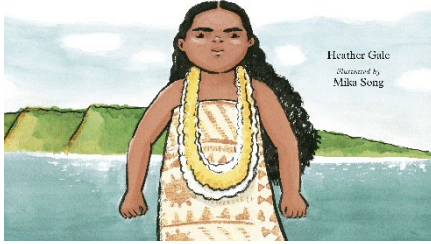


HO'ONANI HULA WARRIOR



Ho'onani: Hula Warrior by Heather Gale, illustrated by Mika Song

Tundra Books, 2019

ISBN: 9780735264496 (Hardcover)

*Age Range: 4-8

Grade Range: Preschool-3

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Ho'onani feels in-between. She doesn't see herself as wahine (girl) OR kane (boy). She's happy to be in the middle. But not everyone sees it that way.

When Ho'onani finds out that there will be a school performance of a traditional kane hula chant, she wants to be part of it. But can a girl really lead the all-male troupe? Ho'onani has to try . . .

Based on a true story, *Ho'onani: Hula Warrior* is a celebration of Hawaiian culture and an empowering story of a girl who learns to lead and learns to accept who she really is--and in doing so, gains the respect of all those around her.

Ho'onani's story first appeared in the documentary *A Place in the Middle* by filmmakers Dean Hamer and Joe Wilson.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

“Boldly outlined watercolor and ink artwork by Song conveys visual information with strength that suggests Ho’onani’s own. And Gale grounds the child’s experience, based on a true story, in Hawaiian traditions, modeling showing ‘every person the same unconditional acceptance and respect.’” – [starred review, Publishers Weekly](#)

“[...] brings to light the Hawaiian tradition of valuing those who are māhū, or nonbinary. Teacher and activist Kumu Hina creates a place of safety and acceptance, encouraging her students to treat others with respect. Ho’onani’s courage to be true to herself and her place in the middle is empowering. Hawaiian words are intermixed, and Song’s illustrations are full of emotion and determination. Ho’onani deserves a place on any shelf.” – [Kirkus Reviews](#)

“Educators will find a two-fold purpose to Ho’onani: as a helpful jumping-off point to discuss Hawaiian history and culture, and as a way to approach conversations about gender identity with a range of age...[I]t is essential for readers to see that she does not ever compromise herself or back down. Gender-nonconforming and nonbinary children will be excited to see someone like themselves reflected in the book’s pages, and everyone will want to stand up and cheer Ho’onani along.” – *School Library Connection*

“Expanding even further the idea that Natives aren’t silent or of the past or little antiques staged just so in the American imagination...[Ho’onani] emerges as a leader who embraces their uniqueness and is in turn embraced by the other children they lead. Heather Gale’s prose is buttressed by Mika Song’s lovely drawings to make this a wonderfully feel-good story about tradition and difference.” – *New York Times*

Updated February 23, 2026

Tundra Books

sdevotta@penguinrandomhouse.com

"[T]his tale provides a lesson on defying gender stereotypes...she defies cultural norms and the thoughts of those in her community in order to pursue her dream." – "21 Diverse Children's Books Chosen for Gayle's Grandson, Luca", *Oprah Daily*

"While the book serves up a rousing tale of a child overcoming obstacles...it also deftly weaves in elements of culture and gender in simple language that kids can understand. Gale said people have thanked her for providing such an accessible story about a complicated topic." – "Gender fluidity is a part of Hawaiian culture. How a children's book is reclaiming that", *Today.com*

"Remarkably interesting. Intersectionality at its finest...The book refuses to be labeled so I won't label it. I'll just say it's a subtler message than we often see on similar subjects." – "[31 Days, 31 Lists: 2019 Books With a Message](#)", *A Fuse 8 Production*

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

An Amazon Best Children's Book of the Month selection
One of the New York Public Library's Best Books for Kids 2019
One of the Ontario Library Association's 2019 Top Ten Titles
Featured on the 2020 Rainbow Book List
Featured on the 2020 Rise: A Feminist Book Project List

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

[Educator's Guide](#)

[A Place in the Middle website](#)

["Rescuing Native Americans From the Imaginative Prison of the Past" – New York Times](#)

["21 Diverse Children's Books Chosen for Gayle's Grandson, Luca" – Oprah Daily](#)

["Gender fluidity is a part of Hawaiian culture. How a children's book is reclaiming that" – Today.com](#)

***A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.