When lava flows, a Hawaiian goddess' name comes up

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Image 1. Street art depicts Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of fire, in the aftermath of eruptions from the Kilauea volcano on Hawaii's Big Island, on May 12, 2018, in Pahoa, Hawaii. Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images.

In some rural Hawaii neighborhoods, lava from the Kilauea volcano has burned down or come close to burning down some homes. One name often comes up when people discuss the volcano: Pele. The name sounds like peh-leh.

"You can't really predict what Pele is going to do," said Julie Woolsey. She is a resident who left the area on May 3 as a fissure, a crack in the earth, opened on her street. The crack oozed lava just 1,000 feet from her home.
Who Is Pele?

Pele is known as the goddess of volcanoes and fire. She is an important figure in Hawaiian culture.

She represents all of the elements related to volcanoes. This includes magma, steam, ash and acid rain.

Pele is an akua, which means goddess. But she is not a goddess in the same way people outside Hawaii might think of gods and goddesses.

"A lot of people translate the word akua as god. But we feel that word has kind of a Western connotation to it, so we use the word 'element,'" said Kuulei Kanahele. She is a scientist at an organization that focuses on preserving Native Hawaiian culture. They’re not the kind of gods "where they're punishing you," Kanahele explained.

According to local chants, Pele and her family first set off from an unknown land outside of Hawaii. Pele made her way through the main Hawaiian Islands. She finally settled on Hawaii Island, the big island.
The legend says Pele dug craters on the islands. They include Maui’s Haleakala crater. The legend goes on to say Pele didn't find a crater that she liked until Kilauea's Halemaumau crater. That is where she now lives.

**Why Is She Beloved?**

"In Hawaiian thinking and Hawaiian culture, Pele is the foundation, the creation of land," said Piilani Kaawaloa. She teaches traditional Hawaiian literature, chant and hula at Hawaiian schools.

Pele has two forms, Kaawaloa explained. One stays at the crater tending to her fire pit. Another goes "holoholo," or leisurely exploring. This form wanders around Puna, a district on the sides of the Kilauea volcano.

That's exactly what is happening now. Lava fissures are opening up in Puna's towns and lava is flowing by. Scientists worry that Kilauea's peak could still have an explosive steam eruption. It would throw huge rocks and ash miles into the sky.
Legends Of Pele

A popular legend tells the story of an old woman. She asked for food from two girls who were cooking. The older girl said they didn’t have food for strangers. But the younger girl shared their food. The woman told the younger girl that strange things would happen on the mountainside. She advised the girl to tell her family to hang bits of cloth made from bark to stay safe.

The younger girl's grandmother said that woman was Pele. Their family took the advice.

Then Pele sent her lava to destroy those who made her angry. The lava did not touch the younger girl's home. Pele protected her.

"When our myth writers observe nature and what’s happening, it's easy to put feelings and emotions and romance into it" said Kanahele. This is a way to make the stories interesting. It also helps them stand the test of time while teaching listeners right from wrong.

To understand Pele on a deeper level, it’s important to remember science underlies the tales, Kanahele said. After all, the tales were created to record scientific observations.
One example, she said, is the story of Pele brawling with Poliahu, the goddess of snow. That's really about an eruption at Mauna Kea, where there was snowfall. It describes the fire and ice interacting, Kanahele said.

**Four Laws**

Pele has four laws, Kanahele explained:

First, the lava will always flow in order to create new land. Lava will always move to new spots.

Second, when it seems a volcanic eruption is coming, the land belongs to Pele. Signs include earthquakes and the smell of sulfur, which smells like rotten eggs. "If she's in residence, then it's best for humans to not be there."

Third, once Pele moves on from the land, the area is no longer forbidden. Humans can then return or go into that land.

Fourth, the land will be okay for human use after it has reforested. That is when the trees and plants have grown back.
Quiz

1 Which selection helps the reader understand Pele’s significance to people in Hawaii?

(A) "You can't really predict what Pele is going to do," said Julie Woolsey. She is a resident who left the area on May 3 as a fissure, a crack in the earth, opened on her street.

(B) The legend goes on to say Pele didn't find a crater that she liked until Kilauea's Halemaumau crater. That is where she now lives.

(C) "In Hawaiian thinking and Hawaiian culture, Pele is the foundation, the creation of land," said Piilani Kaawaloa.

(D) Pele has two forms, Kaawaloa explained. One stays at the crater tending to her fire pit. Another goes "holoholo," or leisurely exploring.

2 Read the section "Legends Of Pele."

Select the paragraph that shows how Pele legends explain natural events.

(A) Then Pele sent her lava to destroy those who made her angry. The lava did not touch the younger girl's home. Pele protected her.

(B) "When our myth writers observe nature and what's happening, it's easy to put feelings and emotions and romance into it" said Kanahele. This is a way to make the stories interesting. It also helps them stand the test of time while teaching listeners right from wrong.

(C) To understand Pele on a deeper level, it's important to remember science underlies the tales, Kanahele said. After all, the tales were created to record scientific observations.

(D) One example, she said, is the story of Pele brawling with Poliahu, the goddess of snow. That's really about an eruption at Mauna Kea, where there was snowfall. It describes the fire and ice interacting, Kanahele said.

3 Read the article's introduction [paragraphs 1-2] and the final section “Four Laws.”

What is the connection between those two sections?

(A) Both mention how the temperature of lava can destroy things.

(B) Both discuss how trees are replanted after a volcanic eruption.

(C) Both suggest people should not be near lava.

(D) Both indicate how quickly and how far lava can travel.
4 Read the section "Who Is Pele?"

What does this section explain that other sections do NOT?

(A) how Pele came to Hawaii according to the legends
(B) how Pele is connected to the volcanoes in Hawaii
(C) how Pele’s stories are popular with people in Hawaii
(D) how Pele’s stories are connected to events in nature