree sap were often used to help seal around the ropes, so the waka did not leak when it was in the water. Today, the Maori people of New Zealand do not make as many waka as they did in the past. Nevertheless, the waka still remain a very important part of New Zealand culture. It is believed that the first people to discover New Zealand arrived in wakas. Without wakas, New Zealand wouldn't be the wonderful country that it is today.

Kindergarten Standards:

NYS Common Core Kindergarten Social Studies Standards

- K.2.b Cultures include traditions, beliefs, and shared values and ideas generally accepted by a particular group of people.
- K.8.b People and communities adapt to their physical environment in many ways, including building homes, buildings, and transportation systems; accessing food and water; and developing ways to protect themselves from shifting weather patterns
- K.9.a Children, families, and communities of today can be compared with those in the past.

Kindergarten ELA Power NYSCCLS (ICSD Power Standards in Bold)

Reading Standards for Informational Text: Kindergarten

- **Integration and Knowledge of Ideas**
 - 7. With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the text in which they appear (e.g., what person, place, thing, or idea in the text an illustration depicts).**
 - 9. With prompting and support, identify basic similarities and differences between two texts on the same topic (e.g., in illustrations, descriptions, or procedures).**

Writing Standards: Kindergarten

- **Research to Build and Present Knowledge**
 - 8. With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.**

Speaking and Listening Standards: Kindergarten

- **Comprehension and Collaboration**
 - 1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *kindergarten topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.**
 - a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion).**
 - b. Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges.**
 - c. Seek to understand and communicate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.**
 2. Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.
 - 3. Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.**
- **Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas**
 - 6. Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.**

Language Standards: Kindergarten

- **Vocabulary Acquisition and Use**
 - 6. Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts.**

Next Generation Science Standards for Kindergarten

K-ESS3 Earth and Human Activity

- ESS3.A: Natural Resources
 1. Living things need water, air, and resources from the land, and they live in places that have the things they need. Humans use natural resources for everything they do. (K-ESS3-1)