

The Birth of Hawaii and Vocabulary

Section Objective:

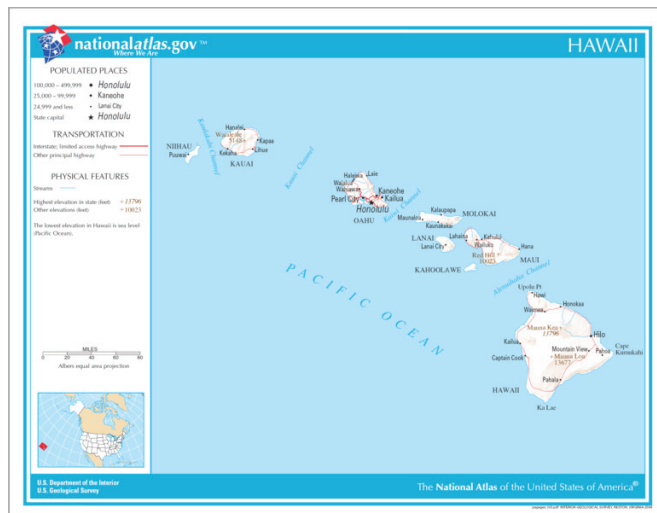
- Monitor reading comprehension
- Evaluate an author's argument
- Identify cause and effect
- Understand the way a work of literature is related to its historical period
- Analyze characteristics of folktales
- Analyze similes
- Understand synonyms and epithets
- Understand idioms

"The Birth of Hawaii"

Introduction to the Reading

This story from the Hawaiian people reflects this significance of volcanoes in this island kingdom. Volcanoes literally formed the islands, and continue to form them today. The largest island in the group has the actual name of Hawaii, though it is also called "the big island," since it is significantly larger than the rest. The Big Island also continues to grow, since the eruptions and lava flows from its active volcano extend the land mass of the island itself. The actual volcano now lies mostly within Volcanoes National Park. If you see older maps of the sailing seas, these island may appear under the name Sandwich Islands: the English explorer Captain Cook named them in honor of his patron, the Fourth Earl of Sandwich. This Earl popularized a quick meal that wouldn't interrupt his card games, thus giving his name to the sandwich.

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park was established in 1916 and includes over 500 square miles of land. Inside the park the land elevation ranges from sea level to 13,677 feet, the summit of Mauna Loa, Earth's most massive volcano. Climates within the park range from tropical rain forests to deserts.



Reading Skills

The Hawaiian alphabet uses only 12 Roman letters: a, e, i, o, u, h, k, l, m, n, p, w. In addition, it uses diacritical marks (line a apostrophe) to indicate breaks between letters. For example, while we usually write the name as *Hawaii*, the original peoples would write the name as *Hawai'i*, using the diacritical mark. With fewer letters used for all words, sometimes reading stories seems more confusing: for example, many names of people and places in this short story start with the letter *H*. As you **monitor your reading**, create a list of words as each new character or place is mentioned; that way, you can more easily keep track of events in the story.

When the egg hatches, Pele names her new sister. **Explain** the meaning of her name; based on the name, determine the early relationship between the two sisters. The story indicates that Pele cared for her sister as she grew up: list the **evidence** in the tale that demonstrates this caring attitude.

The characteristics of *anger and suspicion* affect the actions of Pele. Identify the **causes** of her anger and suspicion, then list the **effects** that these qualities have on others in the story and on Pele herself.

Based on earlier discussions, list the examples of **irony** you see in the actions and reactions of Pele toward her sister.

Literary Skills

The opening words of the story reflect the history of the Hawaiian people: “For many months, Pele followed a star from the northeast...and migrated toward it.” About 1,600 years ago, Polynesian people from the Marquesas Islands crossed the 2,400 miles of ocean to the Hawaiian Islands, bringing seeds, plant shoots, and animals with them. These navigators used the stars, and travelled northeast from their homeland to Hawaii. About 800 years ago, another set of Polynesians from the Society Islands migrated to Hawaii. Together, these groups forged a unique Hawaiian culture, unknown until Captain Cook began contacts with the Western world. Folktales handed down through oral tradition over centuries often contain pieces of historical information about their ancestors. In this case, we have information surviving from their earliest founding.

As a regular **characteristic of folktales**, magic typically plays a significant role. In this instance, Pele has a magic stick, named Pa’oa. Consider the similarity between Pele’s naming her magic stick, and Roland or Arthur naming their swords. Magic also involves turning someone into stone or bringing someone back to life. Examine the uses of magic; **draw your own conclusions** about the appropriateness of these types of magic given the setting of the tales on a volcanic island.

Folktales also frequently portray **division of territory** significant to the people. Living on the mountain, Pele battles the fire God Ailaau. The battle involves fire, fitting for the battle on a volcano mountain. After Pele wins, she becoming ruler of the Island and lives in the fern grove; but Ailaau “hides in he caverns under the earth,” the source of burning lava that often erupts. Mention of the shark God implies the ruler of the sea. In the Zulu

story, division of territory involved the traditional villages of the people who lived along the grasslands, and the water ruled by the Spirit people. **Examine the details** of the story and list all references to *fire* and *water* as significant elements.

As another **characteristic of folktales**, the **egg** often plays a significant role, especially in creation stories. Examine the use of the egg in this story. **Draw your own conclusions** about the appropriateness of this symbol and how it functions within the story. As another characteristic, folktales often use round numbers or **symbolic numbers** to indicate time. In this story, Pele waited forty days for the return of Hi'iaka to return. List the associations you have with the time of *forty days*.

Vocabulary

The name of the Fire god living under the mountain is Ailaau, which means “forest eater.” Consider forest eater as a **simile**; determine what object it refers to, given the setting of the story.

An **idiom** in the story describes “the mountain where part of the earth collapsed.” Re-state this idiom in your own words based on your knowledge of volcanoes.

Aloha is a Hawaiian term with many meanings. It serves as a common greeting (both *hello* and *good-by*); but it also has other meanings. **Use context clues** from the end of the story to determine other meanings of *aloha*.

Specific vocabulary words: volcanic, eruption, caverns, sulfur, aloha

