

MAORI CULTURE

The Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. Their ancestors were Pacific Islanders who travelled the seas in giant canoes. It is thought that they travelled from island to island some time before 1300, using the stars, sun and sea currents to navigate and find land. Today there are about 600,000 people of Maori origin in New Zealand and they make up about 10% of the population.

The Haka

In the past all Maori literature was passed on orally in the form of legends and songs. The most recognized tradition today is the Haka. The Haka is a dance that is performed with actions and loud, fierce shouts. It was used as a war dance and performed before every battle to intimidate the opponents. Today, the New Zealand national rugby team, the All Blacks, perform a Haka before each international match.



Ta Moko

Another prominent feature of Maori culture is Ta Moko, a particular form of tattooing. In the past Ta Moko was a way to signal status. Only the most important people in the tribe received it. Men often had their entire face tattooed as well as other areas of the body. Women, however, usually only had their lips and chins tattooed. Since 1990 there has been a resurgence in the practice of Ta Moko for both men and women, as a sign of cultural identity.

Maori greetings

The traditional Maori welcome is called a hongi. A hongi is a greeting which involves pressing noses instead of kissing.



Did you know?

- The Maori people call New Zealand Aotearoa. It means 'Land of the long white cloud'.
- The word 'maori' means 'normal' and 'ordinary'. In Maori legends, it distinguished ordinary mortal humans from gods and spirits.

Speaking

4 Class discussion. Compare the Maori practice of Ta Moko with tattooing in Western cultures.

Discuss the following:

- Why do people in Western cultures have tattoos?
- Are tattoos more common with a particular age group? Why?
- What's your opinion on tattooing?
Are you in favour or against the practice?

Writing

5 Imagine that you were one of the Canterbury Pilgrims. Write a letter home (about 150 words) describing the island and the indigenous people you have met. Start like this:

*Dearest,
We have finally arrived and I have so much to tell you ...*

Links

- 'The UK', pp. 36-37