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Navigating by Observing Wave Patterns

Sometime in the late 300's, Polynesian sailors and their families set out in huge canoes and came across the Pacific Ocean to Easter Island, probably by accident. They developed a complex culture that included creating hundreds of giant statues that represented their ancestors.

Even though the original islanders came upon Easter Island by accident, they probably knew that there was an island somewhere nearby. Like most ancient Polynesian sailors, they were almost certainly very good at observing how wave patterns change when an island group is within about fifty miles.

- ◆ **Objective:** To observe how wave patterns change when an object is placed in water
- ◆ **Time to Complete Activity:** 1/2 hour
- ◆ **Materials Needed:** A pan that is at least 12 by 12 inches and at least 3 inches deep, a piece of heavy white paper to fit in the bottom of the pan, cellophane or masking tape, a ruler, a small glass, water, a bright overhead light, paper, pencil

Directions:

____ Tape the paper to the bottom of the pan. Be sure that all edges of the paper are taped down.

____ Fill the pan with water and place the pan under a bright overhead light.

____ Holding the ruler horizontally, make waves by moving the ruler up and down gently in the water along one side of the pan.

____ Observe the pattern of the waves. Are they straight, curved, parallel?

____ Take the ruler out of the water and allow the waves to settle down.

____ Place the glass in the pan and again make waves with the ruler.

____ Observe the wave pattern this time. Is there any change? If so, what is causing the change?

Variation: Sketch the different wave patterns that you observe.

Sketch an overhead view of a boat approaching an island and show wave patterns that might occur around the island.



Making a Mini Moai

Sometime in the late 300's, Polynesian sailors and their families set out in huge canoes and came across the Pacific Ocean to Easter Island, probably by accident. They developed a complex culture that included creating hundreds of giant statues that represented their ancestors. The islanders call these statues *moai*.

With only stone tools, the Easter Islanders carved statues that weigh as much as 80 tons. Elaborate designs were carved into the statues, and some had

headdresses and white eyes. Family groups (clans) on the island competed to build the largest and most splendid statues. A food shortage led to fighting among clans, and rival clans toppled one another's statues.

In modern times, archaeologists and others have come to Easter Island to find out some of its secrets. They have raised some of the statues and placed them on their original platforms.

- ◆ **Objective:** To carve a head in the shape of a moai
- ◆ **Time to Complete Activity:** 1 hour
- ◆ **Materials Needed:** Bar of soft soap (like Ivory™), felt-tip pen, utensil with a small scoop on one end, like a potato peeler

Directions:

____ Using the drawing of the moai on this page as a guide, draw the outline of the face, including eyes, nose, mouth, and chin, on one side of the bar of soap. This will be your guide for making the head.

____ Use the scoop to carefully remove bits of soap. First work on the front of the head, then the back, then one side, then the other, so you get an idea of how the whole head is coming along. The back of the moai is usually fairly flat.

____ When the head has taken shape, start working on details like the mouth and eyes.



This moai, which now is in the British Museum, weighs four tons and is 8.25 feet tall. The back of the statue is covered with elaborate designs.



Thought/Discussion Questions

1. Since Easter Island was discovered by Europeans, writers and others have put forward some fantastic stories about how the huge statues were created. One writer proposed that aliens from outer space told earth dwellers to make these statues and many other monuments of ancient mankind, such as Stonehenge. Why do you think present-day humans suggest such stories, aside from wanting to be in the spotlight?

2. Archaeologists have found evidence that damage from rats reduced the number of trees on the island. Can you think of other ways that the Easter Islanders probably caused their forests to decline?

3. The Easter Islanders used up their resources, especially trees, and could not travel to other lands because they did not have boats large and strong enough to go very far out to sea. Eventually there was famine, the culture collapsed, and many people died. Some writers compare what happened on Easter Island with what is happening on our planet in the present time. Do you see any similarities?

