



Powhiri - What happens at a Powhiri?

Fact

- A powhiri is a traditional Maori welcoming ceremony.
- It was used by Maori over 300 years ago to work out if visitors arriving at their Pa (village) were friends or foe (enemies)
- First the Maori warrior standing guard at the entrance of the Pa would call out to his people that visitors were arriving.
- Then a warrior would perform a wero – a challenge and approach the visitors in a war-like way to say “we’re tough and we’re waiting to attack if you guys aren’t friends”. He would lay down something like a piece of fern on the ground before the visitors and if they picked it up it meant they were coming in peace – if they didn’t pick it up it meant war!
- If the visitors picked up the offering there would be a Karanga. A song of welcome from the Pa site and the visitors would enter singing their own song of reply.
- They would meet in front of the Marae which is the place in front of the carved meeting house and share information about themselves and the visitors would explain why they had come to visit.
- Then there would be a feast before the visitors left.

Do you know

- Powhiri is still used on a Marae, even today.
- Maori have a special traditional greeting called a hongi. They press their noses and sometimes their forehead together and it is a real sign of friendship.
- Hospitality – making a visitor feel welcome is a very important thing on a Marae and providing food for the visitor is part of that hospitality.
- A Powhiri is something only the Maori of New Zealand do – it is one of the many traditions that they have had for hundreds of years.

Experiments you can do

Visit a Marae with your family or your school and experience a Powhiri. Almost every Marae will welcome you in if you’d like to drop by but sometimes it can pay to ring first to make sure someone is going to be there and that they don’t have any functions or events planned for that time.

When you visit a Marae you are known as manuhiri – guests. The people of the Marae are known as tangata whenua.

Other Investigations

Learn a waiata – a song that you can sing on a Marae. There are lots of speeches (mihi) on a Marae and longs of songs sung. See if you can learn a good one to sing.