

Wahi Kapu o Pele

(Sacred Place of Pele)

Grade 4



*No Kahiki mai ka wahine o Pele,
Mai ka 'aina mai o Polapola,
Mai ka punohu a Kane,
Mai ke ao lapa i ka lani.*

The woman Pele comes from Kahiki,
From the land of Polapola,
From the rising mist of Kane,
From the clouds that move in the sky.

There was a time in the mysterious past when the air was surrounded with spiritual beings and a thin veil divided the living from the dead, the natural from the supernatural. During that time Pele, goddess of the volcano, came to Hawai'i carrying her youngest and favorite sister Hi'iakaikapoliopele, as an egg.



Photo Analysis

- 1) Who is Pele?
- 2) Where did she come from?
- 3) What is Pele holding in her right hand?

“Pele, the sacred living deity of Hawai'i's volcanoes, controls the limitless power of creation through her perseverance, molten strength, and unearthly beauty. Her passion emanates from her ancient existence. Revered and honored is the fire goddess. She is my spiritual guardian and forever the heartbeat and soul, continuously giving life to her land and its people.”

Pele Hanoa, August 8, 2004 (her 81st birthday)

Pele painting by Arthur Johnsen

Setting the stage

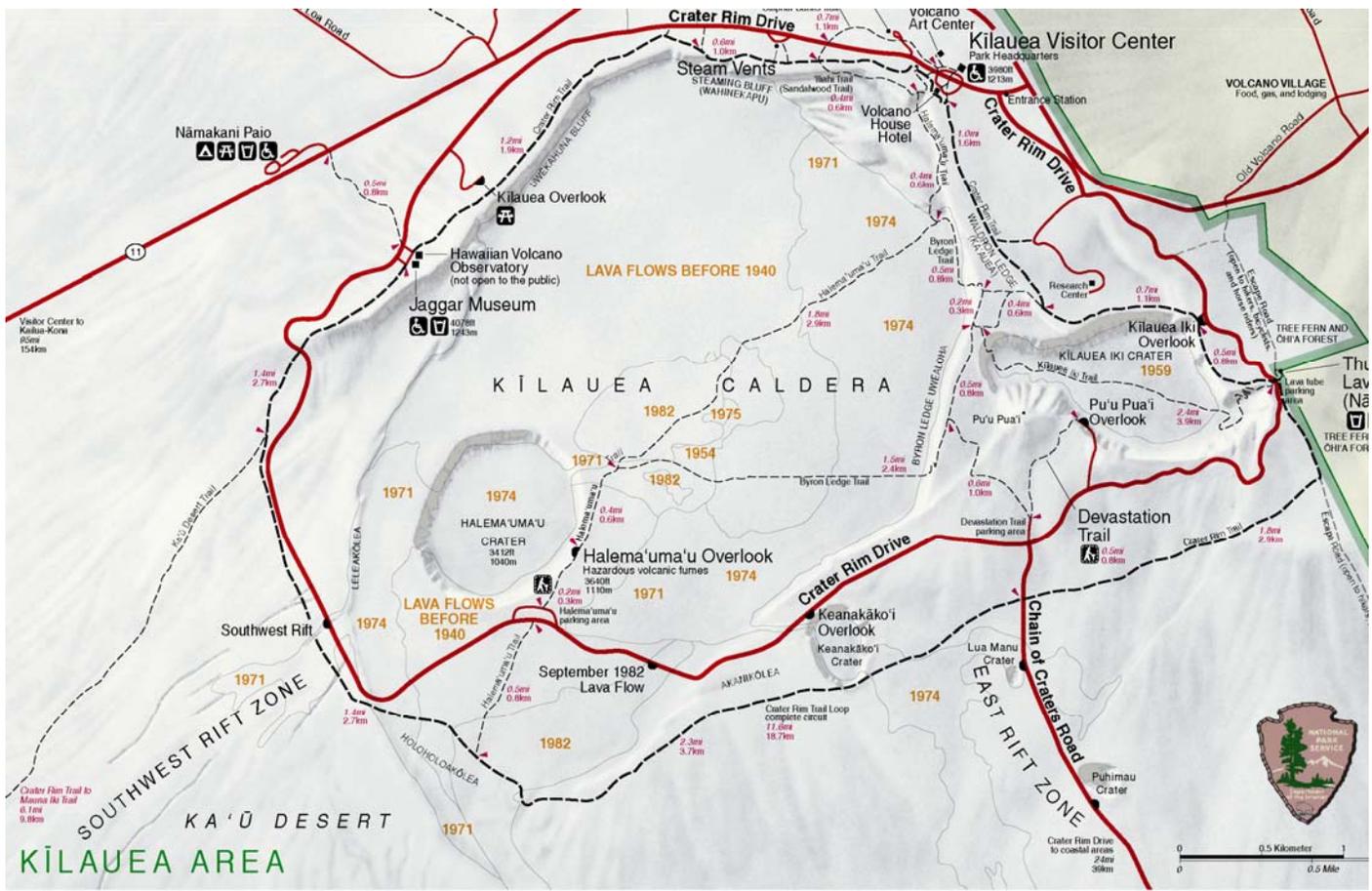
Pele traveled from the northern-most islands guided by her favorite brother Kamohoali'i who was also a guardian shark. Having traveled for many miles from Kahiki in search of a suitable home for her fire and family, Pele finally settled in the crater of Halema'uma'u at the summit of Kīlauea Volcano.

Pele personifies fire and volcanism in all its forms. The volcanic landscape is her handiwork. The poetic name for her is *Ka wahine 'ai honua*, the woman who devours the earth. She sends streams of molten lava flowing down the slopes of the island of Hawai'i, destroying everything in its path. The land trembles and the sky is afire with a crimson glow as her molten body moves across the land. Those present whisper in awe, "*'Ae, 'aia la o Pele, there is Pele*".



Pele painting by Herb Kawainui Kane

Locating the Site: Map



Determining the Facts: Mo‘o‘ōlelo – Oral History

1) Pele and Kamapua‘a

Many Hawaiian stories speak of the relationships between Pele and other gods and humans. One story tells why Pele's home at the summit of Kīlauea is called Halema‘uma‘u, house of the ‘ama‘u fern.

The *kinolau* (body form) of the pig god Kamapua‘a can be seen as a fern or fish. Kamapua‘a also appeared as a man. Kamapua‘a embodies many things in nature like the mist or rain. When he came to Kīlauea to woo Pele, she rejected his love and cried out at him, "A‘ohe ‘oe kanaka, he pua‘a ‘oe, you are not a man, you are a pig!"

He was insulted beyond words and an angry battle ensued between them. Pele hurled bolts of fire and molten lava. Kamapua‘a brought down torrential rains to douse the fires of Pele. The battle raged for a great period of time, each trying to out do the other. Kamapua‘a quickly turned himself into the ‘ama‘u fern and surrounded her fiery home. To this day we remember the battle between Pele and Kamapua‘a and is one story about how Halema‘uma‘u got its name.

‘Ama‘u fern



2) Ho‘okupu



Ho‘okupu are gifts or offerings. Some types of ho‘okupu that are given to Pele are ‘ama‘u, pork, red fish, banana, ‘ōhi‘a-lehua blossoms, and red ‘ohelo berries that grow near her domain.

Today, many people bring ho‘okupu to Halema‘uma‘u Crater. Sometimes, the offerings are inappropriate because they are not traditional like a prayer, chant, dance, or lei made of native materials.

Look for examples of inappropriate offerings at the Halema‘uma‘u Overlook. What things do you see at the overlook that could be considered inappropriate?

E Pele

E Pele, e Pele ka‘u ka‘u li ana

Pele, Pele, hissing along

E Pele, e Pele hua ina hua ina

Pele, Pele, bursting forth

E Pele e Pele oni luna oni luna

Pele, Pele, moving upward

E Pele e Pele oni lalo oni lalo

Pele, Pele, moving downward

He inoa no Pele

In honor of Pele

3) 'Ōhi'a-Lehua

The red 'ōhi'a lehua is a favorite flower of Pele. According to the mo'ō'ōlelo, picking these blossoms will bring the rain.

Another story tells about a handsome man, named 'Ōhi'a who rejected Pele's love. He was in love with a girl named Lehua. Pele turned him into the 'ōhi'a-lehua tree to punish him. Lehua wept because she could not find 'Ōhi'a. Lehua was changed into the red blossoms and placed on the tree. 'Ōhi'a and Lehua remain together until today.

What other colors of 'ōhi'a lehua flowers have you seen?

'Ōhi'a lehua flower



4) 'Ōhelo



The 'ōhelo plant is unique to Hawai'i. One mo'ō'ōlelo tells us that the 'ōhelo was sacred to Pele and that the fruiting branches were offered as a sign of respect. People did not come to Kīlauea or eat the fruit without making an offering to Pele first.

The 'ōhelo was sacred to Pele because it represented the flesh and bones of a younger sister whose name was Ka'ōhelo.

Why was the 'ōhelo sacred to Pele?

5) Keōua's Army Overcome by Volcanic Eruption -September 28, 1922

The following excerpt comes from an account in the book Kamehameha and His Warrior Kekūhaupi'o, Stephen L. Desha.

It describes the 1790 explosive eruption at Halema'uma'u Crater and uses the traditional name of the steam flats area now called Steam Vents.

“Here, however, is the report of the historians concerning this sudden terrible accident to Keōua's warriors: When the returning warriors descended to a certain place called **Kūkamāhuākea**, a very strong earthquake began to shake the earth which cracked and split. Fine volcanic ash spurted upward so that the people close to some of those cracks had no time to seek safety. Also, when those large, deep cracks opened up, some people were unable to avoid them. On the small cracks, they laid down their fighting clubs joining them like ladders, and got precariously to the other side of the crack. Some of these warriors escaped. When the second division of Keōua's warriors arrived close to Uwēkahuna, the sky darkened with lethal smoke and ash, and that division of almost eight hundred warriors was also covered over.

Those who escaped this misfortune from the ash fall talked loudly about it, saying that the main reason for it was their barbaric actions toward blameless women which, however, had been at the command of their *ali'i 'ai kalana*.”

Kūkamāhuākea- kū: to rise, as dust **ka:** the **māhu:** steam, vapor, fumes; to steam, exude vapor
ākea: broad, wide, spacious, open, unobstructed, public, at large

Visual Evidence

We descended into the crater. Pele revealed herself in robes of awful majesty. O goddess of Hawaiian Lore, enshrouded in the mysteries of eternity, who may know the secrets of thy heart? What scientist may wrest from thy creation or know from whence thou art?

Volcano House Hotel Ledger, Edward Smith, 9 August 1885.



Scientific Evidence

According to USGS geologist, Don Swanson, the geological evidence that we see today, links to the stories told by the Hawaiian people about historical eruptions. “I’ve found, at least to my satisfaction, that some of the most important Hawaiian chants and stories describe some of Kīlauea’s past volcanic events, including explosions, the collapse of the top of the volcano to form the caldera about 500 years ago, and some of the large lava flows. It has been the source of immense satisfaction to make a connection between the oral history and the geologic history”.



Sometime before 1000 A.D., Kīlauea volcano blasted skyward in an eruption so massive it sent rocks and dust as much as 18 miles into the air.

The cloud of debris may have been seen on Maui, said Don Swanson, scientist-in-charge at the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory.

And the eruption may have changed the way Hawaiians viewed Kīlauea, ushering in the new volcano goddess Pele, said Hawaiian cultural consultant Kepā Maly.

For several years, geologists have known about fist-size rocks shot through the air, different from surrounding rocks, lying on the ground south of Kīlauea, Swanson said. In August, geologists took a closer look. "What we found surprised, even shocked us," Swanson said. About five miles from the summit, they found a rock weighing 4.3 pounds. At six miles from the summit, they found one weighing nearly 3 pounds.

The eruption of Kulanaokua‘iki (600-1,000 AD) is an event that may help explain the correlation between two deities. “Everyone has heard of the volcano goddess Pele, but not everyone knows that she was sometimes called a “malihini”. Before her, was the volcano god, ‘Ailā‘au. His name means “forest eater” and he was relatively peaceful. Pele was more violent and drove ‘Ailā‘au away. Was it this eruption or a different event that lead to the rise of Pele and fall of ‘Ailā‘au?”, said, Maly. According to Don Swanson, one thing we know for sure, is that Kīlauea has been very active since that time period!

Field Activities

Mo‘o‘ōlelo and Science

Vocabulary – From the word list below, find the word that best describes each definition. Write that word in the space provided.

Caldera, ho‘okupu, kinolau, wahi kapu, mo‘o‘ōlele, ‘ōhi‘a lehua, Pele, ‘Āi lā‘au, Kamapua‘a, Halema‘uma‘u,

Definitions

1. goddess of the volcano _____
2. traditional story or explanation about people, events, or places _____
3. a large crater formed when the top of a volcano collapses _____
4. male deity who lived at Kīlauea before Pele _____
5. sacred place _____
6. crater that is the home of Pele _____
7. favorite flower of Pele _____
8. red fern frond, pig, red fish, ‘ohelo berries, banana, ‘ohi‘a-lehua flowers _____
9. the pig god _____
10. Body form of Kamapua‘a; could be a pig, fern, fish _____

Linking Tradition to Science

On the lines provided, write the scientific occurrence for these mo‘o‘ōlelo.

When Pele stamps her feet the earth shakes. _____.

Pele no longer favored Keōuakū‘ahu‘ula so she threw rocks at his army, darkened the sky with ash, lightning struck, and gases killed them. _____.

Write your own mo‘o‘ōlelo based on scientific evidence. _____

Conclusion

Mo‘o‘ōlelo are wonderful examples of historic events that link the geological evidences found by scientists at this wahi kapu, Kīluaea, the sacred home of Pele. These stories relate how Hawaiians linked the relationships of their deities to respect and stewardship of the land.

Research and Information Sites:

Pele and Hi‘iaka, Nathaniel B. Emerson

Pele, goddess of Hawai‘i’s Volcanoes, Herb Kawainui Kane

Hawai‘i Volcanoes National Park Website: <http://nps.gov/havo>, www.efieldtrips.org/havo

Hawaiian Volcano Observatory Website: <http://hvo.wr.usgs.gov>

United States Geological Survey Website: <http://volcanoes.usgs.gov>

Volcano World Website: <http://volcano.und.nodak.edu/vw.html>

Work Sheet Answers

Definitions

1. goddess of volcanoes Pele
2. traditional story or explanation about people, events, or places mo‘o‘ōlelo
3. a large crater formed when the top of a volcano collapses caldera
4. male deity who lived at Kīlauea before Pele ‘Ailā‘au
5. sacred place wahi kapu
6. crater that is the home of Pele Halema‘uma‘u
7. favorite flower of Pele ‘ōhi‘a lehua
8. red fern frond, pig, red fish, ‘ohelo berries, banana, ‘ōhi‘a lehua flowers ho‘okupu
9. the pig god Kamapua‘a
10. Body form of Kamapua‘a; could be a pig, fern, fish kinolau

Linking Tradition to Science

On the lines provided, write the scientific occurrence for these mo‘o‘ōlelo.

When Pele stamps her feet the earth shakes. Earthquake

Pele no longer favored Keōuaū‘ahu‘ula so she threw rocks at his army, darkened the sky with ash, lightning struck, and gases killed them. Explosive eruption of 1790