

HO'ONANI HULA WARRIOR

by Heather Gale *illustrated by* Mika Song



EDUCATORS' GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

Ho'onani: Hula Warrior is an empowering celebration of identity, acceptance and Hawaiian culture based on the true story of a young girl in Hawai'i who dreams of leading the boys-only hula troupe at her school.

Ho'onani feels in-between. She doesn't see herself as wahine (girl) OR kāne (boy). She's happy to be in the middle. But not everyone sees it that way.

When Ho'onani finds out that there will be a school performance of a traditional kāne hula chant, she wants to be part of it. But can a girl really lead the all-male troupe? Ho'onani has to try . . .

Ho'onani's story first appeared in the documentary *A Place in the Middle* by filmmakers Dean Hamer and Joe Wilson.

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Fountas/Pinnell Reading Level: N



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HEATHER GALE is a former orthotist and author originally from New Zealand. Heather loves stories of all kinds, but she especially loves those that feature real people like Ho'onani. She fell in love with the art of storytelling during long car rides, making up stories to go with the scenes flashing by. Heather has two sons and now lives in Toronto with her husband and their two dogs.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

MIKA SONG grew up in Manila, Philippines, and Honolulu, Hawai'i, before moving to New York to attend Pratt Institute. She studied animation and worked as an animator before getting into children's books. In 2015, she received the Portfolio Award at the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators Winter Conference in NYC. An author and illustrator, Mika loves stories about sweetly funny outsiders, and she recently illustrated the book *Harry and Clare's Amazing Staycation* and wrote and illustrated *Picnic with Oliver*. Mika lives in Brooklyn with her husband and daughter.

This guide was created by **Kathleen Odean**, a school librarian for more than 15 years who now gives professional development workshops for educators on new children's and young adult books. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott, Newbery and Notable Children's Books Committees.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.1, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.2,
CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.3, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.4,
CCSS.ELA- Literacy.SL.K-3.1, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.SL.K-3.2

1. What information do you learn about Ho'onani's everyday life? Who are the members of her family? Where does she live? What is her home like? What is her school like?
2. What are some words that describe Ho'onani's personality? What are some of her interests? Why do you think Kumu Hina encouraged Ho'onani to try out for the traditional hula troupe?
3. What do the words māhū, wahine and kāne mean? Why does Ho'onani describe herself as being "in the middle?" What do you learn in the brief introduction about the role of māhū in traditional Hawaiian culture?
4. What are some feelings that her sister, Kana, expresses about Ho'onani? Find examples of how she expresses those feelings. Early in the story, what does Kana wish Ho'onani would be like? How does that change by the end of the story?
5. Ho'onani's teacher, Kumu Hina, warns her that some parents "might not appreciate a wahine leading their sons up on stage." Why might the parents feel that way? Ho'onani's response is, "If someone wants to leave, that is their problem." Why does she say that?
6. The introduction speaks about the importance of showing "every person the same unconditional acceptance and respect." What does it mean to show unconditional acceptance and respect to others? Why is it important? Find examples in the story when people do this and others, if any, when they don't.



QUESTIONS FROM THE AUTHOR

Can you think of any animals who change their gender for survival? (For example: butterflies, snakes, frogs, slugs, corals, fish, chickens and seahorses.)

What other countries have their own people in the middle?

7. Describe Kumu Hina based on the story and the author's note. What is her role in the school? How does she help Ho'onani and the other students?
8. What does it mean to be a good leader? How does a good leader act? Talk about whether that changes depending on the situation — does a sports team captain need the same strengths as a school principal? What shows that Ho'onani might be a good leader?
9. Find the times in the story that the phrase, "Strong, sure, and steady," comes up. How do those words relate to the dancing? How do they relate to Ho'onani and her attitude throughout the book?
10. Relate Ho'onani, her experiences, and her attitude to the book's subtitle, *Hula Warrior*. What is a warrior? What makes someone a good warrior? Can you be a warrior without fighting? How does the word apply to Ho'onani?
11. How does the author use questions in the text? Find examples and discuss the effect of using questions instead of statements. When does the author use dialogue? Discuss what the story would be like without questions or dialogue.
12. The book's creators also use different size text on some pages. Look at examples of this and talk about what this adds to the reading experience. When are exclamation points used in the regular typeface and the larger ones? What is the effect of using an exclamation point?
13. Carefully study the pictures, then talk about what information they show about Ho'onani and her life. How do the illustrations show emotion? Talk about specific examples. Discuss whether the information and emotions are also described in the words or if pictures carry the weight of showing them.



QUESTIONS FROM THE AUTHOR

Kumu Hina
felt compelled to
change gender for
acceptance while
today Ho'onani is a
non-binary person
who likes who she is.

What are your
thoughts on being
non-binary?

Do you think this term
is helpful or does it
create more division?



FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. As a class, watch the documentary *A Place in the Middle*, on which the book is based. Hold a class discussion about the film and how it relates to the book. Have students compare and contrast the two mediums. What does the book offer that the documentary doesn't? What does the documentary offer that the book doesn't? How do they complement each other?

<https://aplaceinthemiddle.org/>

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.1, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.3,
CCSS.ELA- Literacy.SL.K-3.1, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.SL.K-3.2

2. As explained in the Author's Note, Kumu Hina is a transgender woman. Talk with students about the meaning of transgender and what they know about it. The author emphasizes the importance of "unconditional acceptance and respect." Have students discuss how this might be especially important in the life of a transgender person.

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.4, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.SL.K-3.1

3. Ho'onani declares to her sister, "Just because I feel more kāne doesn't mean I'm not wahine! I'm in the middle!" Everyone has some ways in which they feel like they are in the middle at least some of the time. Invite each student to write a short letter to Ho'onani in which they talk about aspects of their lives that feel "in the middle."

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.1, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.4,
CCSS.ELA- Literacy.W.K-3.2



QUESTIONS FROM THE AUTHOR

In Hawai'i the white-flowered lei is worn by females while the yellow lei is worn by males. The story begins with the yellow and white leis together and ends with Ho'onani's sister, Kana, wearing yellow and white.

What are your thoughts on how the illustrator added another layer to the story that was not expressed in words?



4. The story closes with the group's onstage performance at the school. Ask students to create the kind of posters for the event that might be posted at the school and local businesses to invite parents and community members to attend. Students should decorate the posters in a way that reflects the traditional hula chant performance as well as other aspects of Hawai'i shown in the book.

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.4, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.SL.K-3.5

5. Ho'onani's story is one that might interest a television or radio reporter. Divide students into pairs and have them prepare a short interview between a reporter and Ho'onani. They should come up with questions, then consider carefully how Ho'onani might answer them. When they're ready, the pairs should conduct the interview in front of classmates or record it for later viewing.

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RI.K-3.1, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.SL.K-3.1

