

# Is this Paradise? What is real? How does expectation influence reality?

When people travel to beautiful places that are deemed paradise, the wish is often to live there. Many people dream of what it would be like to live in a tourist destination where life seems idyllic and perfect. How many people consider the realities of what life is actually like and how much the tourist impacts the identities of the local people?

In this lesson, your students will read Kristiana Kahakauwila's "This is Paradise." The story brings up questions about and explores the deep tensions between local and tourist, tradition and expectation, and the façade and the authentic self. Using the short story, students will follow the intertwining stories of three groups of women and how they interact with a mainlander who visits Hawaii who keeps repeating, "this is it. This is paradise" (33).

Group one: the surfer girls, which is made up of the narrator and Cora Jones, Kaila Ka'awa, Lani Pogan, and Mel Chun.

Group two: the housekeepers at the Banyan Hotel, which is made up of the narrator, Stassi Nifon, and unnamed others.

Group three: the professional career women, which is made up of the narrator and Esther Lu, Laura Tavares, Kiana Naone, and Paula Gilbert.

As your students read the story, ask them to use the graphic organizer to keep track of the narrators and their group's story. Ask them to pay close attention to how the three groups interact with Susan, the girl in the "white bikini with red polka dots." An answer key for the chart has been provided.

In addition to tracing the three groups' stories, have them use the second graphic organizer to find text evidence to support Kahakauwila's purpose of exploring the deep tensions between local and tourist, tradition and expectation, and façade and authentic self.

## Questions for discussion:

1. What impact does having three different narrators with three different, yet similar, perspectives have on your understanding of the story?
2. Have you ever gone on vacation and asked questions like Susan's?

- a. "Everyone talks about aloha here, but it's like the Hawaiians are all pissed off. They live in paradise. What is there to be mad at" (23).
- 3. Do you or have you ever lived in a place that people visit for vacation? How can you relate to the experiences of the Hawaiians?
- 4. Kahakauwila names places such as Pohnpei, Yap, or Kosrae uses words such Aiu, kanaka, kumu, and kupuna. She also uses dialect in the surfer girls' dialogue.
  - a. What do these words mean? Where are the places located?
  - b. What impact does this have for your understanding of the reading?

**Directions: Keep track of the narrators and their group's story. Pay close attention to how the three groups interact with Susan, the girl in the "white bikini with red polka dots."**

Surfer Girls	Women of Housekeeping	Professional Career Women

Directions: Find text evidence to support Kahakauwila’s purpose of exploring the deep tensions between **local and tourist**, **tradition and expectation**, and **façade and authentic self**.

Local and Tourist	Tradition and Expectation	Façade and Authentic Self

**Teacher Resource: Answer Key**

<p><b>Surfer girls</b></p> <p>Narrator Cora Jones Kaila Ka’awa Lani Pogan Mel Chun</p>	<p><b>Housekeepers</b></p> <p>Narrator Stassi Nifon Others, unnamed</p>	<p><b>Professionals</b></p> <p>Narrator Esther Lu Laura Tavares Kiana Naone Paula Gilbert</p>
<p>Notice Susan “she wears a white bikini with red polka dots” (9)</p> <p>“her blue-and-white-striped hotel towel labels her for what she is” (10)</p>	<p>“we, the women of housekeeping” (11)</p> <p>“The door to room 254 is open, and we watch a young woman tie a white wrap around her waist. Her polka-dot bathing suit... “ (12)</p> <p>“We smile back at her. We feel as if we can trust her” (12)</p> <p>“We talk of our husbands and our children... already the youngest speak more English than we do” (14)</p> <p>“We even want, in some small part of our hearts, to send them back home to Pohnpei or Yap or Kosrae so they can really learn what it means to be one of use. Already they are American” (14)</p>	<p>“It doesn’t hurt that we’re from here. We are considered by our peers to be local women who’ve done well, left but come back, dedicated their education and mainland skills to putting this island right... but sometimes, late at night and alone beneath the hand-stitched Hawaiian quilts we can finally afford to purchase, we wish we had followed our law and grad school boyfriends to D.C. or Chicago. We could have foregone being pillars. We could have been regular women” (16).</p> <p>“We’d like to tell them that Waikiki is nothing more than a succession of Hyatts and Courtyard by Marriotts, Cheesecake Factories and Planet Hollywoods... We’d like to tell them that the real Hawai’i is elsewhere, hidden in the karaoke bars...” (17)</p> <p>They see “a woman in a polka-dot bikini” shopping in one of the ABC convenience stores (17).</p>

		<p>“And outside of Waikiki, the native dress seems suspiciously similar to what’s on sale at Macy’s. Hawai’i is no fantasyland” (18)</p>
<p>At the Lava Lounge:</p> <p>“We are just getting good and worked up when we spot the polka-dot girl from this morning” (20).</p> <p>“We want to make fun of her, but she possesses a certain girlishness that awakens our forgiveness. It’s not her fault she’s haole” (21).</p> <p>Buy Susan a shot: “And one fo’ you, sista” (22)</p> <p>“Thanks for sharing... I’m Susan” (22).</p> <p>“She doesn’t talk back to Lani, which wins her some points, but a few minutes later we overhear her whispering to her brother: ‘Everyone talks about aloha here, but it’s like the Hawaiians are all pissed off. They live in paradise. What is there to be mad at” (23).</p> <p>“Not only does paradise no longer belong us, but we have to watch foreigners destroy it. We have plenty aloha for someone who appreciates. We have none for a girl like this” (23).</p>		<p>Bar Ambrosia:</p> <p>“This bar is anything but local” (29).</p> <p>“Anything but local,” Laura repeats. “That’s why I come here.” We nod our heads in agreement. Here, no tiki decorations hang on the wall. Pina Coladas and mai tais are replaced with Manhattans. Reality in space-age pepper shakers... Ain’t no Lava Lounge... thank goodness we’ve graduated from that place” (30).</p> <p>“We are standing in the hotel lobby... when a couple staggers through the front entrances... she has a ski-jump nose. We remember the nose. She’s the girl from the ABC Store” (31).</p> <p>“Probably just met him tonight,” Kiana says drily. “I guess that’s the point of vacation” (32).</p> <p>About living on the island: “but they’ll never be able to afford their own place... worried that another development will push housing prices further upward, making it harder still</p>

<p>“Kaila Ka’awa, whose two brothers have spent most of their lives in and out of county jail, defends Bryan” (25).</p> <p>When trying to warn Susan about Bryan, the recently released-from-prison guy: “You girls really don’t want visitors to have a good time, do you?” Susan shrugs. “Whatevs.” With a tight smile, she snaps her purse shut and brushes past Lani. The bathroom door swings in Susan’s wake, and we are all left staring at the empty space (28).</p>		<p>for our people to remain on their land” (32-33).</p> <p>Susan: “She just keeps repeating, ‘this is it. This is paradise” (33).</p>
<p>Leaving the Lava Lounge at 2 am.</p> <p>“We look into the hotel, and we can almost understand why here, in Waikiki, the world appears perfect. The hotel lobbies are brimming with flower arrangements and sticky with the scent of ginger... And the people are beautiful... These people, our people--- look fresh as cut fruit, ready to be caressed, to be admired. These are people to be trusted. This is not New York or Los Angeles. No, Hawai’i is heaven. A dream” (34-35).</p>		<p>Nightmare: “We hear a woman screaming for help, and we’re not sure if the voice is ours or someone else’s” (36).</p> <p>“But we don’t think everything is okay. Something is amiss, muddled. Years have passed since we listened to our dreams, since we were youthful enough to trust them” (36).</p>

<p>They hear Susan: “A girl says, ‘No,’ and we take a step in the direction of the voice” (35).</p> <p>Making out on the beach: “Like no one can see them out there, when they’re about as hidden from view as mating monk seals. How many time have we glimpsed naked ass, white as moonlight, pumping away for all it’s worth” (35).</p>		
<p>“We’ve just turned the corner at the snack stand when we spot the crowd gathered outside of the Banyan Hotel” (39).</p> <p>Mel turns to one of the <b>housekeepers</b> and asks quietly, “Auntie, what happened” (40).</p> <p>“We know her... <i>we know her</i>, we repeat. We know her and we warned her and we saw him” (40)</p> <p>“The police officers frown at us in disbelief or annoyance, but one of them, a petite woman with dark skin and protruding belly” (40)</p> <p>“The policewoman follows our gaze with her eyes and watches the waves with us. For a moment, we’re all looking at the ocean with the same longing, the same</p>	<p>“We’re on the early shift again, so we arrive at five in the morning” (36).</p> <p>“Even though we are facing east, toward mainland America, we pretend that in the distance, beyond the white haze that hangs above the ocean, lie our home islands. We don’t like to think of ourselves as homesick, but sometimes we feel an ache for their still, quiet air” (37).</p> <p>They find Susan: “But those who found her, who touched her, who recognize her--- we stay. We form a circle around her, protecting her even though she is beyond our protection” (38)</p> <p>“She is in need of a mother, and that’s a job at which we are experts” (39)</p>	<p>“We tell her the police sketch looks just like him, that man with Susan. We have learned the girl’s name now and we use it” (42).</p> <p>“Paula tells us a group of surfer girls contributed to the artist’s sketch, which Paula personally approved. ‘Just like how we saw him’” (42).</p> <p>“We’re older and more experienced than the Susans of the world. We’re career women. We should have seen that Susan was getting herself into trouble. We should have done something” (42).</p> <p>“Esther says Hawai’i is becoming more and more like the mainland, and for once we don’t hear anger in her voice, just regret” (43).</p> <p>Laura contends that because this is Hawai’i, Susan let her guard down. “This woman,</p>

<p>sense of hurling through space and time” (41).</p> <p>About <b>Paula</b>: “We can trust her” (41)</p> <p>Telling <b>Paula</b>: “With sudden clarity, we remember hearing splashing in the water the night before and a woman’s scream. We hadn’t thought it anything more than a shriek of laughter” (41)</p> <p>“Throughout the day we argue over Susan, acting as if we knew her enough to speak for her” (44)</p> <p>“We feel disgust with Security... Why didn’t they interrupt? We think of the noises we heard and ask ourselves the same questions” (44).</p> <p>“When they see local people, they must think we are the ones that brought them death” (45).</p> <p>Memorial service and “all that’s left ... is a confused jumble” of flowers (46).</p>		<p>this Susan, she was twenty-two. She should have known better” (43).</p>
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