



Duke Kahanamoku

HIDDEN HERO OF HISTORY

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Duke Kahanamoku was a surfer, record-breaking swimmer, Hollywood television and film actor, Honolulu Sheriff and heroic rescuer who lived a life of integrity and honor.

Duke Kahanamoku was born in Honolulu Hawaii in 1890. He was the eldest child in his family and had five brothers and three sisters. His family moved to Waikiki when Mr. Kahanamoku was young, and it was on Waikiki Beach that he developed his **surfing** and swimming skills.

Surfing is an excellent water sport in which surfers stand and balance on a board, riding the surface of waves. Typically, they do this in the ocean, although some surfers may find suitable waves in larger lakes. Today, surfboards are made of lightweight materials that help the board stay buoyant. But innovations in surfboard construction hadn't happened yet when Mr. Kahanamoku was surfing.

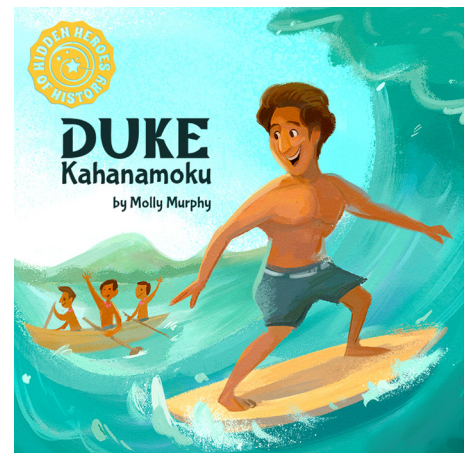
For most of his career, he used a traditional longboard constructed like an **ancient Hawaiian olo board**. It was made from the wood of a **koa tree** and was 16 feet long and weighed 114 pounds. Just for comparison, a modern longboard weighs about 15 pounds.

Mr. Kahanamoku's surfing ability earned him the title as the "father of modern surfing," It's been documented that he rode what's estimated to have been a 30-foot-tall wave for close to a mile. Feats like that earned him the nicknames "The Duke" and "The Big Kahuna."

Duke Kahanamoku was also a talented swimmer. At age 21, he broke 3 **freestyle** world records at his first swimming races in Honolulu Harbor. However, the Amateur Athletic Union overseeing Mr. Kahanamoku's races would not recognize these record-breaking feats until years later, stating that the ocean currents must have aided Mr. Kahanamoku as he was swimming.

Mr. Kahanamoku qualified for the U.S. Olympic swimming team in 1912 and went to the Summer Olympics in Stockholm where he won a gold and silver medal. Then, in the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp, he won two more gold medals. He won another silver medal in Paris in 1924. And finally, at the age of 42, he won a Bronze Medal as an alternate on the U.S. water polo team in the Los Angeles Olympics.

While Mr. Kahanamoku was swimming in the Olympics, he also traveled throughout the world to give swimming and surfing exhibitions, and was responsible for globally popularizing the sports. Before these exhibitions, surfing was only known in Hawaii.





In 1922, he moved to Southern California to act on television and in 30 films, one of which starred another “Duke” - the famous John Wayne. During his time living in Southern California, he also transformed the sunny location into a water sports oasis.

He had a heroic moment in 1925, rescuing eight men from a fishing boat that capsized in the ocean. Using his surfboard, Mr. Kahanamoku made repeated trips from the shore to the capsized ship. His rescue influenced life-guards across the country, who started using surfboards as standard equipment for water rescues.

During the last stretch of his career, he served thirteen consecutive terms as Honolulu’s Sheriff. He kept getting voted back into the position! But it’s said that he never stopped finding excuses to spend time in the water.

Throughout his life, Duke Kahanamoku was known for spreading the **Spirit of Aloha**, which is part of his Hawaiian culture. He valued integrity, respect, and harmony, encouraged a life of giving and sharing, and approached the world with open arms.

Celebrating Duke Kahanamoku

Duke Kahanamoku’s life and achievements are honored to this day. Fellow surfers and beachgoers can find a 17-and-a-half-foot bronze statue of him and his surfboard in Waikiki. People pay their respects by draping flower **lei** over his arms and laying them at his feet.

So many well-deserving tributes have popped up over the years: Mr. Kahanamoku was the first person who was inducted into the Swimming Hall of Fame and the Surfing Hall of Fame. He is also in the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame, and a large surfing competition was named in his honor. There was even a commemorative Duke Kahanamoku stamp from the U.S. Postal Service.

Glossary

Surfing - Surfing is a water sport done in the ocean or sea. The surfer uses their surfboard to catch a wave and ride in towards the shore. Surfing was invented by the Polynesians at least 4000 years ago.

Ancient Hawaiian Olo Board - The olo board allowed the rider to catch a cresting wave before it actually broke and the ride could continue long after the wave flattened out. These boards couldn’t turn quickly and required stamina and strength to paddle out.

Koa Tree - Koa wood is special because of three primary reasons: its beauty, rarity, and symbolic meaning. The beauty of Koa is rooted in its unique grain patterns and a variety of colors. It only grows in Hawaii and has played a significant role in ancient Hawaiian history. It was used to make surfboards because it is buoyant, making it floatable.

Freestyle - Freestyle is a type of swimming competition where the swimmers have few limitations about what kind of swimming stroke, or arm motions, they can use while racing.



Aloha Spirit - The Aloha Spirit is considered a state “law” in Hawaii. While you won’t get you into trouble if you break it, it serves as an important reminder to everyone to treat people with deep care and respect.

Lei - A lei is often constructed of flowers, and sometimes leaves, sea shells, seeds, nuts, and feathers. It’s a common symbol of love, friendship, celebration, honor or greeting in Hawaii.

Give it Some Thought

Why do you feel the citizens of Honolulu re-elected Duke Kahanamoku 13 times as their Sheriff?

Why would people still honor Mr. Kahanamoku’s statue? What do you think his life represents to them?

What character traits did Mr. Kahanamoku have that would make him risk his own life to save eight fishermen who capsized their boat in the ocean?

Use Your Imagination

Read the statement about the “Spirit of Aloha” from a Hawaiian citizen:

“Aloha is a positive and contagious way of life. It’s treating everyone you meet as if they were your family. It’s love, respect, acceptance, kindness, compassion. You have to be someone others can count on and their shoulder to cry on. You live it by taking care of everyone on land and in the sea. It’s giving everything without expecting anything in return. You show Aloha by being a good person and teaching others to be good not with words but by example.”

How can YOU be a good example of the Aloha Spirit?

Before you answer, ask yourself some of these questions first:

- How can I show more respect?
- How can I show more acceptance for myself? For others?
- How can I show more kindness and compassion?
- How can I be a better caretaker of my community?

It may be helpful to write down your thoughts and responses to these questions in a journal.

Once you’ve had time to reflect, come up with 4 ideas on ways you can be a good example of the Aloha Spirit and write them down on the “**I Have the Aloha Spirit!**” worksheet. You can draw pictures to illustrate your ideas too.

Share what you create with a friend, classmate or family member so you can inspire them to live the Spirit of Aloha too.