

Lesson 7. Mo'olelo - Maui and the Sun

On the Wailuku River, not far from Rainbow Falls, lived the half-god Maui. His mother, the goddess Hina, lived behind the falls in the Cave-of-Mists. In those times the days were short, but Maui found a way to lengthen them.

Maui was a young man of strength and courage. He had a magic club, a magic spear, and a magic canoe paddle, all given to him by his grandmother. In addition to these, he had special powers because he was the son of a goddess. He was very fond of his mother, Hina, and visited her nearly every day; for his stepfather, Aikanaka-the-Wanderer, was often away from home.

The goddess Hina was known throughout the islands for her beauty and for the fine bark cloth she made. From the time Sun came through the eastern gate until he went through the western gate, Hina worked at her tapa. She gathered the bark herself from the mulberry trees. She brought sea water in which to soak it. She pounded the wet bark on her tapa log.

One time when Maui was watching her, he said, "You send all your days making tapa!" Hina laid aside her wooden beater, smiling in a sad way. "For those who make tapa, the day is never long enough. This piece is ready to dry but already Sun turns toward the west. My tapa will still be damp when Evening Star hangs in the sky."

"This is Sun's fault. He travels too swiftly. I shall find him and tell him so!"

"O Maui, Sun is a god.!"

"We are gods, too." Maui said.

"But small ones, with small power. And you are but a half-god," his mother reminded him. "Sun has great powers. No one has ever gone close to him and lived!"

"Then I shall be the first!" Maui boasted. "I shall catch Sun and make him promise to go more slowly."

Hina warned, "Take your magic club and paddle. You will surely need all the power you have."

What problem is Hina experiencing and what is Maui's solution?

First, Maui made snares. He gathered coconut fiber and twisted eight strong cords. At the end of each he tied a noose. Then, as Evening Star appeared in the sky, he coiled his snares in his canoe, laid his magic club beside them, and picked up his magic paddle. One stroke carried him down the river, a second stroke to the island where Sun made his home in the crater of a dead volcano.

Maui left his canoe, took his eight snares and his magic club, and started up to House-of-Sun. Swiftly he climbed up the grassy slope. Slowly he climbed the steep side of the volcano. At the top, in the crater, Sun lay fast asleep under a blanket of clouds. Silently, Maui laid his snares. Then he hid behind a lava rock and slept through the night.

Before daybreak, Maui woke. Clouds were just beginning to roll out of the crater. Soon over its rim came Sun's longest leg, his first glittering ray of sunrise. Down the slope it came and into the center of Maui's snare it stepped. Maui drew the cord tight and fastened it to the rock.

"What is this?" roared Sun.

"You are my prisoner," said Maui.

"Let me go at once!" Sun commanded. "I have a long journey to make."

"You will journey nowhere until you promise to travel more slowly," said Maui.

"I go swiftly so might night's rest will be longer. Why should I promise such a thing?" Sun demanded.

Maui picked up his magic club before he answered. "Because my mother Hina needs more time to dry her tapas."

"Tapas! I have no time for such things!"

Maui said no more. He swung his magic club against Sun's longest leg, breaking off a piece. Sun screamed in pain and anger. He scrambled to get three more legs over the rim of the crater. But Maui laid his snares wisely and each leg was caught fast. Sun thrashed about, blowing his fiery breath. Maui backed off and tied the three cords fast.

How did Maui capture the sun? What did he use?

Four legs crawled over the crater's rim. Four more legs were caught. Now Sun was frightened. The more he struggled, the tighter the nooses became. One leg was broken and seven more tied fast. He began to bluster.

"You dare not kill me! Without my light, plants and trees would die! Without plants, your people will die!"

Maui looked up from the cord he was tying. "Sun, let us bargain. Promise to travel more slowly for part of the time and I shall let you go."

"Ae. I promise," said Sun crossly.

With his magic club, Maui broke the cords. Sun hurried off across the sky, and Maui paddled back with the good news for Hina.

After that, for part of each year, Sun traveled at his usual speed. Days were short and darkness came early. But the rest of the year, Sun traveled more slowly. Then the days were long and filled with sunshine, and Hina was able to dry her tapas.

Sun kept his promise. If there were times when he wanted to hurry, his broken ray reminded him of the strength and courage of the young half-god, Maui.

In which season do you think the sun "travels slowly"? What do you think the weather is like? Do you think this would be a good time for planting? Explain why or why not.