

The Court Theatre presents

NUKU & VAI

Created by Juanita Hepi
and Talia-Rae Mavaega

EDUCATION PACK

Primary Schools Tour
18 August - 19 September
2025

THE
COURT
THEATRE

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CAST AND CREATIVES

Devising Director & Cultural Advisor - Juanita Hepi

Devisor/Writer - Talia-Rae Mavaega

Actor - Tusi Elisara

Actor - Tiana Te Rongopatahi Mo'iha

Production Design: Alix Ashworth (Set, sound, costume, props)

Stage Manager - Tim Bain

Production Build- Hannah McDougall

Education Manager - Ben O'Brien-Limmer

With special thanks to all those who helped bring the mo'okuauhau (lineage, family history) of the taonga to the performance;

Kā mihi atu ki a **Ngāi Tūāhūriri**. Thank you to mana whenua, Ngāi Tūāhūriri.

- The Pātē was made by papa **Mike Tavioni** and mama **Awhitia** for their mokopuna **Waimārima** (Tiana and Kari's daughter).
- The Pāpale were woven by (Nuku) **Ammon Tainui Watene** (Tiana's Uncle) and (Vai) **Megan Leota** (Tiana's cousin).
- The Poi were made by **Tiana** and **Juanita**.
- The Rarotongan Ukulele was made by **Ana Maine** and **Maurai Villa** for **Kari Moana** (Tiana's wife).
- Tiana's ukulele is a Kala gifted to her by her mom **Malia**, and sister **Pohai**.

This Education Resource was compiled by **Grace von Huben** for Court Theatre Education and Engagement


THE ORIGINS OF NUKU & VAI

When Juanita and Talia-Rae first talked about making this show, they both wanted to honour their own whakapapa (geneology) and they also wanted to represent the natural world.

In te reo Māori, **nuku** has many meanings but it is a word most closely associated to Papatūānuku. In the Samoan language, Vai also has many meanings and is most closely associated with water. Using Nuku and Vai as the names meant we could honour the land and the water, while also honouring our Māori and Samoan whakapapa.

It can mean to move, shift, or change position, whether referring to people, objects, or more abstract changes. It can also mean to displace or to transfer something from one place to another. Another important meaning refers to the surface of the earth or land.

HAVE A GO!



Can you find any places, phrases, or whakataukī that use the word 'nuku'?

Hint: Start by searching for 'the longest place name in New Zealand'...

DID YOU KNOW?

In some Māori stories, Tangaroa is considered to be the god of the ocean and all things within it, while Taniwha are said to inhabit lakes and rivers

In many related languages, such as Tahitian, Cook Islands Māori, and Hawaiian, **vai** means water or liquid. In te reo Māori, the word is wai.

Vai refers to fresh water, as opposed to seawater (tai). This includes rivers, streams, springs, and lakes, which are considered life-giving and sacred. Across Polynesia, vai is deeply tied to ideas of purity, sustenance, and spiritual connection. In Māori cosmology, water (wai/vai) is both a physical necessity and a spiritual element, often linked to the atua (deities) who govern natural resources.

Vai (or wai) is celebrated in whakataukī (proverbs) that emphasise its life-giving role. One example is:

He wai e inu ai, he wai e ora ai.

Water to drink, water to live.

HAVE A GO!

In a small group, use movement and sound to represent different bodies of fresh water...

REO ACROSS THE MOANA

Māori	Cook Islands Māori	Hawaiian	Samoaan	Tongan	English
wai	vai	wai	vai	vai	fresh water
nuku	nuku	_____	nu'u	nuku	earth, land, to move
moana	moana	moana	moana	moana	_____
rangi	rangi	lani	lagi	_____	sky, heaven
_____	enua	honua	fanua	fonua	land, earth, homeland
ariki	ariki	ali'i	_____	eiki	chief, leader
tangata	_____	kanaka	tagata	tangata	person, human
whare	'are	hale	fale	fale	_____

CAN YOU FIND THE
ANSWERS AND FILL
IN THE BLANKS?

ART FORMS IN THE SHOW

Kapa Haka

Kapa haka is a unique form of Māori performing arts where people use their body, voice, different kinds of props and weaponry to express themselves and portray special messages. Kapa Haka includes various types of “dance” and “song” such as ‘haka’ - seen performed by the All Blacks, poi, waiata-a-ringa (action songs) and mōteatea (chants).

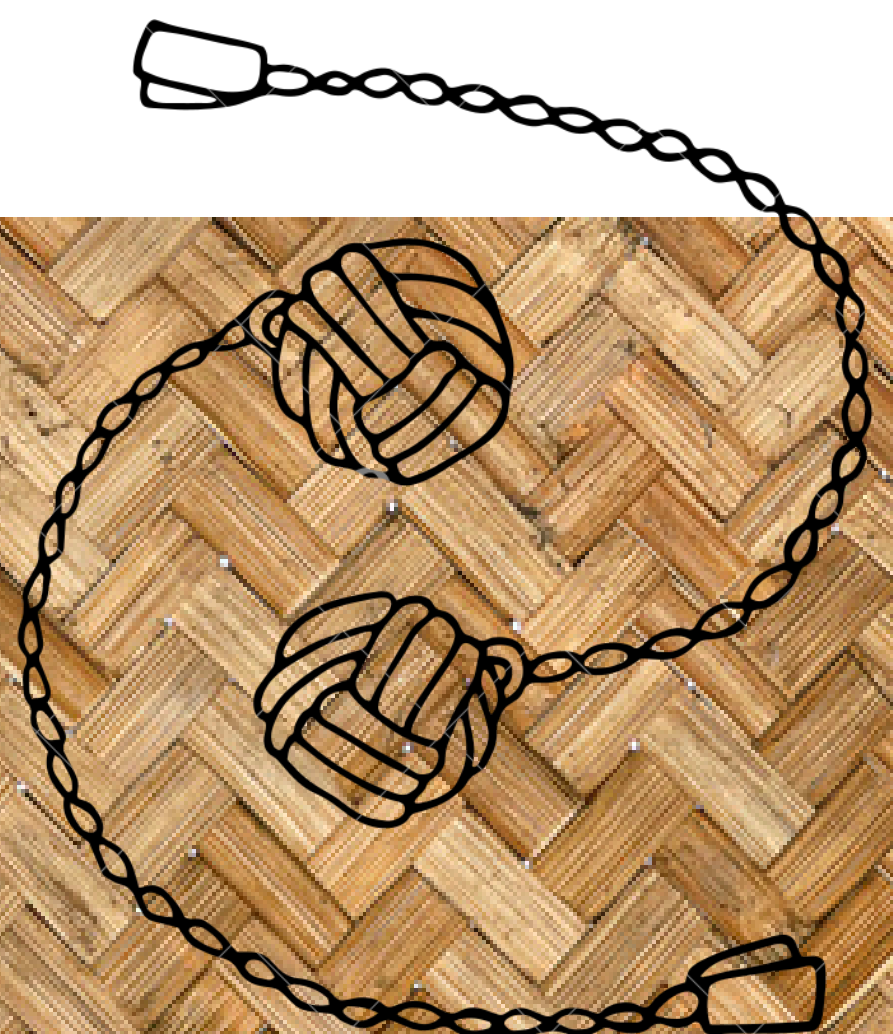
Poi

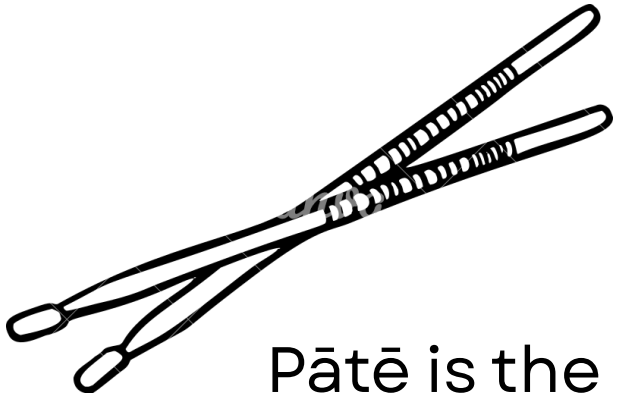
Poi refers to a visual instrument which resembles a small ball attached to a string that is swung in circular patterns and reflected off the body to create dazzling imagery and drum like rhythms. Generally, poi is performed in larger groups accompanied by singing and actions.

In former times, poi were used mainly by men to strengthen their wrists and increase flexibility for combat and warfare. Poi originated with Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand.



Pettit, C. (2017, September 14). Episode 2, FaCt 2 - Poi – He ao Kotahi. He Ao Kotahi. <https://www.heao kotahi.co.nz/blog-1/2017/7/5/episode-2-fact-2-poi>





Pātē

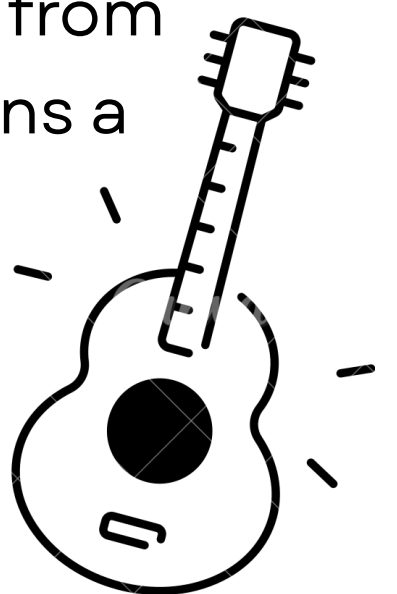
Pātē is the Samoan word for a wooden slit drum. It is often carved from a single log, which produces deep, resonant tones when struck with sticks. Originating from the islands of Polynesia, the pātē is used both as a musical instrument and a means of communication, with different rhythms and pitches carrying messages across distances. In performances, it provides the heartbeat of the music, accompanying song and dance, and is played solo or in ensembles to create intricate rhythmic patterns.

Pāpale

Pāpale is the Hawaiian name for a hat or headpiece, often woven from natural fibres such as pandanus, coconut leaves, or flax. Originating in Polynesia, pāpale serve both practical and cultural purposes—providing protection from the sun while also signifying status, identity, or celebration. They are worn in everyday life as well as during ceremonies, dances, and festivals, with weaving styles and decorations reflecting local traditions and personal expression.

‘Ukulele

The ‘ukulele is a small, four-stringed instrument that originated in Hawai‘i, adapted from Portuguese machete and cavaquinho brought by immigrants in the late 19th century. Known for its bright, cheerful tone, the ‘ukulele quickly became a central feature of Hawaiian music and culture, accompanying song, hula, and storytelling. Today, it is played worldwide in a variety of styles, from traditional island melodies to contemporary popular music, and remains a symbol of aloha and Kanaka Maoli identity.



DISCUSSION

**Do you know any special instruments, songs, or art forms from your culture?
Share with you group!**

MAKING NUKU & VAI

“My favourite part of creating this show has been working with the people I get to work with every day. The writer, actors, designers, stage manager and education team all have an important part to play and this team has gone above and beyond to ensure this work is not only wonderful for tamariki but that we all leave here feeling confident, proud and like we've learned something new. I want to give special mention to the actors Tusi and Tiana, together they bring so much life, love and joy to their roles, as well as a phenomenal amount of talent and skills, we're very lucky to have them tell this story.”

- Juanita

“My favorite scene to perform is singing te ata mahina; really any part that has singing and playing instruments. Other than that, my favorite part of the whole show has been working together as a team, feeling safe and uplifted in the process, and collectively making something for keiki that will uplift and empower and spread aloha. I also love that the taonga that we are using was made with aloha.”

- Tiana

“I think the hardest scene was where Nuku and Vai make amends because all the feelings that the characters were feeling, we were also feeling. It's a beautiful thing.”

- Talia-Rae



Devising Director &
Cultural Advisor -
Juanita Hepi:



Devisor/Writer - Talia-
Rae Mavaega



Actor - Tusi Elisara



Actor - Tiana Te
Rongopatahi Mo'iha



Ever since they can remember, things have always been the same for best friends Nuku & Vai. They laugh at the same things, dance along to the same waiata, and they both love playing outside. But when they need to be on the same team, they realize that they have two different ways of thinking! Nene and Tutu (Nuku and Vai's nans) help them on their journey to understand themselves, each other, and where they come from.

DISCUSSION:

1. Can you think of a challenge that Nuku & Vai faced?
2. What is ONE thing you learned about being a good friend from the story?
3. Which part of the story made you laugh the most?



ACTING

DISCUSSION

How could you tell when the actors are playing different character?

MULTIROLING

In *Nuku & Vai*, the actors have to play multiple different characters. At the start of the play, Tusi and Tiana play Nena and Tutu, grandparents to Nuku and Vai.

Actors often use their bodies, voices, and faces to communicate which character they are playing.

HAVE A GO!

1. Finding characters physically – your whole class walks around the space. As you walk, experiment with leading from different parts of the body. Try leading with your feet, your knees, your hips, your chest, and finally your head. Take a moment to watch other people leading with different parts of their body, do people look different or the same?

2. Each person chooses one body part that they enjoyed leading with. Walk around the space and explore what happens when you start exaggerating these physical traits. Imagine that you are starting at level one, try and exaggerate your movements slowly from level one to ten. Choose a level to continue to work with, level five usually feels about right.

3. Find a partner, in a pair show each other your walk and talk about who you think would move in that way. What do they do for a job? How old are they? How do they talk?



WAIATA

Te Ata Māhina is a waiata (song) that's far more than background noise. It was composed by Tukiterangi Curtis and Pere Wihongi and originally performed by the kapahaka group Te Pikikōtuku o Ngāti Rongomai at the 2019 Te Matatini kapahaka festival as a waiata tira (choral piece). The song didn't just float around unnoticed. It topped the NZ Te Reo Māori singles chart for multiple weeks in 2023, proving that when a waiata has depth, people actually listen.

TE ATA MĀHINA

Ko te ata māhina, Ata tuhi, ata rapa
Maiea te putanga o Tamanuiterā
Ko te ata hāpara, Mahea te pō
Ka ao, ka awatea, Ki te whaiao, ki te ao marama
Kōrihi te manu, Kōki te oro
Ko te ata pō, ko te ata pō,
Te kōpara e kō ake i te ata
Ka ao, ka awatea, Ki te whaiao, ki te ao marama
TĀIKI E

HAVE A GO!

1.
Sing the waiata with your group
2.
Choose a story that you love to tell and try writing a rap to share it with your classmates.
Think about rhythm and rhyme and see if some of your friends can help provide a beat with their voices, bodies, or percussion instruments.

LEARN THE RAP

Pātē, poi, pāpale! Pātē, poi, pāpale!
Pātē, poi, pāpale! Pātē, poi, pāpale!

This is a pātē! What's a pātē?

A pātē is a drum, and it goes Boom! Boom!
You can hear someone play it from across
the room

This is a pātē, (yeah) It keeps the beat (uh
huh) When you play it real fast, You can
bring the heat

Pātē, poi, pāpale! Pātē, poi, pāpale!
Pātē, poi, pāpale! Pātē, poi, pāpale!

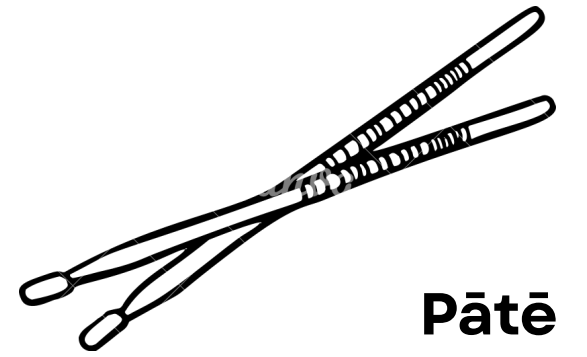
This is a poi, Now watch me move
Watch me swing it all around, Let's get in
the groove

This is a poi, Its not a toy
Cus when I swing em all around, It gives
me joy

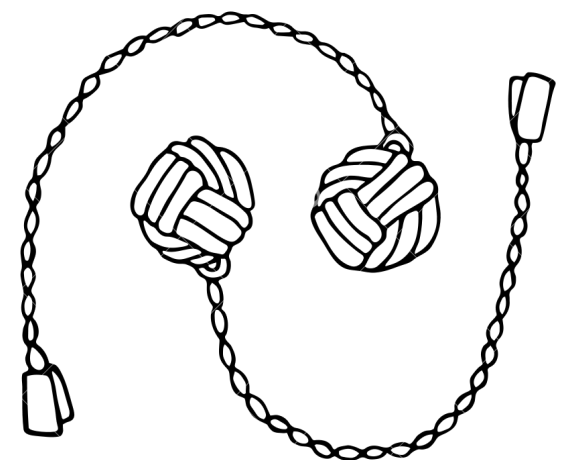
Pātē, poi, pāpale! Pātē, poi, pāpale!
Pātē, poi, pāpale! Pātē, poi, pāpale!

This is a pāpale, A woven hat
You can put it on your head, Just like that
This is a pāpale, Wear it in the sun
You can run all around and have so much
fun.

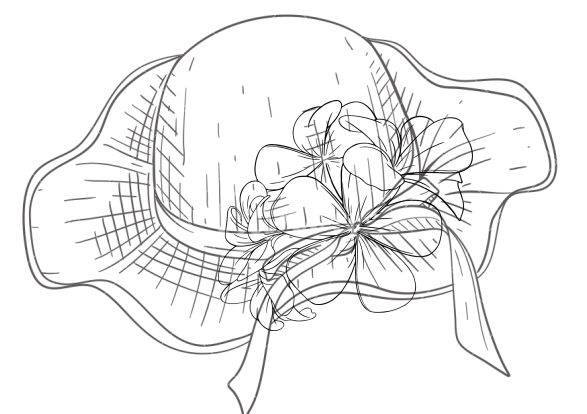
Pātē, poi, pāpale! Pātē, poi, pāpale!
Pātē, poi, pāpale! Pātē, poi, pāpale!



Pātē



Poi



Pāpale



KĀKAHU (COSTUMES)

DISCUSSION

What can we learn about a character or story from the kākahu on stage?

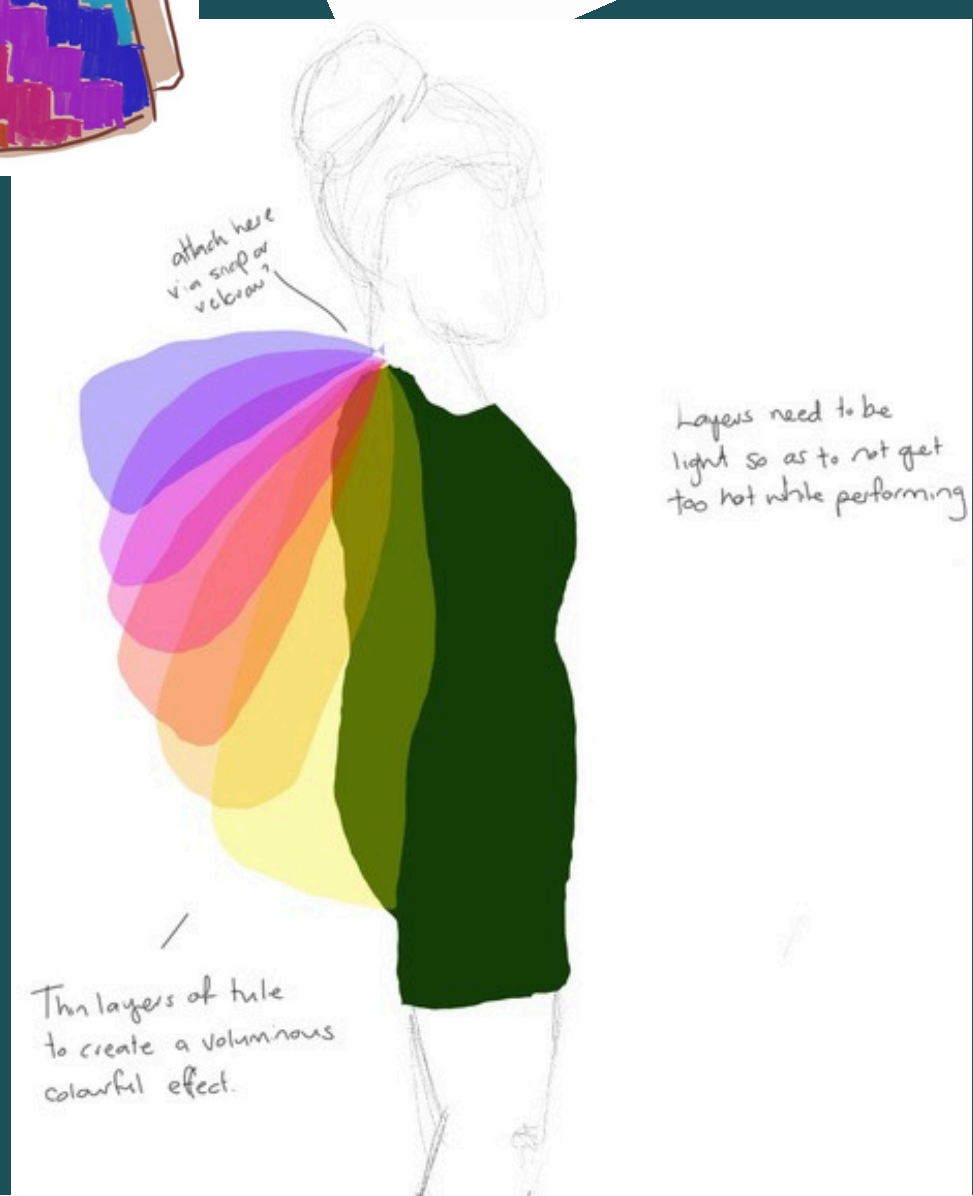
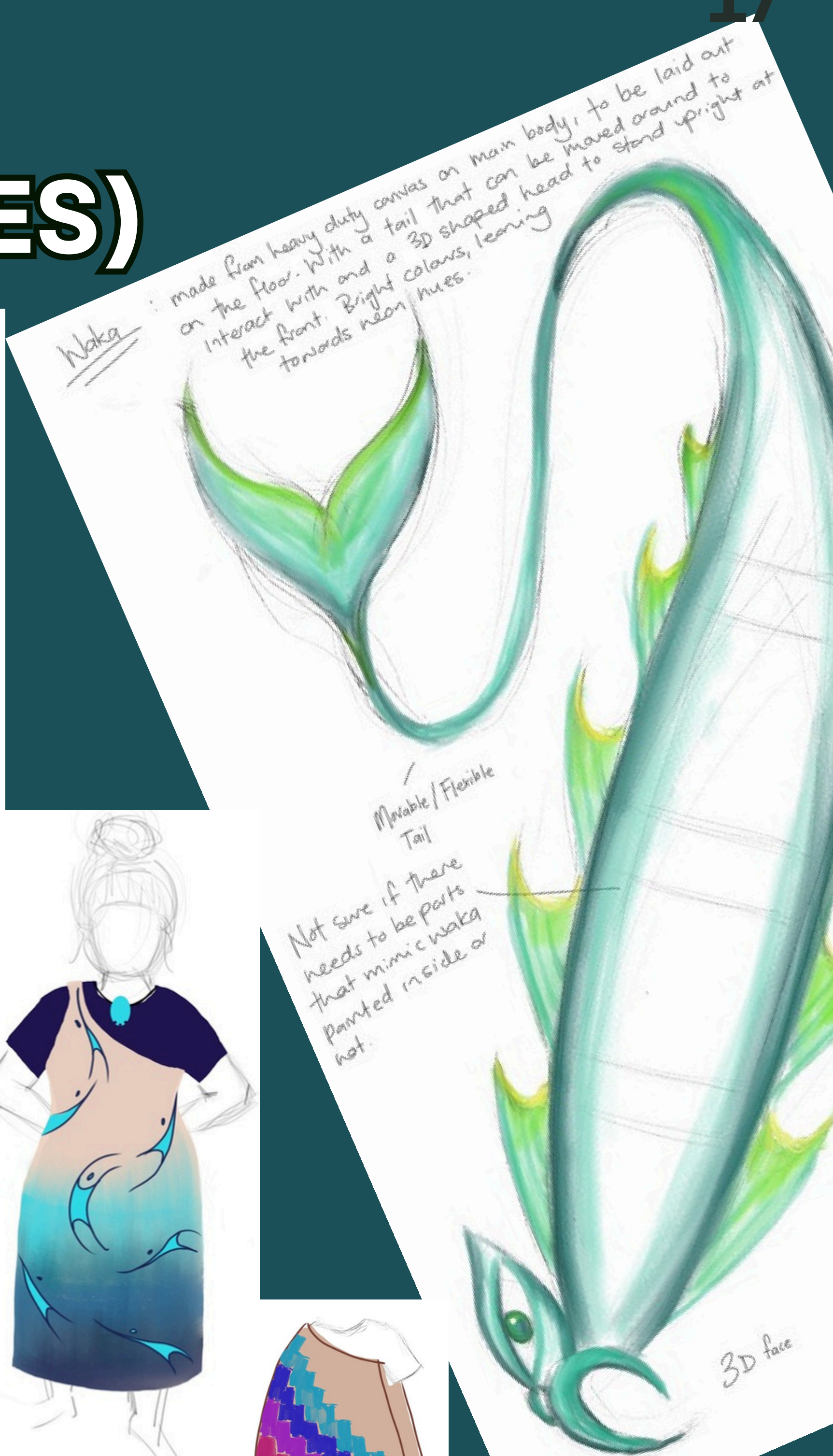
Kākahu can mean garments, clothes, a cloak, apparel, clothing, or a costume. For Nuku & Vai, production designer, **Alix Ashworth**, created several designs to ‘pitch’ (offer the idea) to the production team. On the next page are some of Alix’s sketches. Compare these to the kākahu you saw during the performance.

HAVE A GO!

Imagine you are the designer for Nuku & Vai. Sketch or bullet point your ideas for the costumes. Can you incorporate nuku (earth) and vai (fresh water) into the kākahu ?



KĀKAHU (COSTUMES)





Mauri is a very important Māori word that means the life force or energy in all living things—people, animals, plants, rivers, and the land. It’s what keeps everything alive and connected. For Māori, mauri is a special idea that shows how people, nature, and the world around us are linked. Māori have used it for a long time to understand health, well-being, and inner strength. Tamariki and young people can explore how their own ancestors and cultures have described this idea of inner power or life force, and think about the ways it shows up in their own lives today. It’s a way to learn about your roots and see how people have cared for themselves and the world for generations.

HAVE A GO!

1. Put your hand on your puku (belly). Take THREE deep breaths. Write down how you feel after breathing.

2. Find a leaf, stone, or shell. Draw it here:

3.

a) Have a think...

What makes MY mauri shine bright?

b) Finish this sentence...

My mauri feels strong when _____

_____.

c) Bring your whole group together;
say in unison:

“Ko taku mauri, ko taku oranga.”

(My mauri is my wellbeing)

DISCUSSION

What gives this object its mauri?

WHAIWHAKAARO

Whaiwhakaaro is a Māori word that means to consider, reflect, or give thought to something. Spend some time thinking about the performance and the activities you have explored.

DISCUSSION

Have a look at the list of Cast and Creatives. Which role in making a show interests you the most? Share why.

Theatre can help us find our mauri because it lets us tell our stories, show our feelings, and work together. When we act, sing, or dance, we can feel proud of who we are and happy to share that with others.

DISCUSSION

What are some ways that Tusi and Tiana share their mauri on stage?