

Sharing Hawaii's Resources – The Hawaiian Ahupua'a (ah-who-pu-ah-ah)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Read the following information about the Hawaiian Ahupua'a and answer the questions at the end.

Back in the olden days in Hawaii, there were no stores and no restaurants. People needed to catch fish, grow vegetables, and build houses and canoes for themselves. To make sure everyone could find the natural resources for food and shelter, the chiefs developed a system for dividing the islands into land districts called Ahupua'a.

Imagine that an island is like a pie. The Ahupua'a is like a slice of pie. The smallest, pointy part of the pie would be high in the mountains, and the largest part of the pie would be the shore area. The sides of the wedge-shaped land were determined by natural boundaries such as cliffs or ridges. Just as Mom or Dad might cut a pie so everyone can have a piece with crust and fruit, the chiefs divided the land so that Hawaiians could find natural resources in the mountain, valley, and shore regions. Each Ahupua'a district had all the natural resources the people needed. They could fish, farm, and gather forest resources in their Ahupua'a.

By dividing the land into these pie slices, the chiefs provided each community with access to a sample of all the resources in all the regions. It also helped ensure that all usable land would be used and the areas would not be overcrowded. People would have access to the many resources found in Hawaii but would be limited to the resources found only in their own Ahupua'a. They were not allowed to gather, farm, or fish in other Ahupua'a without special permission. In this system, all Hawaiians could use a beach, a valley, and a mountain range.

Having access to the natural resources of the three regions was a benefit to the Hawaiians because they needed to use resources in all these areas to live. A benefit is a gain from the action taken or the decision made. But in this system, Hawaiians could not choose where they were to fish, farm, or gather. They were stuck using what they were given. Having no choice was a cost to the Hawaiian people. A cost is the effort, loss, or sacrifice necessary to have something.

All systems have benefits and costs. In old Hawaii, the Ahupua'a was one method used for getting Hawaii's resources to the people. But, were the benefits greater than the costs?

Hawaiian Economics: From the Mountains to the Sea



1. How did the Ahupua'a method benefit the people of Hawaii?
 2. Why could it have hurt Hawaiians to be limited to certain areas of the island?
 3. Would you want to live in a system where you were told where to shop and live? Why or why not?