

Ghost of the Lagoon

by Armstrong Sperry



PREVIEW This short story is set on Bora Bora, an island in the southern Pacific Ocean. Mako, a young boy, has heard many stories about a terrifying shark in the waters near his home. He vows to slay the shark and win the reward offered by the king. Will Mako have the chance to test his courage?

Before You Read

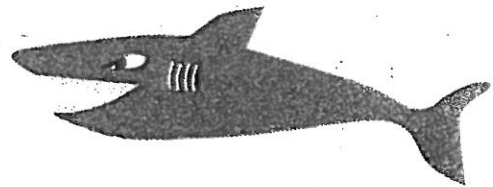
Connect to Your Life

Think of someone you know or have read about who you think displays bravery, or courage. What courageous actions has he or she taken? What dreams or ideas made this person take risks? In the chart below, write down information about this courageous person. An example is shown.

Person's Name	Courageous Action(s)	Why He or She Did This
<i>Matthew Henson</i>	<i>expedition to North Pole</i>	<i>loved adventure and exploring</i>

Key to the Story

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? Think of words related to danger. Write them in the boxes below. Then use each word in a sentence about the sea.



1.

The captain knew taking his boat out in the storm was a risk.

2.

3.

As the story begins . . .

- Mako lives on the island of Bora Bora.
- Mako has a dog named Afa.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN? A *crag* is a piece of rock that sticks out from a cliff or mountain.

Pause & Reflect

1. What are your impressions of Mako? (*Infer*)

2. **MARK IT UP** Underline vivid details about the island where Mako lives. Would you like to live on Bora Bora? (*Visualize*)
YES / NO, because

FOCUS

As the story opens, you meet Mako and learn about the island where he lives.

MARK IT UP As you read, circle details that help you get to know Mako. An example is highlighted.

10 the faces of the cliffs. As you look upward, you see wild goats leaping from crag to crag.

Mako had been born on the very edge of the sea, and most of his waking hours were spent in the waters of the lagoon, which was nearly enclosed by the two outstretched arms of the island. He was very clever with his hands; he had made a harpoon that was as straight as an arrow and tipped with five pointed iron spears. He had made a canoe, hollowing it out of a tree. It wasn't a very big canoe—only a little longer
20 than his own height. It had an outrigger, a sort of balancing pole, fastened to one side to keep the boat from tipping over. The canoe was just large enough to hold Mako and his little dog, Afa. They were great companions, these two.

Pause & Reflect

WORDS TO KNOW

lagoon (lə-gōōn') *n.* a shallow body of water separated from a sea by sandbars or coral reefs

harpoon (här-pōōn') *n.* a spearlike weapon used to hunt large fish

FOCUS

Mako's grandfather tells him about Tupa, the "ghost" of the lagoon.

MARK IT UP >> As you read, underline words and phrases that tell about this creature and how the islanders feel about him.

One evening Mako lay stretched at full length on the pandanus mats, listening to Grandfather's voice.

Overhead, stars shone in the dark sky. From far off came the thunder of the surf on the reef.

The old man was speaking of Tupa, the ghost of the lagoon. Ever since the boy could remember, he had heard tales of this terrible monster. Frightened fishermen, returning from the reef at midnight, spoke of the ghost. Over the evening fires, old men told endless tales about the monster.

Tupa seemed to think the lagoon of Bora Bora belonged to him. The natives left presents of food for him out on the reef: a dead goat, a chicken, or a pig. The presents always disappeared mysteriously, but everyone felt sure that it was Tupa who carried them away. Still, in spite of all this food, the nets of the fishermen were torn during the night, the fish stolen. What an appetite Tupa seemed to have!

Not many people had ever seen the ghost of the lagoon. Grandfather was one of the few who had.

"What does he really look like, Grandfather?" the boy asked, for the hundredth time.

The old man shook his head solemnly. The light from the cook fire glistened on his white hair. "Tupa lives in the great caves of the reef. He is longer than this house. There is a sail on his back, not large but terrible to see, for it burns with a white fire. Once, when I was fishing beyond the reef at night, I saw him come up right under another canoe—"

WORDS TO KNOW

reef (rēf) *n.* a ridge of rocks, sand, or coral near the surface of the water

As the story continues . . .

- Mako hears stories about the "ghost" of the lagoon.
- There is a reward for capturing this ghost.
- Mako learns something about his father.

MORE ABOUT . . .

PANDANUS MATS Pandanus is a tree with very long leaves. After the leaves are harvested and treated, they are woven into mats. In the South Pacific, these mats are often used for bedding and floor covering. Mako uses his pandanus mat as a bed.

English Learner Support

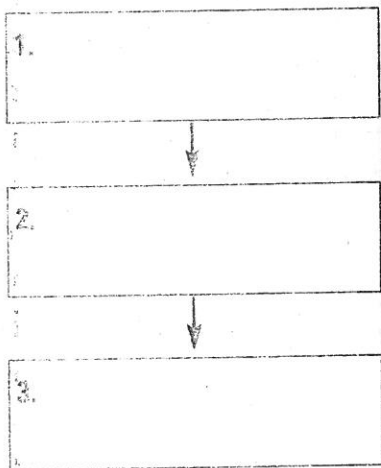
Culture

Legends The *endless tales* that the old men speak about are legends. A legend is a story handed down from the past that may tell about events that really happened or a person who really lived. Legends often mix fact and fiction. Mako has grown up listening to his grandfather tell about Tupa, the ghost of the lagoon.



Some of the events in this story are described out of order. To keep track of important events, complete this diagram. Write one event in each box, and place the events in the order that they actually happened. For example, the story shared by Mako's grandfather happened before the events in Mako's present life.

Events



What does Mako learn about his father?

“What happened then?” Mako asked. He half rose on one elbow. This was a story he had not heard before.

The old man's voice dropped to a whisper. “Tupa dragged the canoe right under the water—and the water boiled with white flame. The three fishermen in it were never seen again. Fine swimmers they were, too.”

Grandfather shook his head. “It is bad fortune even to speak of Tupa. There is evil in his very name.”

“But King Opu Nui has offered a reward for his capture,” the boy pointed out.

“Thirty acres of fine coconut land, and a sailing canoe as well,” said the old man. “But who ever heard of laying hands on a ghost?”

Mako's eyes glistened. “Thirty acres of land and a sailing canoe. How I should love to win that reward!”

Grandfather nodded, but Mako's mother scolded her son for such foolish talk. “Be quiet now, son, and go to sleep. Grandfather has told you that it is bad fortune to speak of Tupa. Alas, how well we have learned that lesson! Your father—” She stopped herself.

“What of my father?” the boy asked quickly. And now he sat up straight on the mats.

“Tell him, Grandfather,” his mother whispered. The old man cleared his throat and poked at the fire. A little shower of sparks whirled up into the darkness.

“Your father,” he explained gently, “was one of the three fishermen in the canoe that Tupa destroyed.” His words fell upon the air like stones dropped into a deep well.

Mako shivered. He brushed back the hair from his damp forehead. Then he squared his shoulders and cried fiercely, “I shall slay Tupa and win the king's

reward!" He rose to his knees, his slim body tense, his eyes flashing in the firelight.

"Hush!" his mother said. "Go to sleep now. Enough of such foolish talk. Would you bring trouble upon us all?"

100 Mako lay down again upon the mats. He rolled over on his side and closed his eyes, but sleep was long in coming.

The palm trees whispered above the dark lagoon, and far out on the reef the sea thundered.

Pause & Reflect

FOCUS

The next day, Mako and his dog go to another island. Read to find out what Mako sees along the way.

MARK IT UP >> As you read, circle details that help you visualize what Mako sees.

The boy was slow to wake up the next morning. The ghost of Tupa had played through his dreams, making him restless. And so it was almost noon before Mako sat up on the mats and stretched himself. He called Afa, and the boy and his dog ran down

110 to the lagoon for their morning swim.

When they returned to the house, wide-awake and hungry, Mako's mother had food ready and waiting.

"These are the last of our bananas," she told him. "I wish you would paddle out to the reef this afternoon and bring back a new bunch."

120 The boy agreed eagerly. Nothing pleased him more than such an errand, which would take him to a little island on the outer reef, half a mile from shore. It was one of Mako's favorite playgrounds, and there bananas and oranges grew in great plenty.

"Come, Afa," he called, gulping the last mouthful.

Pause & Reflect

Why do Mako's people fear Tupa? Cross out the *wrong* answer below. (Clarify)

He tears the fishing nets and eats the fish.

He attacks children.

He killed three fishermen.

He has a terrible sail on his back.

As the story continues . . .

- Mako goes to another island to get bananas for his family.
- He thinks about Tupa on his way there.

English Learner Support


Language

Syntax Writers sometime place words in an unusual order, or syntax. For example, *there went Afa also* means the same as "Afa also went there." *So clear was the water* means "the water was so clear." By placing *so clear* at the beginning of the sentence, the writer makes sure readers will notice this phrase.

MORE ABOUT . . .

CORAL GARDENS Coral is made of tiny animals called *coral polyps*. When the coral polyps die, they leave behind skeletons. The hard skeletons stick together to form structures known as coral reefs and coral gardens. These reefs and gardens are home to thousands of fish, plants, and animals.

READ ALOUD

 the boxed passage. Vary the tone and volume of your voice to express Mako's feelings.

"We're going on an expedition." He picked up his long-bladed knife and seized his spear. A minute later, he dashed across the white sand, where his canoe was drawn up beyond the water's reach.

Afa barked at his heels. He was all white except for a black spot over each eye. Wherever Mako went, there went Afa also. Now the little dog leaped into the bow of the canoe, his tail wagging with delight. The boy shoved the canoe into the water and climbed aboard. Then, picking up his paddle, he thrust it into the water. The canoe shot ahead. Its sharp bow cut through the green water of the lagoon like a knife through cheese. And so clear was the water that Mako could see the coral gardens, forty feet below him, growing in the sand. The shadow of the canoe moved over them.

A school of fish swept by like silver arrows. He saw scarlet rock cod with ruby eyes and the head of a conger eel peering out from a cavern in the coral. The boy thought suddenly of Tupa, ghost of the lagoon. On such a bright day it was hard to believe in ghosts of any sort. The fierce sunlight drove away all thought of them. Perhaps ghosts were only old men's stories, anyway!

Mako's eyes came to rest upon his spear—the spear that he had made with his own hands—the spear that was as straight and true as an arrow. He remembered his vow of the night before. Could a ghost be killed with a spear? Some night, when all the village was sleeping, Mako swore to himself that he would find out! He would paddle out to the reef and challenge Tupa! Perhaps tonight. Why not? He caught his breath at the thought. A shiver ran down his back. His hands were tense on the paddle.

WORDS TO KNOW

expedition (ək'spɪ-dʃən) *n.* a journey with a goal or purpose

As the canoe drew away from shore, the boy saw
160 the coral reef that, above all others, had always
interested him. It was of white coral—a long slim
shape that rose slightly above the surface of the water.
It looked very much like a shark. There was a ridge on
the back that the boy could pretend was a dorsal fin,
while up near one end were two dark holes that
looked like eyes!

Times without number the boy had practiced
spearing this make-believe shark, aiming always for
the eyes, the most vulnerable¹ spot. So true and
170 straight had his aim become that the spear would pass
right into the eyeholes without even touching the sides
of the coral. Mako had named the coral reef Tupa.

This morning, as he paddled past it, he shook his
fist and called, “Ho, Mister Tupa! Just wait till I get
my bananas. When I come back, I’ll make short work
of you!”

Afa followed his master’s words with a sharp bark.
He knew Mako was excited about something.

Pause & Reflect

FOCUS

Mako and Afa reach the
island where bananas
grow. Find out what
Mako does in the jungle.

The bow of the canoe
180 touched the sand of the little
island where the bananas
grew. Afa leaped ashore and
ran barking into the jungle,
now on this trail, now on that. Clouds of sea birds
whirled from their nests into the air with angry cries.

Mako climbed into the shallow water, waded
ashore, and pulled his canoe up on the beach. Then,
picking up his banana knife, he followed Afa. In the

1. vulnerable (vūl' nər-ə-bəl): open to physical injury.

Pause & Reflect

1. Do you think Mako will kill
Tupa? (Predict)
YES / NO, because

2. Check the phrase that best
completes the following
sentence. (Clarify)

Mako often practices
killing Tupa by spearing a

- banana tree.
- wild pig.
- coral reef.

As the story continues . . .

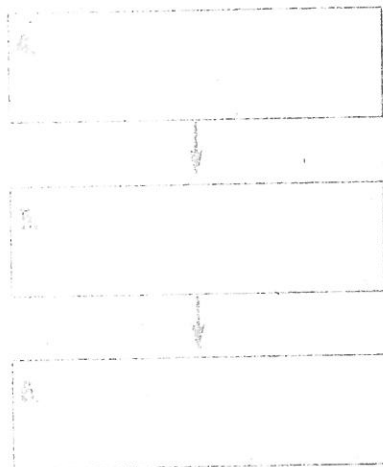
- Mako meets wild animals
on the island.
- He gathers food.
- He must hurry home before
it becomes dark.

MARK IT UP Reread the boxed passage. Circle details that help you picture the rain forest. (Visualize)



Continue filling in your flow chart with the main events in the order that they actually happened.

Events



190 jungle the light was so dense and green that the boy felt as if he were moving underwater. Ferns grew higher than his head. The branches of the trees formed a green roof over him. A flock of parakeets fled on swift wings. Somewhere a wild pig crashed through the undergrowth while Afa dashed away in pursuit.

Mako paused anxiously. Armed only with his banana knife, he had no desire to meet the wild pig. The pig, it seemed, had no desire to meet him, either.

200 Then, ahead of him, the boy saw the broad green blades of a banana tree. A bunch of bananas, golden ripe, was growing out of the top.

At the foot of the tree he made a nest of soft leaves for the bunch to fall upon. In this way the fruit wouldn't be crushed. Then with a swift slash of his blade he cut the stem. The bananas fell to the earth with a dull thud. He found two more bunches.

Then he thought, "I might as well get some oranges while I'm here. Those little rusty ones are sweeter than any that grow on Bora Bora."

210 So he set about making a net out of palm leaves to carry the oranges. As he worked, his swift fingers moving in and out among the strong green leaves, he could hear Afa's excited barks off in the jungle. That was just like Afa, always barking at something: a bird, a fish, a wild pig. He never caught anything, either. Still, no boy ever had a finer companion.

220 The palm net took longer to make than Mako had realized. By the time it was finished and filled with oranges, the jungle was dark and gloomy. Night comes quickly and without warning in the islands of the tropics.

Mako carried the fruit down to the shore and loaded it into the canoe. Then he whistled to Afa. The dog came bounding out of the bush, wagging his tail.

“Hurry!” Mako scolded. “We won’t be home before the dark comes.”

The little dog leaped into the bow of the canoe, and Mako came aboard. Night seemed to rise up from the surface of the water and swallow them. On the distant shore of Bora Bora, cook fires were being lighted. The first star twinkled just over the dark mountains. Mako dug his paddle into the water, and the canoe leaped ahead.

Pause & Reflect

FOCUS

Read to find out what Mako sees near the coral reef on his way home.

The dark water was alive with phosphorus. The bow of the canoe seemed to cut through a pale liquid fire.

Each dip of the paddle trailed

streamers of light. As the canoe approached the coral reef, the boy called, “Ho, Tupa! It’s too late tonight to teach you your lesson. But I’ll come back tomorrow.”

The coral shark glistened in the darkness.

And then, suddenly, Mako’s breath caught in his throat. His hands felt weak. Just beyond the fin of the coral Tupa, there was another fin—a huge one. It had never been there before. And—could he believe his eyes? It was moving.

The boy stopped paddling. He dashed his hand across his eyes. Afa began to bark furiously. The great white fin, shaped like a small sail, glowed with phosphorescent light. Then Mako knew. Here was Tupa—the real Tupa—ghost of the lagoon!

WORDS TO KNOW

phosphorus (fös’fer-es) *n.* a substance that glows with a yellowish or white light

Pause & Reflect

1. Number these events in the correct order. (Sequence of Events)

- Mako hears a wild pig.
- Mako loads fruit into his canoe.
- Mako picks bananas.
- Mako makes a net to carry oranges.

2. How does Mako feel about Afa? (Infer)

As the story continues . . .

- Mako and Afa paddle through the dark waters.
- They encounter danger on their way home.

English Learner Support

Language

Personification The sentence in blue type is an example of personification. Personification is a figure of speech that gives human traits to an object or idea. *His voice died in his throat* means that Mako is unable to cry out because he is so frightened.

Pause & Reflect

Will Mako be able to save Afa from the shark? Write your **prediction**.

YES / NO, because

As the story ends . . .

- Mako must try to protect himself and Afa from Tupa.
- Mako's knowledge, skill, and bravery are tested.

His knees felt weak. He tried to cry out, but his voice died in his throat. The great shark was circling slowly around the canoe. With each circle, it moved closer and closer. Now the boy could see the phosphorescent glow of the great shark's sides. As it moved in closer, he saw the yellow eyes, the gill slits in its throat.

Afa leaped from one side of the canoe to the other. 260 In sudden anger Mako leaned forward to grab the dog and shake him soundly. Afa wriggled out of his grasp as Mako tried to catch him, and the shift in weight tipped the canoe on one side. The outrigger rose from the water. In another second they would be overboard. The boy threw his weight over quickly to balance the canoe, but with a loud splash Afa fell over into the dark water.

Mako stared after him in dismay. The little dog, instead of swimming back to the canoe, had headed 270 for the distant shore. And there was the great white shark—very near.

“Afa! Afa! Come back! Come quickly!” Mako shouted.

Pause & Reflect

FOCUS

Read to find out if your prediction is right.

The little dog turned back toward the canoe. He was swimming with all his strength. Mako leaned forward. Could Afa make it? Swiftly the boy seized his spear. Bracing himself, he stood upright. There was no 280 weakness in him now. His dog, his companion, was in danger of instant death.

Afa was swimming desperately to reach the canoe. The white shark had paused in his circling to gather speed for the attack. Mako raised his arm, took aim. In that instant the shark charged. Mako's arm flashed forward. All his strength was behind that thrust. The spear drove straight and true, right into the great shark's eye. Mad with pain and rage, Tupa whipped about, lashing the water in fury. The canoe rocked
290 back and forth. Mako struggled to keep his balance as he drew back the spear by the cord fastened to his wrist.

He bent over to seize Afa and drag him aboard. Then he stood up, not a moment too soon. Once again the shark charged. Once again Mako threw his spear, this time at the other eye. The spear found its mark. Blinded and weak from loss of blood, Tupa rolled to the surface, turned slightly on his side. Was he dead?

Mako knew how clever sharks could be, and he was
300 taking no chances. Scarcely daring to breathe, he paddled toward the still body. He saw the faintest motion of the great tail. The shark was still alive. The boy knew that one flip of that tail could overturn the canoe and send him and Afa into the water, where Tupa could destroy them.

Swiftly, yet calmly, Mako stood upright and braced himself firmly. Then, murmuring a silent prayer to the shark god, he threw his spear for the last time. Downward, swift as sound, the spear plunged into a
310 white shoulder.

Peering over the side of the canoe, Mako could see the great fish turn over far below the surface. Then slowly, slowly, the great shark rose to the surface of the lagoon. There he floated, half on one side.

Tupa was dead.

Mako flung back his head and shouted for joy. Hitching a strong line about the shark's tail, the boy

English Learner Support

Vocabulary

Multiple-Meaning Words

Read the sentence in blue type. The word *true* has more than one meaning. It can mean "loyal" or it can mean "real." In this case, *true* means "without going off course."



READING TIP Complete your flow chart with important events from the end of the story. Add more boxes if you need them.

Events

7.



8.



9.



10.



Why does Grandfather sing a song about "Thirty acres of land and a sailing canoe"?

Pause & Reflect

1. **MARK IT UP** Why does Mako attack Tupa? Find the answer on page 50 and underline it. (Cause and Effect)
2. What was your reaction to Mako's fight with Tupa? (Connect)



Now that you have read the ending, look back through the story. Star events or details that suggest that Mako will encounter Tupa later in the story. (Analyze)

320 began to paddle toward the shore of Bora Bora. The dorsal fin, burning with the white fire of phosphorus, trailed after the canoe.

Men were running down the beaches of Bora Bora, shouting as they leaped into their canoes and put out across the lagoon. Their cries reached the boy's ears across the water.

"It is Tupa—ghost of the lagoon," he heard them shout. "Mako has killed him!"

330 That night, as the tired boy lay on the pandanus mats listening to the distant thunder of the sea, he heard Grandfather singing a new song. It was the song which would be sung the next day at the feast which King Opu Nui would give in Mako's honor. The boy saw his mother bending over the cook fire. The stars leaned close, winking like friendly eyes. Grandfather's voice reached him now from a great distance, "Thirty acres of land and a sailing canoe. . . ." ❖

Pause & Reflect