



Talking points

White feathers

Examining the symbolism surrounding white feathers:



In WWI white feathers were used as a symbol of cowardice, given to shame young men into joining the army. However in different cultures and at different times they have had very different meanings. Explore these other understandings of white feathers and have some feathers for young people to look at and touch.

An angel watching over you: Ask if anyone has ever found a white feather unexpectedly? Say that some people believe that if you find one unexpectedly it is a sign from a loved one - an angel watching over you.

A symbol of faith, hope and compassion: Does anyone know anything about New Zealand? Who were the people living there before British people settled? These people are known as Maori. They have a different name for New Zealand - Aotearoa, meaning 'Land of the Long White Cloud' (the name Aotearoa is now used alongside New Zealand as the country's other name). Here the white feather is traditionally worn by Maori people of rank. It is known as the Raukura. It is recognition of a higher spiritual power and a symbol of faith, hope, and compassion for all of mankind and our environment. There are various accounts of how the Raukura feather became such a significant symbol. One refers to a gathering of people who witnessed an Albatross landing on one of its courtyards, dropping a single feather before departing. This feather was honoured by two highly respected Maori leaders. Through their honourable leadership the Raukura feathers became a symbol of pride and inner strength and of remembrance for the Maori ancestors who peacefully resisted British colonisation. The Raukura is a symbol which continues to guide Maori people today with wisdom and hope for living together in peace.

A symbol of bravery: In Native American culture a white feather represents purity and wholesomeness of heart. A Native American Indian given the name White-feather translates to mean the bravest of the brave.