



Navigating by the Stars: The Polynesian Voyaging Society

Nainoa Thompson, Polynesian Voyaging Society
Hawaii

☀ Call to Action

To learn more about the Polynesian Voyaging Society, please visit www.hokulea.com.

☀ Values

- Courage
- Dedication
- Adventure
- Commitment
- Environmentalism

☀ Lessons Learned

We can find solutions to modern problems by reconnecting with the ancient wisdom included in our heritage.

If you want people to care about nature, you must first help them learn how to connect to it.

Sometimes the best way to secure our future is to learn from the past.

Nainoa Thompson has devoted his life to reviving ancient Hawaiian cultural traditions that were nearly lost to history.

Whether he is working on cultural preservation, environmental advocacy, or championing sustainability education for Hawaiian youth, he credits everything he's achieved to the guidance of generous teachers. "I owe everything I've done to the great teachers I've been fortunate to learn from in my journey of life." In 1976 Nainoa saw the Hōkūle'a—a traditional Polynesian voyaging canoe with no Western implements—set sail from Hawaii en route to Tahiti for the first time in 600 years. Inspired by the Hawaiian cultural renaissance, he became a navigator for the Polynesian Voyage Society. Over a period of 45 years, his voyages have totaled more than 250,000 nautical miles—the equivalent of circumnavigating the earth 20 times!

☀ Language Arts

Working in groups of 3-5 students, create a presentation about the history of Hawaii (starting before it became part of the U.S.). Research the island's culture and traditions.

How do Hawaiian culture and traditions differ from Western traditions? How have Western culture, traditions, and economic models affected Hawaii? At the end of the presentation, mention which of the facts that you learned that surprised you and your team members the most, and why.

Climate change and pollution are some of the negative side effects of industrialization and modernization. How have the practices associated with modernization and industrialization affected Hawaii's ecosystems, economy, and culture? Create a 5–10-minute video in which you use secondary sources to answer these questions. Conclude your video by giving concrete suggestions

about how more traditional values and practices could be used to create a more sustainable paradigm for the island.

Nainoa says that “our solutions don’t evade us because of an absence of technology, but an absence of culture.”

What do you think he means? Participate in a [Socratic Seminar](#)¹ with your peers in which you discuss the meaning of these words in the context of the story, but also in the context of your own community. How would learning, and becoming familiar with our own ancestral culture help us find solutions to problems we perceive as being too technologically advanced?

STEM Activities

What are the differences between Pacific and Western navigation methods? Between Polynesian and Micronesian methods? What natural signs are used by traditional Pacific navigators? When and how do you think these signs were used?

Using this [lesson plan \(page 19\) from UNESCO.org](#)², students will learn about the different types of boats and canoes used by Polynesian navigators, and will analyze and explain how certain of their design/structural features contribute to their ability to take such long ocean voyages.

In this [lab from the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry](#)³, students will learn about constellations and how they are used for communication, navigation, and timekeeping. They will then learn how to use a star map, an indispensable tool for touring the night sky.

Sustainability Innovations

As home base of the Polynesian Society, Hawaii has been a centerpiece for the voyages of the Hōkūle‘a. What is the [Polynesian Voyaging Society](#)⁴? How can our knowledge of traditional voyages impact our future generations and their view of the Earth?

In addition to the Hōkūle‘a voyages, Hawaiian culture has played an important role in the sustainability and preservation of our Earth. Nonprofits such as [The Kohala Center](#)⁵ are vital in perpetuating the combination of research, a’ina stewardship, ancestral knowledge, and sustainable systems needed to prepare the islands for a more sustainable future.

One of Nainoa’s greatest accomplishments has been serving as a mentor and guide to young students in Hawaii.

It is important to perpetuate Indigenous culture in communities that rely on traditional knowledge and history for grounding in their roots. [Kupu Hawaii](#)⁶ is an organization that helps students identify green careers and connect to the a’ina.

Sustainability Career Pathways

Indigenous Studies Scholar. So much knowledge--of the land, of celestial navigation, of a sustainable way of life, of [living through a world-changing societal crisis](#)⁷--exists in the experience and history of Indigenous peoples. Learning from and sharing this knowledge could be a powerful and valuable career path. If this is a path for you, you could start your explorations at the [Native American and Indigenous Studies Association](#)⁸ or at the [Center for World Indigenous Studies](#)⁹.

The Shipping Industry. The shipping industry is a key part of the global economy. This field requires [captains](#)¹⁰, [navigators](#)¹¹, logistics managers, and crew. Can you imagine yourself working on a ship? How about on a [cutting-edge, sustainable ship](#)¹² that uses solar and wind energy to keep its environmental impact minimal? Or perhaps you’d like to [design sustainable ships](#)¹³?

Satellite Technology. The modern world runs on satellites, which are used for everything from communications and navigation to sustainability applications like tracking weather and climate patterns in agriculture. Have you ever considered helping to design, launch, and run satellites? [Learn more here](#)¹⁴.

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- 1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SW-WQk-UnUg>
 - 2 http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/Canoe_teachers_manual_LR.pdf
 - 3 https://omsi.edu/sites/default/files/field/educator-guide/navigating_by_the_stars_teacher_guide.pdf
 - 4 <http://www.hokulea.com/moananuiakea/>
 - 5 <https://kohalacenter.org/>
 - 6 <https://www.kupuhawaii.org/hysc/>
 - 7 http://earthed.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SOW17_chap4_IndigenousEd.pdf
 - 8 <https://www.naisa.org/>
 - 9 <https://www.cwis.org/>
 - 10 <https://www.yourfreecareertest.com/ship-captain/>
 - 11 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navigator>
 - 12 <https://solarimpulse.com/sustainable-shipping-solutions>
 - 13 <https://www.marineinsight.com/green-shipping/13-technologies-to-make-the-ultimate-green-ship/>
 - 14 <https://www.jyi.org/2013-march/2017/6/25/careers-in-satellite-technology>

