



## A Note on Culture

**M**oana is a celebration of the rich stories of Oceania and is based on the beliefs and cultures of real people. In creating the original film, the producers at Disney Animation formed an Oceanic Trust. This group of anthropologists, cultural practitioners, historians, linguists, and choreographers from islands including Samoa, Tahiti, Mo'orea, and Fiji was integral in the creation of the film, providing feedback and notes on everything from character design and song lyrics to the depiction of culture onscreen. This respect and careful attention to detail was carried forward in the creation of *Moana JR.* for the stage. Each production of the show is supplied with a Director's Guide, a Pronunciation Guide, and Choreography Video demonstrations, providing information, research, and tips to ensure the show you are about to undertake is a reverent celebration of Oceanic culture. Below are show-specific excerpts from the ShowKit®.

## Casting Your Show

Producing a musical is a wonderful way for your participants to engage with stories and cultures from around the world. At the same time, respectful representation of the people and cultures celebrated in *Moana JR.* is essential. When selecting a show to produce, consider your community and the opportunities to include and/or learn about the culture of the Pacific Islands. Once you embark on your production of *Moana JR.*, consider how culture intersects with casting and design using the following guidelines.

### A Note on the Sensitivity of Casting

When producing theater with young performers, it is best to cast actors whose strengths will allow them to excel at the role they are assigned. In an educational setting, talent, need, capacity, and representation are all important considerations when casting your show. Some roles require a great deal of personality (such as when an actor is asked to play a comedic sidekick) and others require a level of gravitas best expressed by more mature performers (such as a parent figure). Avoid casting young performers based on their appearance alone and consider the message you might send by doing so. Your production will benefit from a variety of races, genders, abilities, body types, and sizes, so approach your casting process with care and an open mind.

### Inclusive Casting

Although fictional, the island of Motunui is an amalgamation of many real Oceanic cultures. So, unlike the stories of some musicals, *Moana JR.* is based on the beliefs and customs of real people. Before casting, consider how this cultural representation intersects with your potential cast members and greater audience: Are there students with ties to Oceanic cultures in your theater program? Is there a Pacific Islander population in your area? With this in mind, cast your show in a manner that best engages your community and uplifts the cultural inspirations of *Moana JR.* and the Pacific Islands.

### Gender Flexible Roles

For characters marked as gender flexible, the gender of the character (including costuming) should align with the gender identity of the actor cast in the role. Though there are female pronouns associated with Tamatoa in the script's dialogue, this character is gender flexible and you are allowed to change the pronouns to reflect the gender identity of the performer (whether to he/his or they/their). This change only applies to Tamatoa; all other characters must remain as written, regardless of the gender of the actor who plays the role.

# Designing Your Show

## Set Design and Dressing

Inspired by the collective history, folklore, and mythology of the cultures and peoples of the Pacific Islands, *Moana JR.* is set 2,000 years ago, before the discovery of Hawai'i and New Zealand. To be respectful of Oceanic culture, avoid any design that utilizes elements that are closely associated with 1950s Hawaiian "tiki" aesthetics, such as tiki carvings and luaus, and use restraint when incorporating floral motifs.

## Props

When designing props for *Moana JR.*, avoid using Western elements and themes, such as colonial ships, flags, coins, pirates' treasure, nautical décor, and compasses. Look instead to materials and objects found in nature, and which reflect wayfinding, the ancient Oceanic method of navigation and exploration.

## Costumes & Makeup

*Moana JR.* is set in ancient Oceania before the discovery of Hawai'i. Though Motunui is a fictional island, it is inspired by the cultures and peoples of the Pacific Islands. As such, elements like synthetic grass skirts, coconut bras, leis, and Hawaiian prints should be avoided in favor of handmade, organic, and found materials and natural-looking fabrics. Research traditional clothing of these islands for creative ideas. For example, tapa cloth, made from the bark of a mulberry tree and easily dyed, is traditionally used to make clothing, mats, and sails. Whatever your design concept, just be careful that the costuming doesn't become too bulky or cumbersome – your cast should have lots of freedom to move!

It is important to remember that the imaginary island of Motunui is an amalgamation of many real Oceanic cultures. While some elements of the story are rooted in one particular culture, others are uniquely created for this stage adaptation and draw on multiple inspirations. Therefore, certain specific cultural references, such as ceremonial dress (including Moana's red tuiga headdress from the animated film's final scene) and body paint should not be used.

**ROYAL RED** – In the Disney animated film, Moana and her family regularly wear the color red. Reserve this regal color for Moana, Chief Tui, Sina, Gramma Tala, and Chief Ancestors 1-3 to designate their royal status.

**MAUI** – A character inspired by an actual demigod in the Pacific Islands with the same name, Maui is loved and revered across all of Oceania. As such, it's important that this larger-than-life warrior is represented with great care. Maui's tattoos, which are an important part of the Disney animated film, have been removed from this adaptation so that this character's integrity remains intact across all productions. Tattoos are an earned, sacred part of Pacific Islander culture and should not be worn by any non-Pacific Islander as part of a costume; **under no circumstances should your actor wear any tattoos.** Keep it island casual for this charismatic shapeshifter, dressing him in a black or green shirt and tan shorts with sandals. Accessorize him with a necklace or belt made of bits and pieces of found materials such as shells and leaves.



# Choreography Video Demonstrations

The Choreography Videos included in the ShowKit® offer explanations and demonstrations of Polynesian dance and specific elements that make it unique to Oceania. Replicate these dances in their entirety or use them as a jumping-off point for your choreographic research and development.



## Dramaturgy

While *Moana JR.* is entirely fictional – the events depicted never happened and were purely created from the imagination of the authors – it is deeply rooted in the culture and history of the Pacific Islands. During the creation of *Moana*, the filmmakers went on research trips and assembled an Oceanic Story Trust to create a depiction of the Pacific Islands that was accurate and respectful (the ShowKit® also contains more information on the creation of *Moana*).

To get you started, this section of the ShowKit® offers some insight into the history and culture of the Pacific Islands, including information on geography, history, language, wayfinding, and mythology. We encourage you and your team to engage in further research and conversation to ensure your production is respectful of and authentic to Pacific Island culture. Also included are helpful research links to resources like The Polynesian Voyaging Society and National Geographic. The more your cast and creative team understand the world of the play, the better both your process and your product will be!