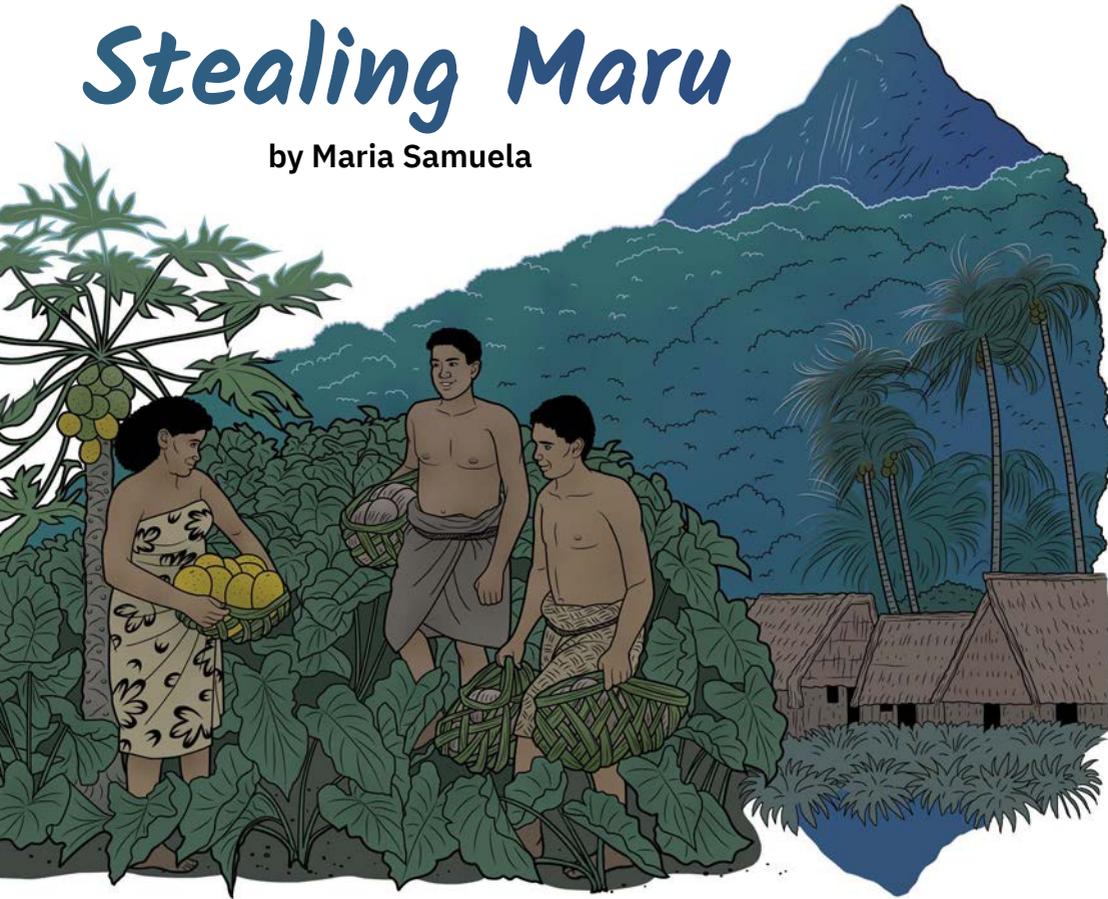


Stealing Maru

by Maria Samuela



Long ago, when the world still believed in magic, there was a majestic maunga, or mountain, on the island of Rarotonga. The maunga was called Maru, which means shade. The maunga stood over the village of Puaikura like a giant guardian.

The people of Puaikura were very proud of their maunga. It cast a shadow over the village in the early morning, so the people could sleep for longer. It also sheltered the village from the harsh sun in the daytime, so the trees and plants could grow tall and lush. And it was beautiful to look at.

Near Rarotonga, there was another island called Aitutaki. The people of Aitutaki were jealous of the people of Puaikura and their maunga.

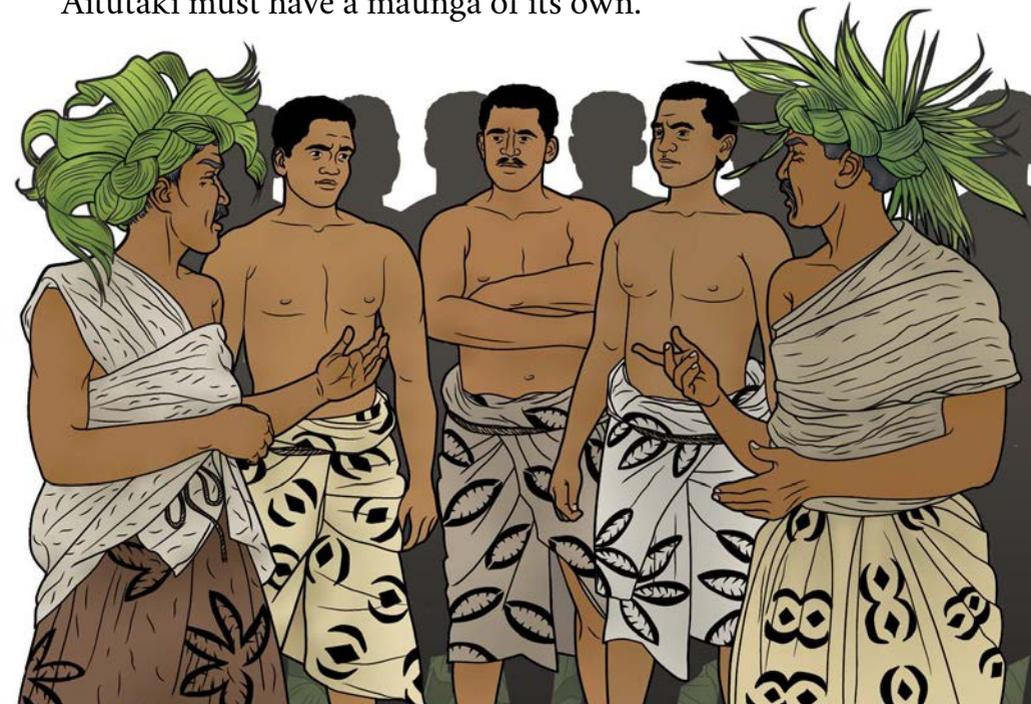
“The crops in Puaikura grow strong,” one said.

“The villagers in Puaikura are happy because they rest well,” said another.

“The maunga is the most beautiful we’ve seen,” said a third.

Aitutaki was flat. The people of Aitutaki wanted a maunga like Maru. If they had their own maunga, they thought, their crops would grow strong, too. If they had their own maunga, their people would be well rested. If they had their own maunga, they would be the envy of all the other islanders.

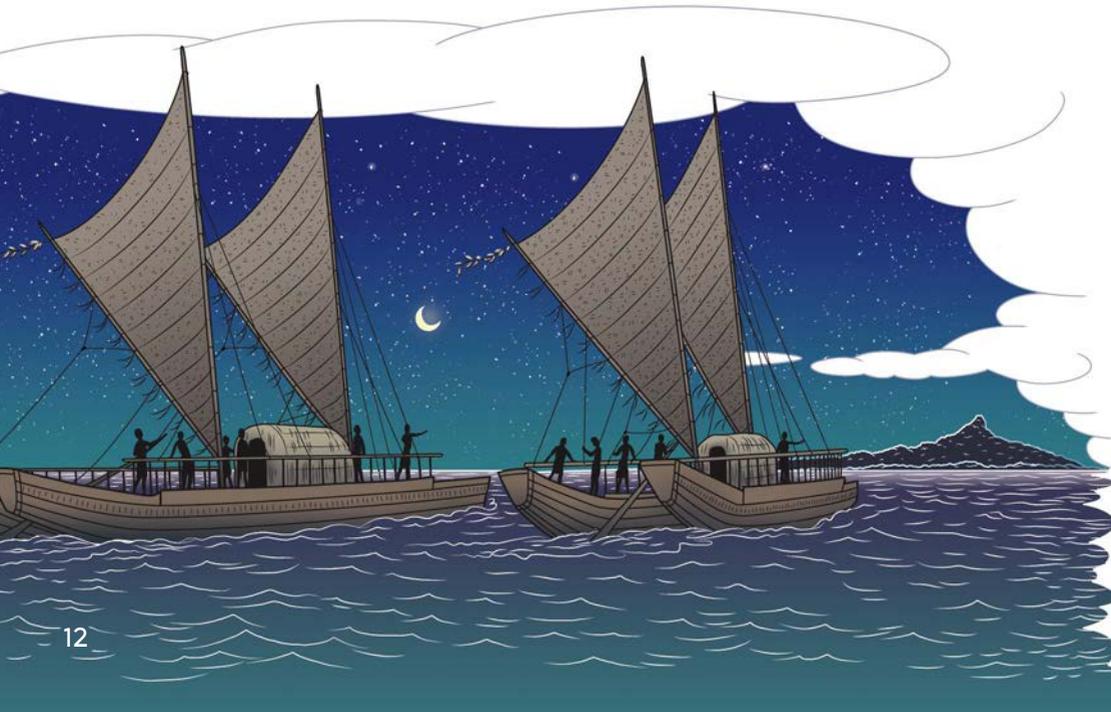
Two ariki, or chiefs, lived on Aitutaki. Their names were Vaeruarangi and Tamatoa. They gathered their strongest warriors. “Bring us this Maru!” the two ariki ordered. “Aitutaki must have a maunga of its own.”



Over the next few weeks, the warriors prepared to steal Maru. They built two huge vaka, strong enough to carry a very heavy load. Then they filled each vaka with tools to cut down the maunga. They prayed to the god Rongo for his blessing and for a safe journey. When everything was ready, they sailed for Rarotonga.

The warriors were brave and clever. They used the stars and the birds and the patterns of the waves to help find their way. They planned to arrive in the middle of the night so that no one would see them stealing the maunga.

When it was nearly nightfall, the warriors saw Rarotonga in the distance. Maru looked as beautiful as they had imagined. They paddled in silence to the western side of the island and the village of Puaikura. It was dark when they landed. The people of Puaikura were fast asleep.

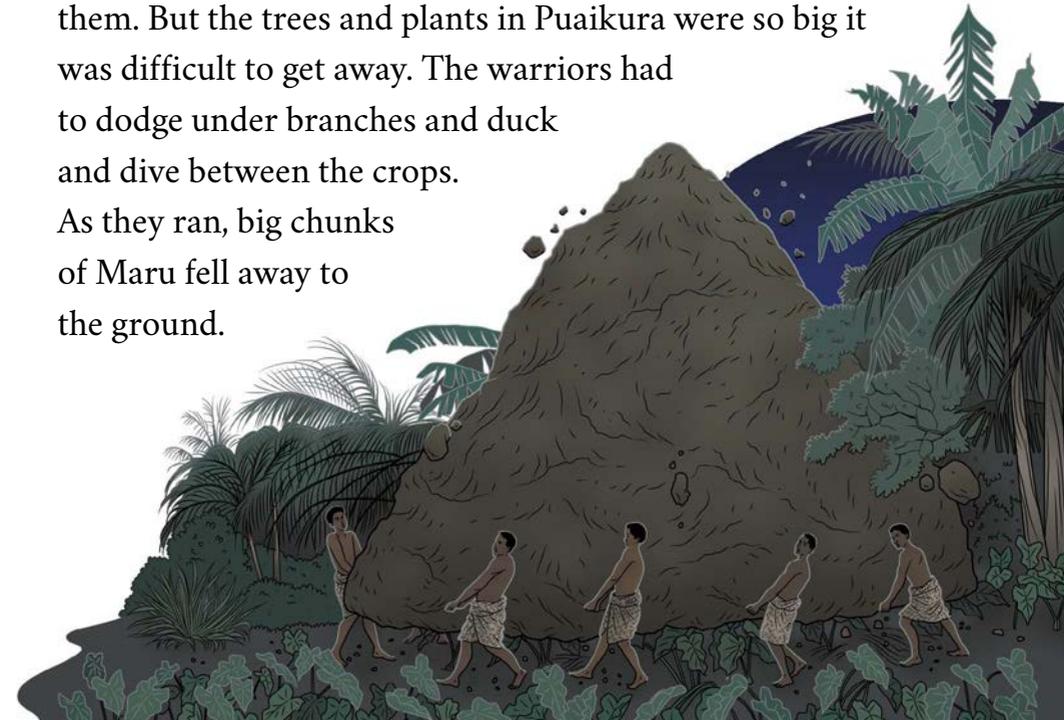
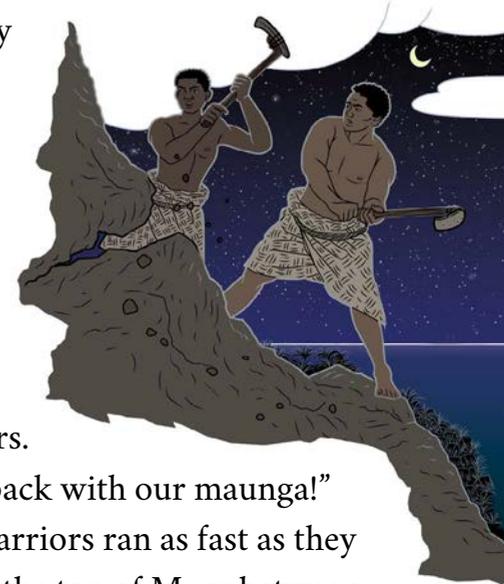


The warriors picked up their tools and sneaked through the village to the bottom of Maru. They climbed up the side of the maunga. Then they started to cut into it.

They worked quietly so that they wouldn't get caught. When the top of the maunga broke away from the base, they carried it down the slope and back towards their vaka. By now, the warriors were tired. The mountain was heavy, and they grunted as they carried it between them. Their noise woke the villagers.

“Stop!” cried the villagers. “Come back with our maunga!”

Hearing the angry shouts, the warriors ran as fast as they could towards their vaka, carrying the top of Maru between them. But the trees and plants in Puaikura were so big it was difficult to get away. The warriors had to dodge under branches and duck and dive between the crops. As they ran, big chunks of Maru fell away to the ground.



“Taviviki!” yelled the villagers. “Hurry up! The thieves are getting away!”

The warriors saw the beach ahead. Quickly, they pushed their vaka into the sea, the crumbling Maru balanced between the two vessels. The angry villagers watched their precious Maru disappear into the night.



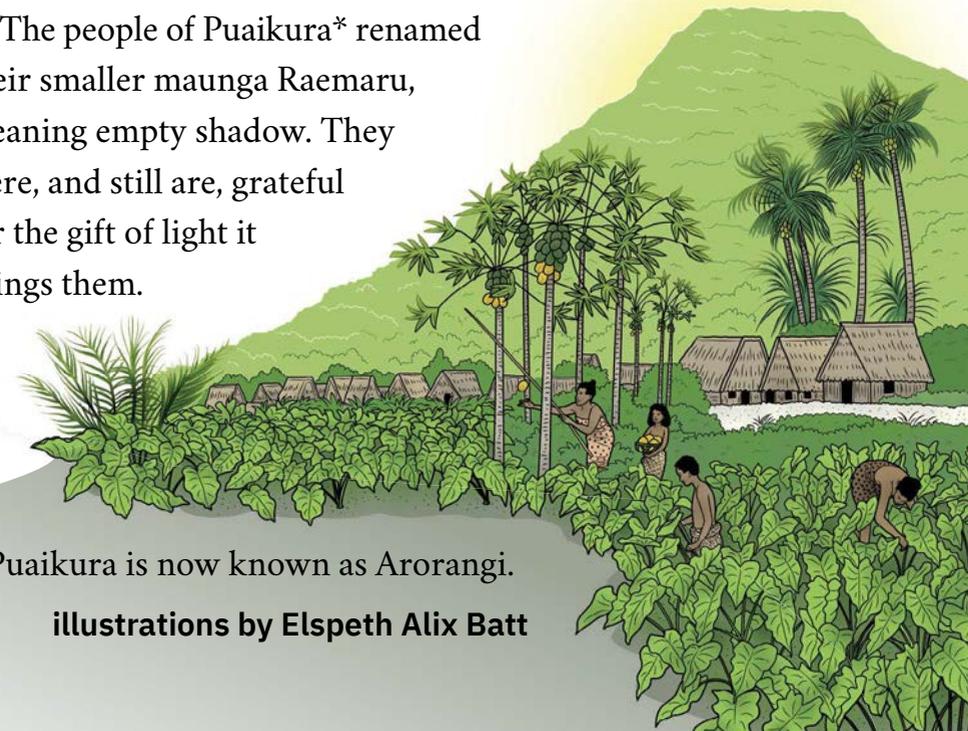
The warriors took all night and day to sail back to Aitutaki. By the time they reached home, the maunga was the size of a hill. It didn't matter. The people of Aitutaki now had their very own maunga, and they could enjoy its protective gifts.

The people of Aitutaki gave Maru a new name. They called it Maunga Pu, meaning top of the mountain. The maunga still stands on Aitutaki today.

Back in Rarotonga, the people of Puaikura were angry. They planned revenge. Tinomana, their ariki, gathered together his best warriors. They started building new vaka, strong enough to carry them all. They got ready to attack Aitutaki.

But while they were building the vaka, the people noticed something. Without their maunga, their village was no longer sheltered from the rising sun, so they woke earlier each morning. Because they woke earlier, they could work on their crops for longer. They could also fish for longer and catch more seafood. And they had more time in the day to spend with their families. They got used to this new way of living. The longer days made them happy. They got more things done. After a while, they didn't feel angry any more about losing the top of their maunga.

The people of Puaikura* renamed their smaller maunga Raemaru, meaning empty shadow. They were, and still are, grateful for the gift of light it brings them.



* Puaikura is now known as Arorangi.

illustrations by Elspeth Alix Batt

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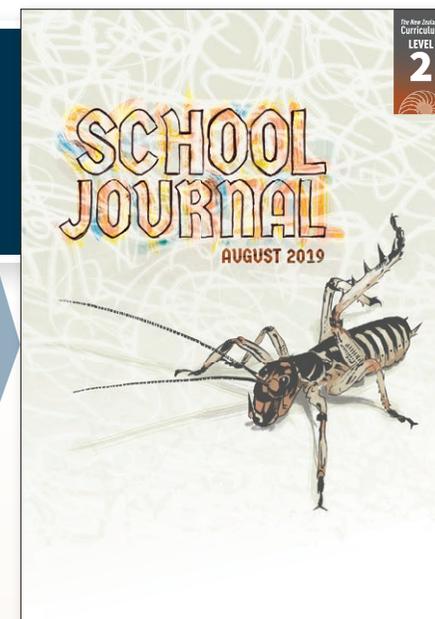
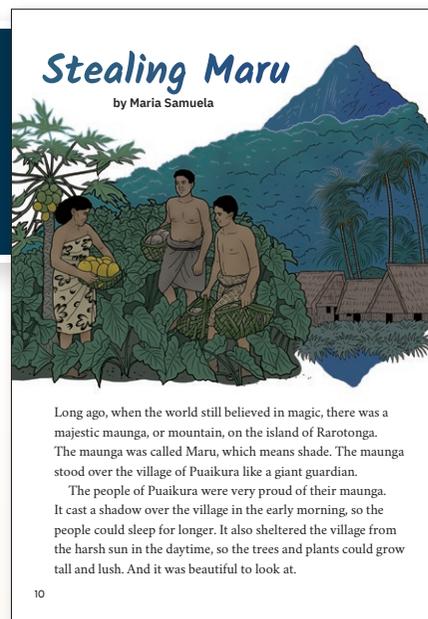
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