Moana, Disney’s 56th animated feature, is a computer-animated-musical-fantasy-comedy adventure film. Moana is directed by Ron Clements & John Musker, directors of The Princess and the Frog, and features music from Lin-Manuel Miranda, Opetaia Foa’i, and Mark Mancina. This film features the voices of Auli'i Cravalho, Dwayne Johnson, Rachel House, Temuera Morrison, Jemaine Clement, Nicole Scherzinger and Alan Tudyk.

The film tells the story of Moana, a powerful, brave, and independent daughter of a chief of a Polynesian tribe. She is chosen by the ocean to reunite a mystical stone with a goddess to save her people from the darkness. Moana sets sail on an adventure in search of a demigod named Māui. They work together and discover their strength through battles with the treacherous ocean and learn the power that friendship, understanding, and trust can accomplish.
Before Watching the Film

Discussion Questions & Activities

Discuss the following:

- What do you know about Polynesian culture? How do you think it impacts the film?
- Have you ever been to a Polynesian island? If yes, what did it look like? If no, what do you think it would look like?
- This is Disney’s 56th animated feature. What other Disney animated features have you seen? What did you think about other Disney animations?
- Discuss film genres.
  - What are historical movies? What are fantasy movies? What are musical movies? What are animated movies?
  - Do you think historical movies are educational? or entertaining?
  - How can music influence storytelling?

Watch the trailer:
- Based on the trailer, describe the character of Moana and the character of Maui.
- Based on the trailer, predict what will happen in the film.
After Watching the Film

Discussion Questions

• How did the film make you feel? What does it make you think about?
• Would you watch it again? Why/why not?
• How would different people view this film differently (dependent on gender, age, ethnic background, worldview, etc)?
• What comments are the directors trying to make about the culture of the characters in this story?
• Which character did you [admire, hate, love, pity] the most? Why?
• Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the: voice-acting, editing, special effects, and soundtrack
• Would you recommend this movie to a friend? Explain your reasons.
• What part of the story told by the movie was the most powerful? Why?
• If you were writing the screenplay for this movie, would you have changed the ending? Explain your answer.
• This is Disney’s second Princess movie where the story was not based on a Fairy Tale or a love interest, Brave was the first. Is it important to have a fairy tale or love interest for a movie to be successful? Why or why not?
Many themes come forward in *Moana*. Discuss major themes that emerge with students. After that discussion, explore the following themes: Culture, Exploration, Responsibility, and Music.

**Culture:**
- This film displays parts of the Polynesian culture. Re-watch the scene for the song “Where You Are”. Make a list of cultural practices and explore some of these concepts in more detail. Why is it important to include Polynesian culture in films?
- Look up the Māori mythology story of Māui. [Myths and Legends of the Polynesians by Johannes Anderson (2011) or The Surprising Things Maui Did by Jay Williams (1979)] Discuss, write, or create a Venn Diagram describing the difference between the Māori mythology and the Moana film, in particular in Māui’s song “Your Welcome”.
- In 2016, before the movie was released, a Māui costume was created in which children would wear a body suit covered in tattoos and have brown face make-up. A number of reports, individuals, and groups were upset as it is not a “costume” and was considered cultural appropriation. The costume was removed from stores and not available to purchase. Discuss what is cultural appropriation and whether or not the costume should have been removed from stores.

**Exploration:**
- Early in the film, Moana has a desire to go out into the sea and explore the world, as was the way of her early ancestors. Re-watch the scene for “We Know the Way”. Discuss what it means to be an explorer. Have explorers impacted your local or cultural history? If so, how? How have explorers impacted world history?
- Re-watch the scene where Moana tries to go out beyond the reef. Discuss different types of boats of early explorers. Why are some boats meant for close to the shore and others for further ocean travel?
Responsibility:

- Re-watch “Where You Are” and look at the lyrics sung by Chief Tui and Moana. Re-watch the ‘climb to the top of the mountain and the placing of the rock’ scene. Discuss and write about the responsibility expected of Moana from her father and people. What is her response in “Where You Are”. Re-watch “How Far I’ll Go” song and look at the lyrics sung by Moana. How has her feelings about responsibility change?

- Re-watch the scene when Moana ask Māui to join her to remove the darkness and return the small pounamu stone, the mystical heart of the goddess Te Fiti. What is Māui’s response? What are his initial reactions? Do these change? Why or why not?

Music:

- The film features music written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, Opetaia Foa'i, and Mark Mancina. Look up lyrics to “I Am Moana” and re-watch the scene. How do the lyrics help tell the story?

- What is the impact of having English and the Tokelauan language in the songs?

- Lin-Manuel Miranda describes “Shiny” as a reference to one of his favourite Disney films, The Little Mermaid, and one of his favourite artists David Bowie. Briefly discuss The Little Mermaid and David Bowie. Re-watch the scene “Shiny” and identify any references. There are also references to Aladdin and other Disney films throughout the movie. Why do film makers reference other films, books, or actors in a new film?
Culminating Projects

• Research a local/cultural story based on exploration or indigenous culture and divide the story into parts. In small groups, write a song about that section of the story. Record the song. Film or act out the musical.

• In small groups, produce, film, and edit a talk show about the characters of Moana. Ask each character about the role they played in this film and what they did after the film was over.

• Research a Polynesian culture and present the information in a unique way (i.e., film, poster, artwork, website, etc.)

• Create a daily written journal, a blog, or vlog (video log) for Moana or Māui of their days on the sea leading up to meeting Te Fiti. What happened that day? How did that character feel that day?

Further Exploration

• Hamilton from Lin-Manuel Miranda (2016)

• Disney’s Brave (2012)

• Disney’s Lilo and Stitch (2002)

• Explorers of the Wild by Cale Atkinson (2016)

• Australia and Oceania by Mel Friedman (2009)

• Lydia and the Island Kingdom by Joan Holub (2007)

• For more books after Moana see:

References