

EMBRACING THE SEA

As descendants of ancient Polynesian seafarers, early Hawaiians developed a way of life closely connected to Hawai'i's ocean environment. To this day, many Native Hawaiians embrace the sea and its creatures, such as the *koholā* (humpback whale), through unique cultural practices and traditions. The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary works to affirm these unique ocean-based elements of Hawaiian culture through special education and outreach activities. By doing this, the sanctuary strives to enhance the survival of North Pacific humpback whales and the ocean-based, conservation-oriented culture of Native Hawaiians.

Legendary Areas of the Koholā - During the winter, Hawai'i's waters take on a new energy as the *koholā* return to their breeding and calving grounds. Natives acknowledged their presence through legendary place names throughout the islands. For example, *Koholālele* meaning "leaping whale," refers to locations along the Hāmākua coast of Hawai'i and at Līhu'e, Kaua'i. *Laeonākoholā* on Kaho'olawe refers to the "cape of whales." *Pu'ukoholā Heiau*, one of Hawai'i's largest *heiau* (temples), was built upon "whale hill." Built in the 1790's under the direction of Kamehameha I, this *heiau* played an important role in his subsequent rise to power as the ruler of all Hawai'i.



Hawaiian Voyagers - Centuries ago, Hawai'i's ancestors voyaged vast distances across the Pacific, resulting in the development of a unique culture. Voyagers were accomplished observers of their natural surroundings, using the clouds, winds, stars, and currents to guide them safely to their destinations. Voyaging between islands and across the Pacific allowed Hawaiians to explore, trade and transport materials. Today, new generations explore their ancestral culture as traditional canoes set sail in remembrance of Hawai'i's voyagers.



Master Fishermen - For centuries in Hawai'i, entire families were devoted to mastering the art of fishing. Ancient Hawaiian fishing traditions are still seen today as *lawai'a* (fishermen) use hooks, lines, and spears to fish during the day, and torches to fish at night. *Limu* (seaweed) and other resources are also gathered along the shorelines.



Fishing Shrines - To promote the abundance of fish, the *lawai'a* would pray to one of many fishing deities, such as *Kū'ula*, for an abundant and successful catch. *Kū'ula* were also stones that represented the god, or a *heiau*, where offerings were left. Many times these *kū'ula heiau* were associated with other *ko'a*, markers that led fishermen to their secret fishing grounds. These *ko'a* were used as landmarks in the same manner that today's fishermen use Global Positioning System (GPS) technology.



The Ahupua'a - A significant part of ancient Hawaiian culture was based on a land division system known as the *ahupua'a*. From the mountains to the sea, the *ahupua'a* enabled many practices such as trading, farming, fishing, and maintenance of resources to flourish under the supervision of a *konoiki* (manager). By caring and showing reverence for the land and sea, Hawaiians understood that these resources would in turn, care for the people.

Unique Fishponds - The islands' shorelines were once decorated by a lacework of rock-walled fishponds. These ponds evolved from an earlier form of Polynesian aquaculture into the *loko kuapā* style which is unique to Hawai'i. Encompassing shallow coastal waters up to the shoreline, the *kuapā* (rock wall) enclosed an area of water in which Hawaiians could manage and raise fish. A *mākāhā* (sluice gate) allowed small fish to enter and prevented larger fish from escaping.



Toothed Whales and the Lei Niho Palaoa - Besides the *koholā*, *palaoa* (toothed whales) also frequent Hawai'i's waters. It is believed that when the carcass of a toothed whale, such as the sperm whale, washed ashore, it became *kapu* (taboo) and was reserved only for the *ali'i* (ruling class). From this carcass, the *niho* (tooth) was extracted, carved and made into a whale tooth necklace known as the *lei niho palaoa*. This *lei*, rare in form and structure, was an intricately woven necklace of human hair with the carved whale's tooth hanging as a pendant.



The Life of the Sea - When Hawaiians gazed upon the sea, they viewed all forms of sea life as *i'a*. From the *limu* to the *koholā*, from the *wana* (sea urchins) to the *manō* (sharks), many *i'a* were sacred and revered as *'aumākua*. An *'aumākua* is believed to be the spirit of a family ancestor that assumes the shape of an animal such as the *manō*, *he'e* (octopus), *honu* (turtles), and others. These *'aumākua* protected the families, who in turn, cared for the animals. *'Aumākua* are still honored today, as Hawaiian families pass on the knowledge, practices and traditions of their *kūpuna* (elders).



HAWAIIAN ISLANDS HUMPBAC WHALE NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Facilitating Native Hawaiian Ocean Uses, Traditions and Practices

<http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>

About the Artist: Brook Kapūkunihi Parker has been an artist for over 30 years and enjoys expressing his love for the Hawaiian culture. During this time, he has created artwork for many organizations including children's book illustrations for 'Aha Pūnana Leo (Hawaiian Immersion School Program), the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and Hilo, and many other projects throughout the years. He used colored pencils and marking pens to create this brilliant artwork for the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary.

