

Take One...

## Ahu'ula - Hawaiian Feather Cloak Teacher Guidance Notes



These guidance notes are designed to help you use this feather cloak as a focus for cross-curricular teaching and learning. A visit to the Pitt Rivers Museum gives the chance to see your chosen object and offers your class the perfect learning outside the classroom opportunity.



### Starting Questions

The following questions may be useful as a starting point.

- What do you think this object is?
- What do you think it is made from?
- Who do you think might have worn it?
- Why might they have worn it?
- What can you see on it?
- Do the patterns remind you of anything?
- What skills do the people who made it have?
- How do you think this cloak got to the Museum?
- Why do you think this cloak is in a Museum?

This beautiful Ahu'ula, a feather cloak from Hawaii, is on display in the Pitt Rivers Museum.

You can find out more information about the cloak here:

<https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/event/feather-cloak>



Inspired by the National Gallery's  
Take One Picture programme

# Background Information

## The Object

This Ahu'ula, a red and yellow feather cloak, belonged to the Ali'i, the royal family of Hawaii. Ahu'ula were for warriors – the longer the cloak, the more powerful you were! If the cloak was damaged in battle it gave it more power as the person was hurt but had survived. These cloaks were the greatest gifts that 18th and 19th century chiefs could give. Great chiefs had dozens of cloaks and they gave them to people they held in great esteem in order to build relationships, create obligation and as part of political and diplomatic transactions. Bird feathers were seen as great treasures, and symbolised divinity, rank and authority. Only very powerful Ali'i who ruled over significant areas could get the kinds of resources to create an ahu'ula like this. Yellow feathers were rarer than red – most of them here are from the o'o (honey eater) and mamo (Hawaiian honeycreeper) birds which are now extinct. The red feathers are from the 'I'iwi (scarlet honeycreeper) bird which is vulnerable, living in the Hawaiian uplands. In the Hawaiian world red and yellow are sacred colours and signify Ali'i status, which is also sacred. Height matters in the Hawaiian world view and anything that can go up to the heavens, like birds, has godly status. These birds also live in the mountain tops which is seen as a spiritual realm. The base of the cloak is made from a fishnet-like textile woven from the olona plant. The feathers were attached to this textile base in tufts. The geometric patterns are typical of most Hawaiian designs and link to the repetition of patterns that we see in the natural world, such as honeycomb, spiderwebs and spirals.

This Ahu'ula was presented by Chiefess Kekauluohi to Sir George Simpson, a governor of the Hudson Bay Company in 1842. Kekauluohi was the Kuhina Nui, or premier, of the Kingdom of Hawaii from 1839-1845 and was second in power after King Kamehameha III. She gave the cloak to Simpson to present to his wife Frances Ramsay Simpson, a personal gift – home to home. Women were seen as powerful and strong in Hawaii at this time. Frances Ramsay Simpson was also from a family of merchants – establishing trade connections and allies was important!

## The Historical Context

This is a feather cloak belonging to the Ali'i but what happened to the royal family in Hawaii?

In 1893 the Hawaiian Monarchy was overthrown by a group of foreign businessmen and Queen Liliuokalani was imprisoned in the Iolani Palace. In 1898 Hawaii was annexed by the United States of America. In 1959 Hawaii officially became the 50th state. Under colonialism private land ownership thrived and the previous approach of sharing resources from each ahupua'a (land segment) destroyed. The streams which ran through each ahupua'a from mountain to sea were diverted for private plantations and ranches, drying out the plains areas where most food crops grew. Now 90% of food is imported, and people are worried about lack of self-sufficiency. This has led to the restoration of some ahupua'a which model sustainable land and water management.

In 1842, when this cloak was given, Sir George Simpson had offered to support conversations to help Hawaii have their sovereignty status guaranteed by Britain. As a series of islands in the middle of the Pacific ocean they were struggling to remain independent as bigger countries wanted more control over the island kingdom. Ultimately they were not successful in retaining their sovereignty but we can understand why this valuable gift might have been given to the wife of this influential businessman. The great-granddaughter of Sir George Simpson sold the cloak in June 1930 to the collector HG Beasley. The wife of Beasley donated his collection to the Pitt Rivers in 1951 after his death.



Detail of the Ahu'ula

# Ideas for creative planning across the KS1 and KS2 curriculum

You can use this feather cloak as a starting point for developing pupils' critical and creative thinking as well as their learning across the curriculum. You may want to consider possible lines of enquiry as a first step in your cross-curricular planning. This may help build strong links between curriculum areas. After using strategies to help children engage with the object and asking questions to facilitate dialogue you can work with the children to develop lines of enquiry which will interest them.

Here are a few suggestions of possible lines of enquiry using this object:

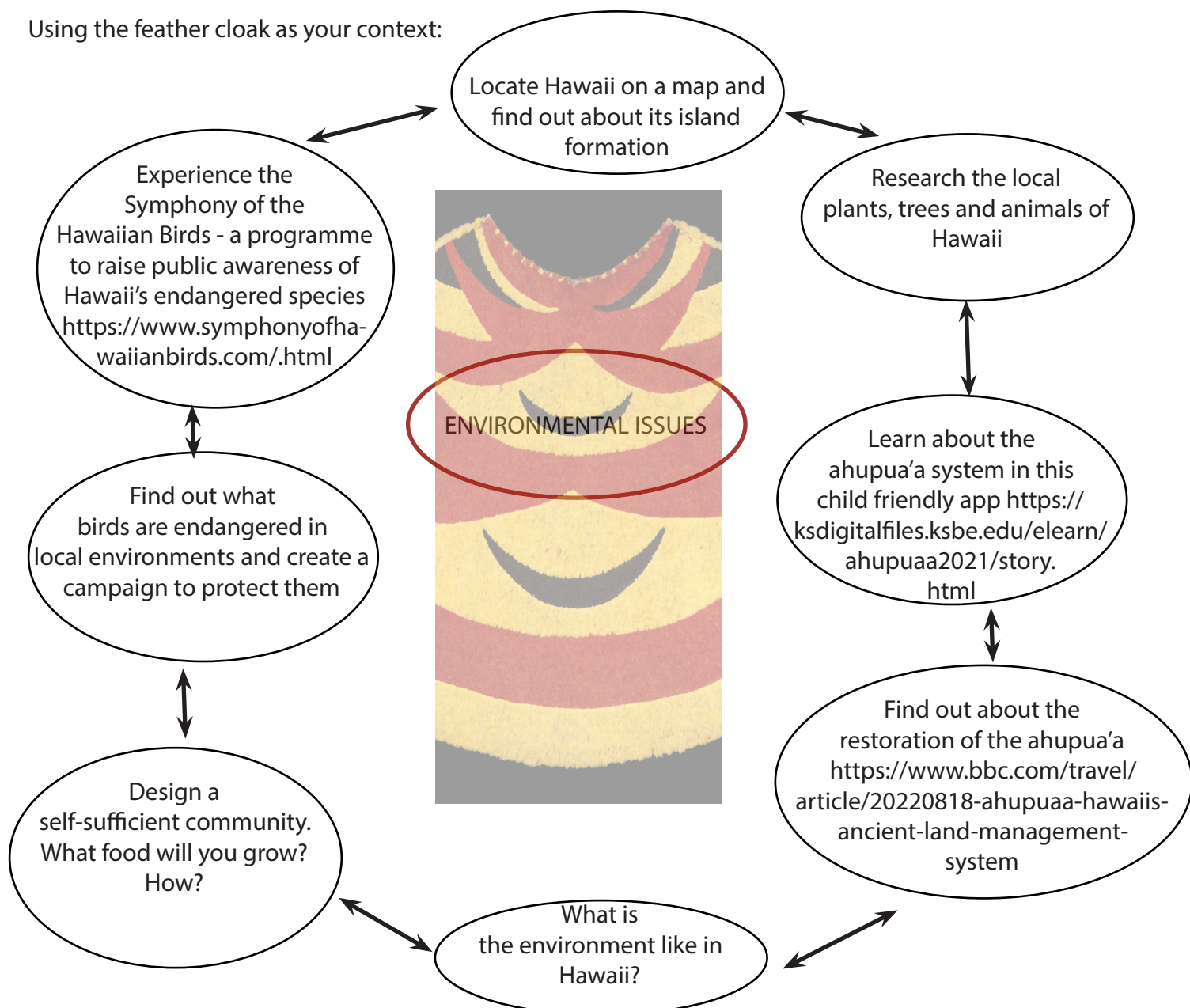
- Hawaiian art and culture
- Environmental issues
- Role of women
- Power and importance
- Colonialism and trade

Using one or more line of enquiry as your starting point consider how you can work in a number of curriculum areas to build links.

## Using Environmental issues as a line of enquiry

Here are a few ideas of how you can develop a range of learning opportunities to engage pupils with this line of enquiry. Each activity can link with the others to build on pupils' learning across the curriculum.

Using the feather cloak as your context:





## Tips for introducing objects to a class

- Display an image of the object in the classroom for a number of days with a sound recorder or 'graffiti wall' for children to add comments or questions about the object. Once comments and questions are gathered a class discussion can follow.
- Display a large image of the object in the classroom. Cover it with paper and then gradually reveal it in the days leading up to your visit, asking pupils to guess what they are going to see.
- Work in pairs sitting back to back. One child has a picture of the object and describes what they can see whilst the other draws what is described
- Introduce an object to the whole class in a question and answer session as outlined on page one
- Create a word bank using words that come from looking at the object and use these to create poems.

## Useful Resources

- Learn more about the stories around the feather cloak  
<https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/event/feather-cloak>
- Discover how people used to live in the Ahupua'a through interacting with this child-friendly app  
<https://ksdigitalfiles.ksbe.edu/elearn/ahupuaa2021/story.html>
- Find out about the Hawaiian landscape and spot native plants, trees and animals in bright, joyful quilts created by the Honolulu-based Poakalani Quilters  
<https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/event/ma-uka-to-ma-kai>

## Take One...Inspires

Take One... encourages teachers to use an object, painting or other resource imaginatively in the classroom, both as a stimulus for artwork, and for work in more unexpected curriculum areas. Work in many curriculum areas can be inspired by using a single object as a starting point.

The challenge is for teachers to use objects to develop culturally enriching, relevant and practical learning opportunities across the curriculum.



Interior of Pitt Rivers Museum

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