

The Hero Maui

A Reading A-Z Level Z Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,373

LEVELED BOOK • Z

The Hero Maui

Connections

Writing

Write an original myth about the demigod Maui that is true to his character and shows him using one or more of his special powers.

Social Studies

Choose a Polynesian island to research. Locate the island on a map and create a report about its geography and culture. Share your report with the class.

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level
T•W•Z**

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Focus Question

What makes Maui a hero?

Words to Know

adamant	mischief
adzes	myth
boon	Polynesian
cajoled	simultaneously
cunning	taut
immortal	trickster

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Correlation

LEVEL Z

Fountas & Pinnell	U-V
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	50

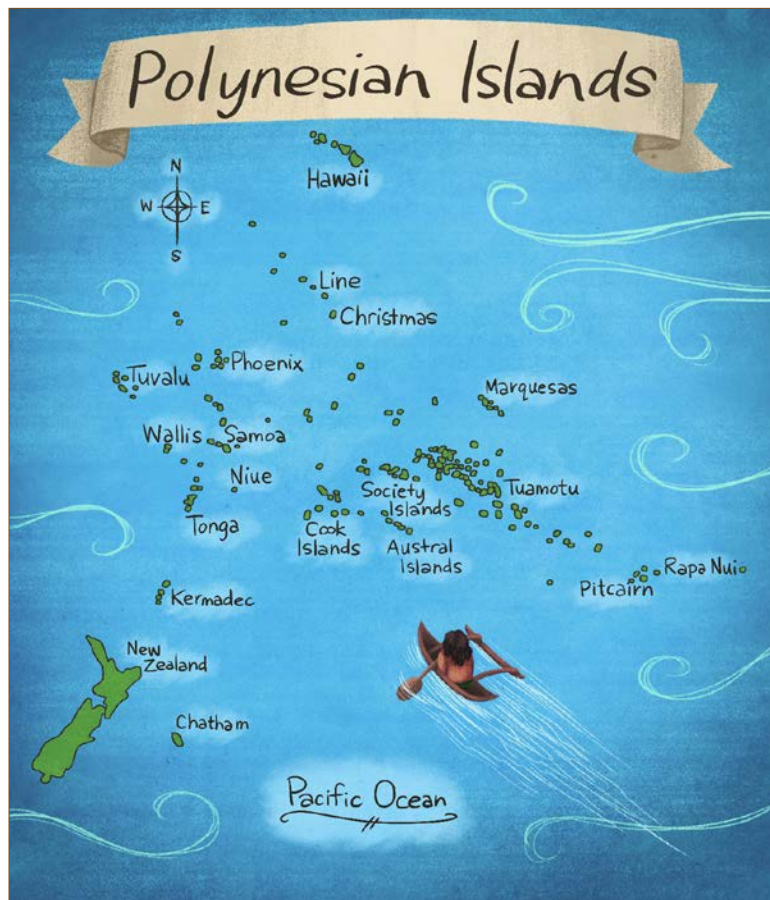


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Hero of the Pacific

The **Polynesian** peoples of the southern and central Pacific Ocean ranged over incredible distances. They settled more than one thousand islands in this region, and each island has its own traditions. However, these peoples share certain key elements of culture, **myth**, and religion. One of the mythical figures common to all of Polynesia is the **trickster** Maui, whose heroic exploits have been told in different ways across the Pacific.

Maui was a demigod, the son of a human woman and a god. Some legends call him the son of Tangaroa, the Polynesian god of the sea, while others say he was the son of Ru, the god of the heavens. He was not **immortal**, as gods were, but he did have supernatural powers of **cunning**, imagination, and strength. In fact, the Polynesians

credited Maui with creating much of

the shape of the world as they knew

it. Here are a few of the stories that

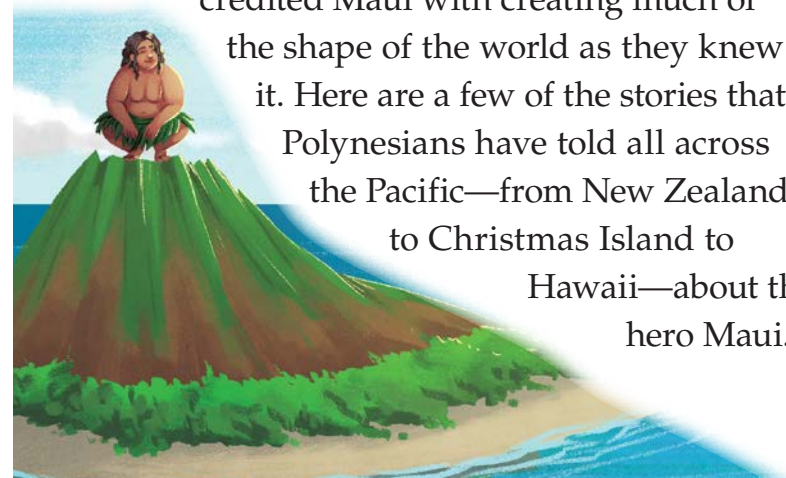
Polynesians have told all across

the Pacific—from New Zealand

to Christmas Island to

Hawaii—about the

hero Maui.



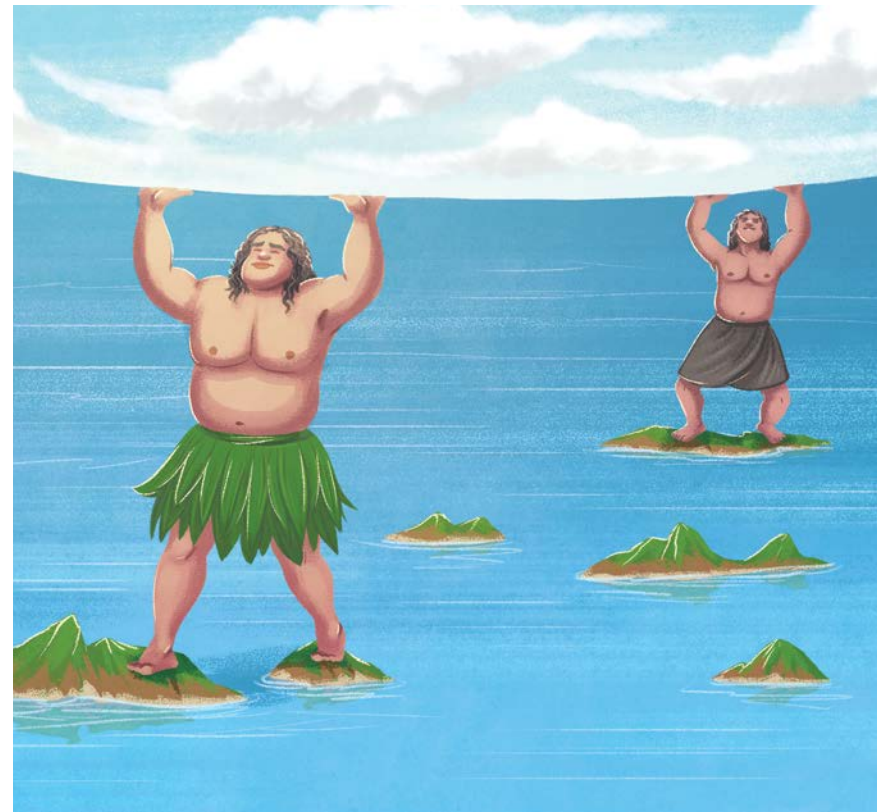
Maui Pushes Up the Sky

Long ago, when the world was young, the earth and the sky had not yet been separated. The plants that grew on the earth pushed steadily on the sky. As they grew, the constant pressure flattened their leaves. Gradually, the plants pushed the sky upward until eventually people could crawl from place to place. It was very inconvenient, and people had trouble getting their daily work done. It was difficult to fish or farm, or even to visit one another when travel was so slow and cumbersome.

Seeing this, Maui took pity on the people. He decided to raise the sky into the heavens so that humanity could move freely on the earth. Maui's strength was very great, but he knew he could not accomplish such an enormous task alone, so he went to Ru, the god of the heavens, to request aid.

Together, they came up with a plan. They would travel far apart from one another and **simultaneously** lift the sky between them.

Maui crawled north and Ru crept south until they each came to a place where they could lie flat on the ground and push upward. They lay on their stomachs and braced their backs against the sky.



When Maui gave the signal, they both began to push and shove with their backs against the sky. Their strength was enormous, and the sky began to move. Gradually, they pushed themselves into a crouching position. Then, with great effort, they stood up with the sky resting on their shoulders.

Then Ru and Maui placed their hands under the sky, palms up, and stretched upward until they were taller than the tallest mountains. As they grew, the sky rose with them until it floated miles above the land.

Ru and Maui were delighted to see that their plan was working. In their joy, they became a little careless. Maui gave the sky playful little jabs with his fingers, and Ru gave an extra push or two. As a result, the sky twisted, dented, and bent above them. It looked awkward. Desiring that their accomplishment should be perfect, the two decided that they would smooth out the sky.

They picked up two enormous stone **adzes** and set to work, chiseling and pounding the surface of the sky into a perfect half circle. Their achievement is still visible today as we look up at the perfect blue dome Ru and Maui created. Now people, plants, and animals can grow and move freely on the earth because of their efforts.



Maui Snares the Sun

The lifting of the sky created an unexpected problem: now the Sun suddenly had enough space to run very fast across the heavens each day. The Sun was delighted with this turn of events. Every day he ran more quickly, trying to see how fast he could go.

This caused great suffering for humankind. The days became very short. Plants could not grow, and fruit could not ripen. There was hardly any time to prepare food, and the nights were long and bitterly cold.

Maui's own mother was particularly unhappy about the way the Sun raced across the heavens each day because his speed interfered with her work. It was Maui's mother's task to make cloth and sew it into clothing and sleeping mats. She made her cloth by stripping bark from trees, pounding it into a pulp, and then spreading the pulp to dry in sheets. However, because the days were so short, she could not dry the sheets of wood pulp, so there was never enough cloth for everyone who wanted it. People complained, and Maui's mother begged Maui to help her.



Maui, moved by his mother's plight, promised to do what he could. He decided to study the Sun's journey to find out how to force the Sun to slow down. Maui climbed to the top of a large mountain and watched the Sun as it raced by one day. He noticed that the Sun had sixteen legs, which allowed him to move very quickly.

Maui returned to his mother and told her, "I know what I have to do. The Sun has sixteen legs; I will need to snare them in order to capture him, but I do not know of a snare that is strong enough to hold him."

"Listen," said Maui's mother, "and I will tell you how to snare the Sun. First, take these ropes from me. They are made of strong vines braided together, and they will not break." And she gave him fifteen different ropes. "But for the rest of the materials to make your snare," she said, "you must visit your grandmother."

Following his mother's directions, Maui journeyed to his grandmother's home. When the old woman learned of his purpose, she was eager to help. She gave him a magic war axe and one more strong rope and told Maui to hide underneath a tree at the top of a mountain.

"From there," she said, "you will be able to see the Sun as he comes up over the horizon, but he will not be able to see you. When his first leg creeps up and over the horizon, throw your first rope. Catch his leg and then fasten the rope securely to a tree. Do this as each of his legs comes up, and you will trap him. Then you can make your demands."

Maui did exactly as his mother and grandmother had told him. Before dawn the next morning, he concealed himself under a tree at the top of the tallest mountain he could find. Before long, the Sun's first leg appeared on the horizon, and Maui threw his rope and caught it. He fastened the rope to the tree and waited for the second leg to appear. As the Sun came up, Maui continued to trap his legs.

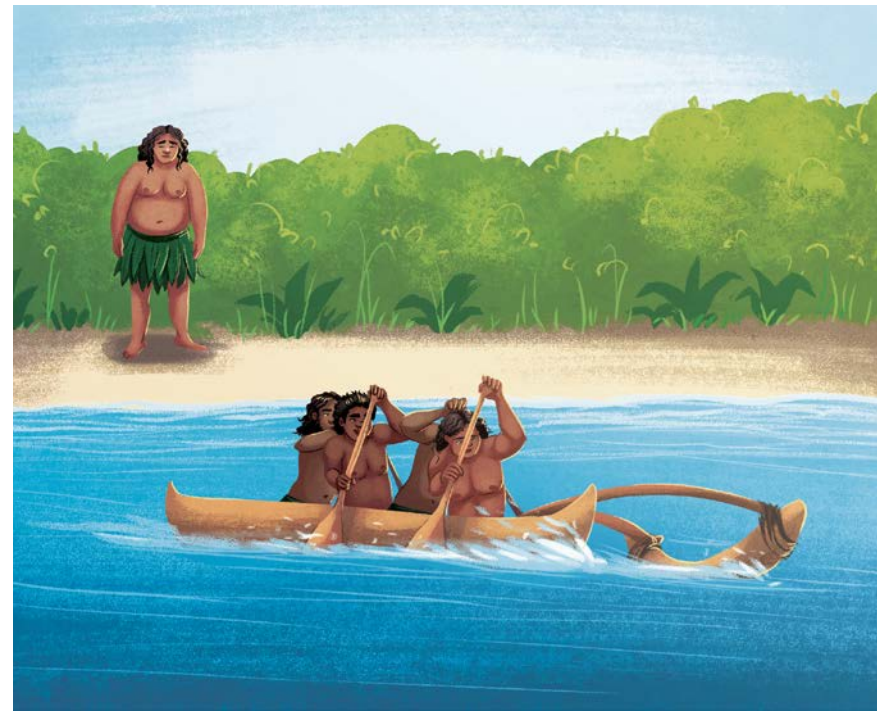
The Sun soon realized what was happening, and he slowed his ascent, but it was too late—Maui had already captured most of his legs. As the Sun brought his final leg up into the sky, Maui captured it and bound it securely to the tree.

The Sun turned and tried to flee under the horizon, but Maui dragged him back. Maui threatened him with the enormous war axe his grandmother had given him. The Sun was terrified for his life, and he begged Maui to release him.

“I will do no such thing,” Maui said, “until we reach an agreement.” And he described all the troubles the Sun’s rapid progress across the sky had made for humankind. He explained how the people could not cook, work, or pray because the days were so short.

The Sun, in fear, agreed to everything Maui said, and soon they had a bargain. Maui was not hard-hearted, and he agreed to allow the Sun to travel quickly across the sky in winter. But in the summer, they agreed that the Sun would travel at a leisurely pace so that the days would be long and the people would be able to complete their work.

Thus Maui snared the Sun and created the seasons we have today.



Maui Pulls Up the Islands

Maui’s great strength and cunning were equaled only by his love of **mischief**. His relatives got tired of his pranks from time to time. When he and his brothers went out fishing, for example, the brothers would often catch fish after much time and effort, only to discover that the fish wound up in Maui’s net.

Eventually, Maui’s brothers refused to take him fishing any longer. Maui was very disappointed at this, for he loved to tease and trick his brothers. He begged them to reconsider. His brothers, however, were **adamant**.

Seeing that their minds were made up, Maui realized that he would have to prove his worth as a fisherman if he were ever to fish with his brothers again. Maui decided to make a new fishing hook that would be capable of catching the greatest fish in the world.

Maui labored for many days and nights making an enormous fishing hook from a sharp bone and a twisted vine. He breathed some of his own magic power into it.



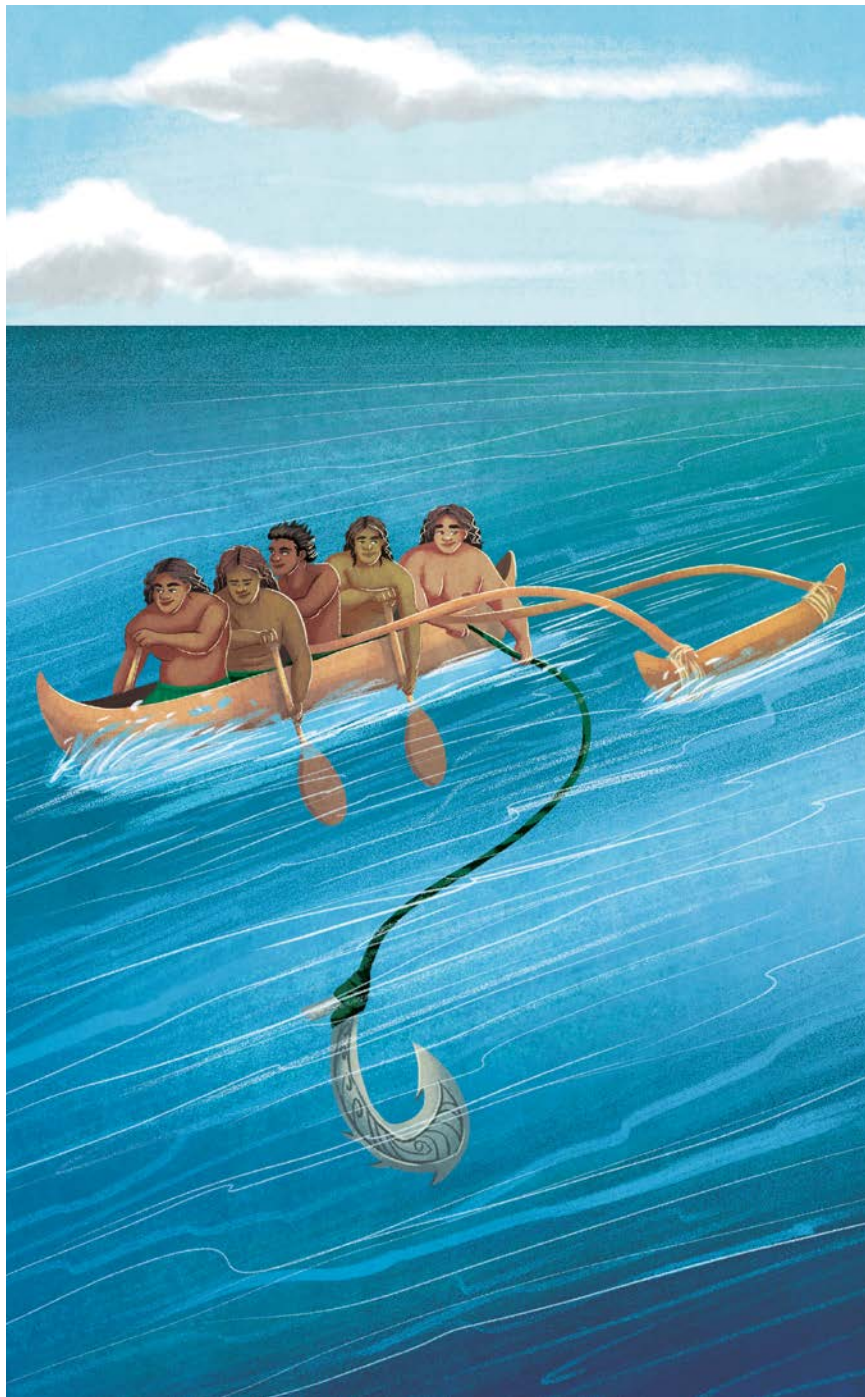
Next, Maui transformed himself into a beetle and hid in one of his brothers' fishing nets. As soon as they were all far out to sea, Maui changed back into his proper shape. Sitting among the fish in the bottom of the canoe, he smiled up at his astonished brothers.

They were not pleased, but Maui **cajoled** them into staying out in the fishing grounds. He promised that they would see a marvel. "If you will take me far, far out to the deepest parts of the ocean," Maui said, "I will show you the greatest fish in the sea."

His brothers grumbled, but rather than endure Maui's arguments, they decided to grant his request. Together they paddled out to the farthest fishing grounds in the deepest part of the ocean.

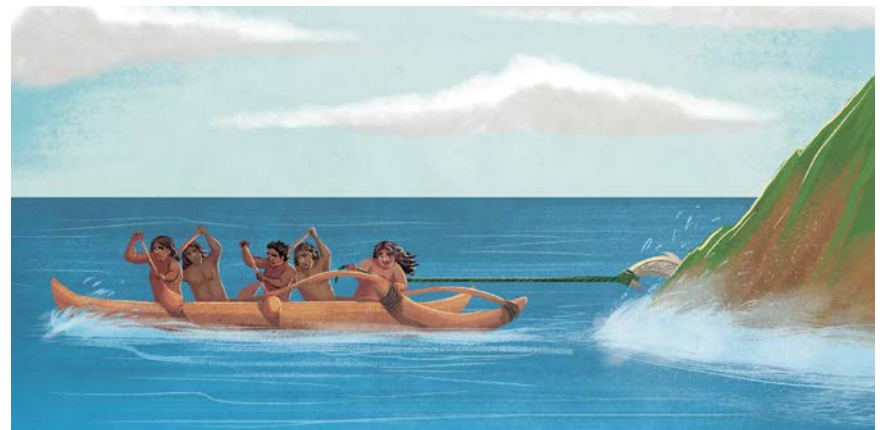
Maui cast out his magic hook and fishing line and commanded his brothers to watch for the most marvelous fish they had ever seen. The line flashed down through the sea, and for a long time nothing happened.

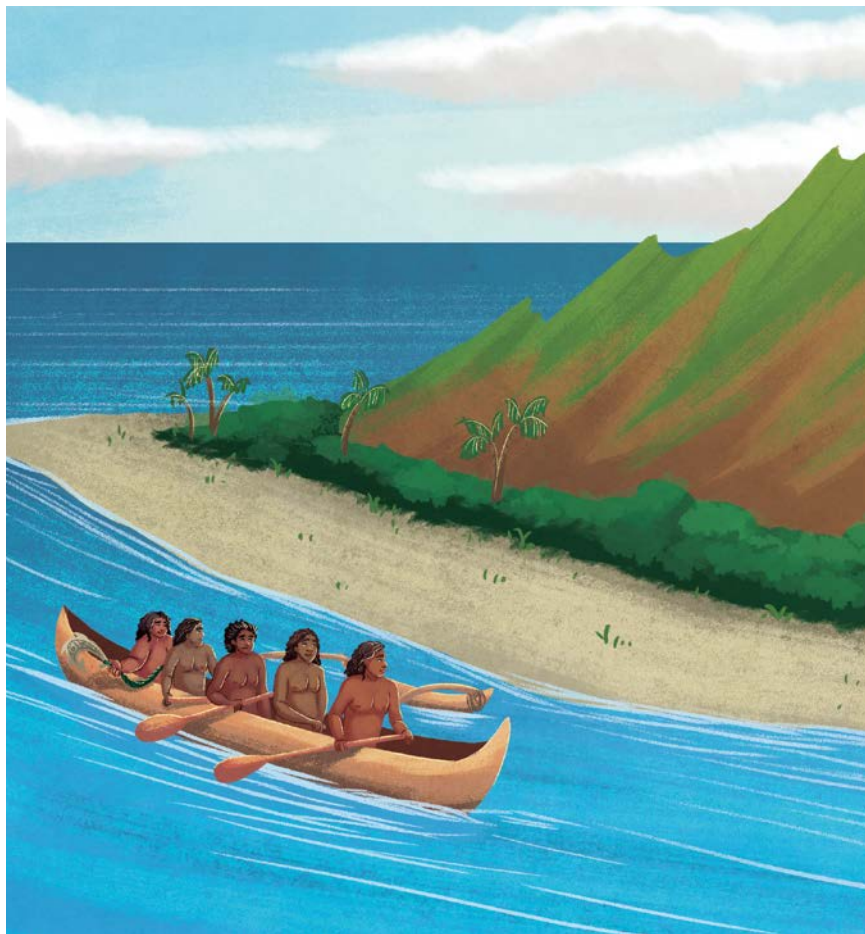
Then, all of a sudden, there was an enormous pull on the fishing line. Maui staggered and seized it with both hands. "Paddle!" he cried to his brothers. "Keep the line **taut**! We will bring in this great fish together."



Maui's brothers sprang into action, paddling with all their might, for they were also eager to see what he had caught. It certainly was a heavy fish. The brothers found that their united strength at the oars was scarcely enough to keep the canoe moving.

Maui pulled, and his brothers paddled, for what seemed like centuries. Finally they could all hear something splashing up through the waves behind the canoe. One of Maui's brothers glanced back, intensely curious to see what they had caught. Then he screamed, horrified, for what he saw was an enormous, green piece of land—an island—surfacing behind them, caught fast on Maui's magic fishing hook. It looked like a monstrous fish that was about to devour them all. The brothers paddled frantically to get away from the island as it rose through the sea.





Maui gave one final, enormous heave and cast the line free, settling the island into place. Suddenly, the brothers found that they were paddling in shallow water next to a beach. Exhausted, they rested on their oars and looked up fearfully at the island. In wonder, they saw that the island already had people on it. Smoke rose from fires, and little houses could be seen near the beach.

Without saying a word, Maui leaped from the canoe and splashed ashore. His brothers cried out for him to return, but he ignored them and soon was lost to sight. He explored the entire island, stopping to stare at a fire that was burning in a pit. Maui had never seen fire before. He reached out tentatively and touched it. His hands were burned. With a yell of pain, Maui rushed back to the sea and dived deep, trying to cool his hands. He went so deep into the ocean that when he came up, he had another island atop his shoulders. Maui set this new island on the sea, but when he touched it with his burning hands, the island caught fire. It is still burning to this day. This is the origin of volcanoes.

Maui's brothers, left behind in their canoe, decided that they wanted to take some of the marvelous island Maui had pulled out of the sea away with them to show their families. So they carved out huge chunks of the island and loaded them into the canoe. The gouges they made in the island remain, even now. This is the reason for the mountains and valleys we see today on Aotearoa, the islands of New Zealand.

That is how the hero Maui lifted the Pacific Islands out of the sea.

Maui Defeated

Maui gave humankind many gifts, but there was one **boon** he was not able to grant humankind: the gift of immortality.

Maui believed that it was not right that the people of Polynesia should die. He wished for humanity to live forever, as the gods did. He decided to attempt to steal the secret of immortality from Hine (HEE-nay). She was a goddess who kept the secret to immortal life in her heart. Maui knew that the only way to steal the secret was to steal Hine's heart.

Gathering his courage, Maui approached Hine stealthily while she was sleeping. He dived into her open mouth with his spear in his hand. He found Hine's heart and nearly escaped with it—but Hine woke just as he was trying to come out of her mouth again. Realizing something was amiss, she caught Maui between her teeth and killed him.

Maui was not successful in giving humanity the gift of eternal life, but humanity remembers him and honors him for the attempt. The stories of Maui's exploits are among the best-loved legends of Polynesia. In this way, the hero Maui survives as the stories about him are passed down from generation to generation.

Glossary

adamant (<i>adj.</i>)	refusing to change one's opinion or decision; determined (p. 12)
adzes (<i>n.</i>)	tools similar to axes, with thin, curved blades attached at a right angle to handles (p. 7)
boon (<i>n.</i>)	a request or favor (p. 19)
cajoled (<i>v.</i>)	persuaded another with flattery, gentle urging, or by making promises; coaxed (p. 14)
cunning (<i>n.</i>)	cleverness or deceit used to trick others (p. 4)
immortal (<i>adj.</i>)	able to live forever; not subject to death (p. 4)
mischief (<i>n.</i>)	behavior that is troublesome or annoying (p. 12)
myth (<i>n.</i>)	a traditional story that explains historical events, natural occurrences, or social customs, and often involves supernatural elements (p. 4)
Polynesian (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to people from ethnic groups native to many islands in the Pacific Ocean (p. 4)
simultaneously (<i>adv.</i>)	at the same time (p. 5)
taut (<i>adj.</i>)	stretched tight; without any slack (p. 14)
trickster (<i>n.</i>)	a clever, deceptive, or mischievous character who takes various forms in the mythology or folklore of many cultures (p. 4)