



Diversity of Cultures

## Māori Pride: Haka as Cultural Resistance and Identity

### Historical Context

The haka is a powerful traditional Māori performance art form that combines chanting, movement, and body percussion to express a wide range of emotions (pride, unity, defiance, and grief). Far more than a war dance, the haka serves as a living embodiment of Māori identity, spirituality, and resistance. Rooted in centuries of Indigenous tradition in Aotearoa (New Zealand), haka has long been a way for Māori communities to assert mana (prestige), whakapapa (genealogy), and a deep connection to ancestors. The word haka is derived from the Māori terms ha (breath) and ka (to ignite or energize), reflecting its role as a physical and spiritual force. There are many forms of haka; some are performed before battle to summon strength and unify warriors, while others are used in funerals, to honor guests, or to celebrate cultural pride. All haka involve rhythmic movement, chanting, stomping, facial expressions, and gestures that communicate emotion and purpose. During the era of British colonization (early 19th century), Māori cultural practices, including the haka, were marginalized or discouraged in official spaces. However, haka endured as a form of cultural resilience and resistance, allowing Māori to maintain their traditions in the face of colonial pressures to assimilate. In modern times, haka has reemerged as a symbol of Māori sovereignty, particularly during the Māori Renaissance of the 1970s–1990s, when Māori activists reclaimed language, land rights, and cultural practices as part of broader decolonization efforts. One of the most internationally recognized haka performances is by the All Blacks, New Zealand's national rugby team. Before every match, the team performs a haka, most famously Ka Mate or the more recent Kapa o Pango, to honor Māori culture and to project unity, strength, and pride on the world stage. While this tradition has helped globalize the haka, it has also sparked important conversations about cultural appropriation versus cultural respect, and who has the right to perform haka with authenticity and intention. Today, the haka remains a vital expression of Māori cultural identity. Whether performed at marae (tribal meeting grounds), protest marches, state funerals, or international sporting events, haka is a living tradition that connects past to present. It stands not only as an art form, but also as a symbol of Indigenous resistance, survival, and pride, a declaration that Māori culture is powerful, sovereign, and here to stay.

### Connection to Habit

Studying the haka through the lens of Diversity of Cultures helps students recognize that history is shaped by the values, traditions, and worldviews of different cultural groups. The haka is not just a performance; it is a deeply rooted expression of Māori identity, resistance, and ancestral connection. By exploring its meaning, evolution, and continued relevance, students gain insight into how Indigenous communities preserve and assert their culture in the face of colonization, globalization, and appropriation. This encourages respect for cultural expression and challenges the idea that dominant narratives are the only ones that matter in history.

## Discussion Questions

- What does the haka mean to Māori people, both historically and today?
- How do the movements, chanting, and facial expressions in haka communicate emotion and meaning?
- How has haka been used as a form of resistance or cultural survival during colonization and after?
- How does haka help preserve Māori language, traditions, and stories?
- How does the meaning or impact of haka change depending on where and why it is performed (ie. sports, funerals, government)?
- What is the difference between cultural appreciation and appropriation when it comes to haka?
- Why is it important to recognize haka as more than a performance? What does it teach us about Māori identity and cultural power?

## Suggested Activity

Materials Needed:

- Image: [Haka painting showing the traditional genre of Māori dance \(1845\)](#)
- Video 1: [All Blacks Haka – Rugby Match \(2022\)](#)
- Video 2: [Parliamentary Haka Honoring MP Nanaia Mahuta \(2024\)](#)
- [Student Analysis Guide](#)
- Notebook Paper
- Pencil/Pen

Step 1: Warm Up Activity - Interpreting an Image of Haka [10 mins]

Source: [Māori War Dance – Kahuroa \(c. 1890\)](#)

Project the image on the board or provide printed copies. Ask students to silently observe the photo for 1–2 minutes. Then, have them respond to the following visual thinking prompts in writing or with a peer:

Think–Pair–Share Questions [10 mins]

1. What stands out to you in this image?
2. How do you think the people in this photo are feeling or what emotions are they expressing?
3. What does this image suggest about the haka's purpose or cultural importance?
4. Why do you think this performance would have been significant at the time it was taken?

Transition Statement: Explain that this image captures a traditional haka, performed by Māori warriors. Today, they will explore how the haka continues to be a living form of cultural expression, used in different ways to assert Māori pride, identity, and resistance.

Step 2: Comparing Haka in Sports and Government [15 mins]

Sources:

1. [All Blacks Haka – Rugby Match](#) (3 mins 56 secs)
2. [Parliamentary Haka Honoring MP Nanaia Mahuta](#) (30 secs)

Divide students into small groups. As they watch each video, they should use the following [Student Analysis Guide](#) to take notes and prepare to share their reflections.

Step 3: Whole Class Debrief Discussion Questions [10-15 mins]

1. How does the haka function differently in a sports setting versus a government setting?
2. What similarities did you notice between the two performances?
3. Why might it be important that haka is used in formal state spaces, like Parliament?
4. What does the haka help communicate that words alone cannot?
5. How does this connect to the idea of cultural survival and sovereignty?
6. The haka has gained global attention through sports, especially the All Blacks rugby team. How do you think this visibility affects Māori culture positively or negatively?

# Primary Sources

Source 1: Painting - Haka Māori dance (1845)



Source: [Haka painting showing the traditional genre of Māori dance \(1845\)](#).

Source 2: Video - [All Blacks Haka – Rugby Match \(2022\)](#)

Source 3: Video - [Parliamentary Haka Honoring MP Nanaia Mahuta \(2024\)](#).

### Student Analysis Guide: Haka as Cultural Resistance and Identity

Instructions: As you watch each video, take notes on the similarities and differences between the haka performed in a sports context (All Blacks rugby team) and a government context (Parliamentary tribute). Use the table below to record your observations.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Question	Haka at Rugby Match (All Blacks)	Haka in Parliament (MP Nanaia Mahuta)
What is the setting or occasion?		
What is the purpose or message of the haka?		
What emotions are being expressed or evoked?		
How do the audience or bystanders respond?		
What traditional elements do you notice (chants, gestures, movement)?		
How does this haka reflect Māori cultural pride, identity, or resistance?		