



# Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

## Aloha 'Āina: Learning from the Land

Living in Hawai'i means access to exploring lush green forests, the deep blue ocean, and fragrant gardens. Nature can be a wonderful teacher for Hawai'i's keiki. According to the Institute of Education Sciences and Dr. Alice Kawakami from the Hawaiian-focused Charter School 'Āina Hui, 'āina-based learning allows keiki to build meaningful, two-way connections with the environment around them and the people in the community. The common theme of 'āina-based learning revolves around its spiritual and cultural connection to the people, honoring the past, present, and future to ensure the sustainability of our home and people. In addition, 'āina-based learning reinforces native Hawaiian practices, values, and language.

The benefits of 'āina-based learning for your keiki include:

- ♥ **Language-** Hawaiian mo'olelo (stories) are passed from kupuna to keiki, preserving family history and identity.
- ♥ **Culture-** Learning creation stories and the history of the people and land instills a sense of connectedness and pride.
- ♥ **Place-** Learning about how our 'āina sustains us develops a sense of kuleana (responsibility) to the land and people.

When children have opportunities to learn through their environment, it helps to grow their language, social-emotional, and cognitive skills. These hands-on learning experiences enhance children's appreciation for and understanding of their environment and can be a starting point in learning how to take care of their land and community.



In this newsletter, we will share 'āina-based activities for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers through Hawaiian language and stories, and real-world experiences.

### This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

## Infants

Starting from birth, young infants' developing brains learn language by hearing stories, words, and songs. Your infant recognizes familiar voices, and you can capture her attention by holding her close, talking directly to her, and varying your tone. In addition, a great way to connect keiki to the Hawaiian culture is through music, dance, and stories, including telling your family mo'olelo (story) to your keiki through oral storytelling.

Here are some additional ideas of what you can do with your keiki:

- ♥ Playing and singing Hawaiian songs. Listen to the songs together then play them again and sing along. If you do this often, your baby will recognize the tune and will eventually pick up the words to the songs. For example, *Nā Mele O Tūtū and Me*, a playlist curated by Partners in Development Foundation is available at <https://soundcloud.com/pidfoundation/sets/na-mele-o-tutu-and-me>
- ♥ Playing instruments to chants or songs. Tap along to chants or songs such as "*Aloha Kakahiaka*" using instruments, such as *kala'au* (rhythmn sticks), *pu'ili* (bamboo sticks) or *'ili 'ili* (river rocks). Show your keiki the instrument and gently tap to the beat. If you don't have an



instrument, hold the infant's hands and clap to the rhythm.

- ♥ Dancing hula to chants or songs. Hold your baby as you sing and dance to a chant or song. As she gets older, talk about hula being a Hawaiian dance that uses hand, foot, and hip motions while encouraging her to dance along. When you integrate movement with language, it helps to form connections in the brain.

### Activity for Infants: : *My 'Ohana's Mo'olelo*

What You Need:

None

What to Do:

1. Settle down with your infant in a quiet place for a mo'olelo (story).
2. Some of the best stories come from your own family history. Think of a story that you heard about your ancestors or a meaningful story from your childhood.
3. Bring the story to life through gestures, facial expressions, and shifts in your tone of voice.
4. After you have placed your infant down for nap, take a moment to write down your mo'olelo. You can even turn this into a unique song that you can sing to your little one.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*



## Toddlers

Young toddlers learn by observing their caregivers and interacting with the environment that surrounds them. Opportunities to explore and learn about their culture and island home help to develop keiki's sense of self. *Kalo* or taro, one of Hawai'i's canoe plants, is the most important plant in the Hawaiian culture. In the legend of Hāloa, the *kalo* plant is honored as the elder brother of humanity, showing the relationship of people as a part of nature. You can share with keiki that caring for the land and water not only grows healthy *kalo*, and in turn it helps them to be healthy too.

The following activities can help deepen your toddler's understanding of *kalo*:

- ♥ Planting *kalo*- *Kalo* grows in the *lo'i* (wet field) or *māla* (garden). Ask a local farmer for a *huli* (cutting) with approximately ¼ inch of the corm (root) with 6-8 inches of the stem. Let the cutting dry in the shade for 2-3 days to prevent rotting. Put the *huli* in water and observe the roots and leaves growing. Change the water often and plant the *huli* after a few days, approximately 1-2 feet apart.



- ♥ Tasting *kalo*- You can cook the leaves and stems to make lau lau or lu'au stew. Steamed and mashed *kalo*, diluted with water, is an excellent first food to introduce to keiki. Involve keiki in cooking the different parts of the *kalo*. This will increase the chances that she will taste and enjoy it. Start with steaming the *kalo* root until soft, then mash it or serve in bite-sized chunks. (Note: All parts of the *kalo* must be cooked well to prevent itching on lips, mouth, and throat).
- ♥ Singing about *kalo*- Introduce keiki to *kalo* through books with songs such as 'Ono Stuff: A Sing-Along with Foods of Hawai'i, by Tiana Kamen; music by Leon and Malia.

### Activity for Toddlers: Poi Smoothie

What You Need:

- Blender
- 6 oz poi
- 1 ½ cups frozen fruit of choice (e.g., strawberries, bananas, mango)
- 2 cups milk

What to Do:

1. Have keiki help pound poi or use purchased poi and add it to the blender.
2. Add the frozen fruit of your choice and the low-fat milk or milk alternative.
4. Blend until smooth.
5. Pour into cups and enjoy!

Note: Poi is a superfood! It is a fat-free, high fiber source of Vitamin B, Calcium and Phosphorus; builds strong bodies, minds, and connection to 'āina.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)



## Preschoolers

Young preschoolers are curious about the world around them. They may ask questions such as, "Why does it rain?" Answering these questions validates your child's curiosity and fosters a deeper understanding of why things are the way they are. Learning about cultural traditions, people, and places in the community builds a sense of kuleana (responsibility) for the 'aina. You can broaden your preschooler's understanding of the world by taking her to places around your community, such as a māla (garden), nahele (forest), kai (ocean), or loko i'a (Hawaiian Fishpond).

Try these activities when exploring a loko i'a (modify these ideas as you explore other places):

- ♥ Discover a new place - Volunteer at a community loko i'a and ask questions such as, "How does the fish get into the pond?"
- ♥ Make a game- Add toy fish (or create your own fish-shaped sponges) to a shallow container of water. Have keiki catch the fish



with a net or sieve. Count how many fish were caught. Extend learning by providing different containers for sorting the colored fish.

- ♥ Get active- After talking about how the gate keeps the little fish safe from the bigger fish, go outdoors and set up a game of chase. Lay sticks at a corner of the yard and let the children know that this is the "safe" area. Pretend to be the big fish and chase keiki until they reach the gate that you are unable to pass through.

### Activity for Preschoolers: Loko I'a (fishpond) in a Cup

What You Need:

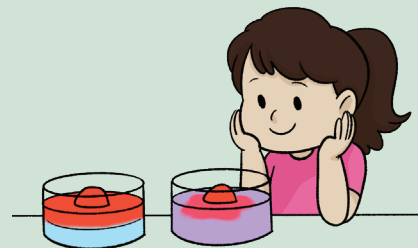
- Clear plastic cups
- Blue and red food coloring
- Salt
- Water
- Ice Cube Trays

What to Do:

1. Add red food coloring to a container of tap water and pour into ice cube trays to freeze.
2. Pour ½ cup of room temperature water into a clear cup and mix with ¼ cup of salt (this is your salt water).
3. Add a drop of blue food coloring to the salt water.
4. Place a red ice cube in the cup with salt water and observe as the ice melts.
5. Next, pour ½ cup of fresh tap water into a different clear cup. Add a red ice cube and observe as the ice melts.

*\*Just like the brackish water in the loko i'a, this demonstrates that saltwater is denser than freshwater; the red-dyed freshwater floats on the surface until the two are mixed.*

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*



## How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

### Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen large muscles such as neck, arms, and legs
- ♥ Use and strengthen small muscles such as facial muscles, fingers, hands, and toes

### Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Develop a close bond with you
- ♥ Feel important and good about herself

### Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Develop her communication and receptive language skills
- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language



### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills
- ♥ Learn to ask and answer questions

## Kids in the Kitchen

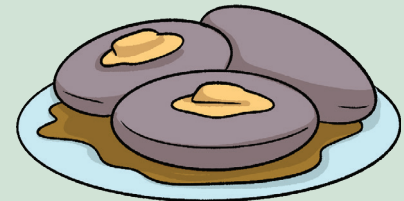
Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show her how to handle items safely and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Praise her efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

### Poi Pancakes

*dapted from <https://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/poi-pancakes-recipe-1947525>*

Ingredients:

- |                         |                                   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • 2 eggs                | • 1 Tbsp sugar                    |
| • ¼ cup butter, melted  | • 4 tsp baking powder             |
| • 1 cup milk            | • ¾ tsp salt                      |
| • 1 ¼ cup flour, sifted | • ¼ cup poi (frozen and crumbled) |



Directions:

1. Show keiki pictures of a kalo plant (or the real kalo corm) and talk about how it is mashed into poi.
2. Beat eggs in a bowl and set aside.
3. Melt butter with the milk and cool slightly before adding it to the eggs.
4. In a separate bowl, sift the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt.
5. Fold in the egg mixture.
6. Have keiki help scoop the poi into the mixture.
7. Spoon onto heated griddle and cook until bubbles form, flipping until slightly brown.

## Resources

### 'Ohana Engagement Resources

<https://www.ksbe.edu/haumana-ohana-resources>

Kamehameha Schools provides free printable resources for 'ohana engagement as well as an interactive Ahu'pua'a and a collection of mo'olelo that supports 'aina-based learning.

### Loko I'a (Hawaiian Fishpond)

<https://www.nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/kaloko-fishpond-curriculum.htm>

Learn about Hawai'i's unique loko i'a, found nowhere else in the world. Discover the history of the loko i'a and how it is designed to catch fish.



## Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).

### Infants and Toddlers

#### 'Ono Stuff: A Sing Along with Foods of Hawai'i by Tiana Kamen

This joyful sing-along book introduces keiki to five traditional Hawaiian foods—taro, sweet potato, breadfruit, banana, and sugar cane. Each page celebrates a plant with vibrant photos and engaging song verses that share fun facts about nutrition and how the foods are used.

#### Māui Slows the Sun by Gabrielle Ahuli'i

In this introduction to Hawaiian legends, Māui, the demigod, uses his olonā rope and catches the sun to convince him to slow his travels across the sky.

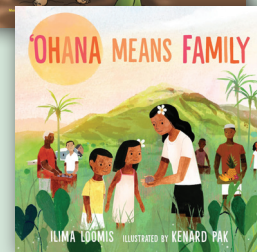
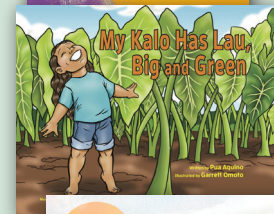
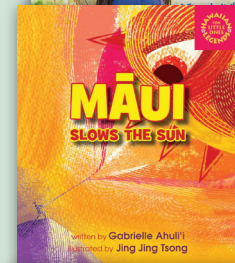
### Preschoolers

#### My Kalo Has Lau, Big and Green by Pua Aquino

This picture story book shares the cultural value of the kalo (taro) plant, the "staff of life." Through pictures and song, keiki learn about growing and harvesting the kalo plant.

#### 'Ohana Means Family by Ilima Loomis

This beautifully illustrated book captures how a family prepares for a lu'au, beginning from growing the kalo to making the poi. The repetitive, rhythmic text written in the cumulative style of "The House that Jack Built" makes it an ideal read-aloud for young children.



**Learning to Grow** is a project of the University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at [www.learningtogrowhawaii.org](http://www.learningtogrowhawaii.org) or visit us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii](http://www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii) and Instagram @uhlearningtogrow