What is Ahupua’a?

Summary
Students go through an exercise where they divide an island using their own designs. They pair up and compare designs with each other. Finally, students are introduced to the traditional Hawaiian ahupua’a system where the island is divided along the watersheds to include all ecosystems.

Objectives
In this introduction to an ahupua’a, students learn how the land was divided under traditional Hawaiian system. They also start to look at the ahupua’a as a unit that contains different types of ecosystems.

Materials
1 Poster board (alternative: 1 projector and a screen)
Coloring markers

Making Connections
For those teachers who are interested, there are many resources available for investigating the ahupua’a (see Resource section). PRISM also has a 5th grade curriculum devoted to the ahupua’a system and sustainability. However, in this unit, we are going to focus on the ahupua’a as an animal habitat.

Teacher Prep for Activity
• Print out the pre-assessment.
• Print out the ahupua’a poster (pdf file is provided with this lesson) or a large version of the ahupua’a drawing (using the template provided in the Supplemental Materials section on p.7). If a projector is available, you may choose to show the drawing on a screen.
• Print/copy the ahupua’a worksheets for the class.

Background
Ahupua’a refers to the traditional land dividing system in Hawai’i. The land was vertically divided along the rivers to give individual ahupua’a, and each system contained the montane region, the valley, and the sea. At the edge of each ahupua’a, a pig altar was built to mark the boundary. Hence it got the name ahu (altar) pua’a (pig).

For students to understand why Hawai’i was divided using the ahupua’a system, they must first learn the concept of sustainability. In the time without grocery stores, cars or airplanes, Hawaiians learned to be self sufficient while living on the islands with limited resources. The rulers at the time divided the land so that in each unit people would had all the resources they needed. Each unit followed
the riparian along a natural watershed, from the mountain to the sea. People were allowed to utilize everything in their own unit, without crossing the boundary to other units. This system made each ahupua’a self sustaining and, at the same time, not wasteful. If the people in an ahupua’a exhausted their resources, they had to live with the consequences without taking from others.

In this unit, we are going to look closely at the native animals found in an ahupua’a. Many animals do not obey the boundary rules of an ahupua’a. However, animals such as Hawaiian freshwater goby require an uninterrupted pathway between the watershed and the sea (see ‘O’opu lesson). The ahupua’a system encourages the protection of a complete watershed. Further, the ahupua’a system promotes values in conservation. These values are essential for preserving Hawaii’s native animals that are facing habitat alteration and destruction (see Save Our Native Forests lesson). Finally, an ahupua’a represents diverse habitats for various native animals. It is impossible to look at all the native animals in an ahupua’a during a 4-week unit; however, this unit will introduce some charismatic animals (see Happy Face Spider and Hawaiian Hoary Bat lessons) to first graders as they step into the natural world of “Animal Ahupua’a”.

Vocabulary explained:
Ahupua’a is the common subdivision of the land in old Hawai’i.
Habitat is the natural place for an animal.
Ecosystem is a system formed by the interaction of a community of organisms with their environment.
Resource is a source of supply that is readily to be used when needed.

Procedure
1. Conduct the pre-assessment prior to the lesson (it can be done on a separate day).
2. Introduce vocabulary to the class. Begin the lesson by asking the class if they have heard the term ahupua’a and what they know about it (briefly, five minutes).
3. Briefly explain what an ahupua’a is (if the students do not know) and/or explain that this unit will focus on how some of the native animals live in the various sections of the ahupua’a.
4. Divide the class into smaller groups of two students. Tell the students that they are going to be the ali‘i and decide the boundaries for their own personal ahupua’a.
   (Optional: pass out some special hats, badges, or yellow fabric capes to represent ali‘i.)
5. Distribute ahupua’a worksheet #1 to each student and go over the question as a class. Remind the students that they will need to explain why they divided their ahupua’a the way they did, so they should think carefully about what would be a good division and why.
6. Have the students work on the worksheet without talking to their partners (2 minutes).
7. After the students completed the worksheet, have them present their answers to their partners. Remind students that it is important to be a good listener in order to learn. Guide their discussion with the following questions (allow ~30 seconds to talk each time a question is posed):
   • How did you divide the island?
   • How many kinds of animal did you have in each ahupua’a?
   • Why did you divide the island this way?
8. After each partner has presented their ahupua’a design, continue the discussion with the following questions:

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What is Ahupua’a?

- What were the differences between your and your buddy’s ahupua’a system?
- What would you want to change in your ahupua’a system?

Note: if adult or older student helpers are available, have them help each group record their discussion (allow more time for helpers to record discussion).

9. After the discussion, show the class a poster of the ahupua’a (see Teacher Prep). Use the large picture to explain how ancient Hawaiians divided ahupua’a units.

10. Point out that each ahupua’a contains all types of ecosystems (mountain, valley, stream, and ocean) on an island. Ask the students why an ahupua’a was divided in this way.

11. Remind the students that this system was created in a time when there were no grocery stores, restaurants, cars, or airplanes. If people needed something, they had to find a way to produce it themselves.

12. Tell the class that they have made their first step in the journey toward understanding an ahupua’a. In the coming weeks, they are going to explore further into an ahupua’a and learn about the native animals that live in it (give clues and have the students guess which animal they will study first).

13. Distribute ahupua’a worksheet #2 to each student and have them divide the island using the traditional ahupua’a system. This exercise can be done on another day or assigned as homework.

Assessments
Discussion on ahupua’a
Ahupua’a worksheets

Resources

Extension Activity
Field trip to the local library – it might be a good introduction for students to start their own research on topics they want to know. Many schools already have an excellent library and may not need to rely on the public library. However, if teacher feel the need to have extra resources, she or he may contact the local library to set up a tour.

Culture Connections
Ahupua’a is the traditional land dividing system that promotes sustainability and conservation of natural resources. Students can further explore the ahupua’a under Hawaiian study.
What is Ahupua’a?

Student Name: ___________________

Worksheet #1

★ Divide the island into 3 areas.
★ Use a marker to draw your boundaries.
Student Name: ___________________
Worksheet #2

★ Divide the island into 3 ahupua’a.
★ Use a marker to draw the boundaries.
What is Ahupua’a?