

Mānawatia a Matariki

The 2025 theme of Matariki mā Puanga is all about inclusion, embracing diversity and celebrating Matariki together. Matariki mā Puanga means Matariki (Pleiades) and Puanga (Rigel) and this phrase acknowledges the relationship between these stars. Both Matariki and Puanga rise in the eastern sky before the sun during the winter period, however some tribes and regions of the country look to Puanga instead of Matariki as the main marker of the New Year. It is important to note that all tribes maintained knowledge of both Matariki and Puanga, choosing as an iwi, or community which determined the beginning of the new year.

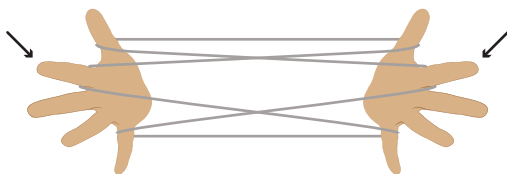
Mahi Whai | Puanga

To celebrate the rising of Matariki mā Puanga let's learn a traditional Māori string game called whai. Whai involves the intricate manipulation of a looped piece of string held between the hands, and in this game, we'll be creating a diamond-shaped pattern representing the bright star of Puanga.

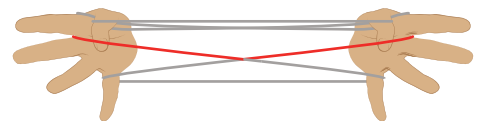
You'll need a two-metre length of string tied in a loop – harakeke is customary, however, nylon or wool can be used:



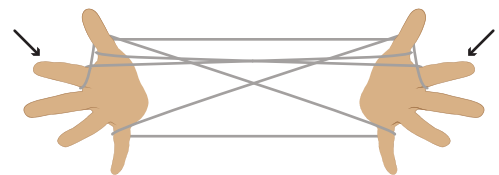
1. Hook your loop of string over both thumbs and little fingers and pull taut, forming a rectangular loop – this is the basis of the pattern called whai.



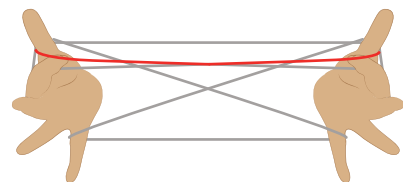
2. Loop the string from the opposite palm around your index fingers and pull it back.

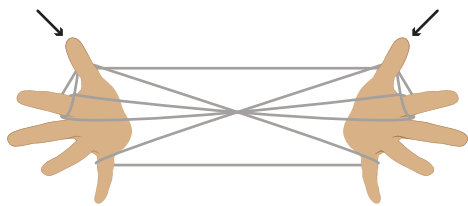


3. With thumbs pick up the second string of the index finger.

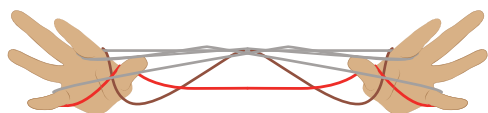
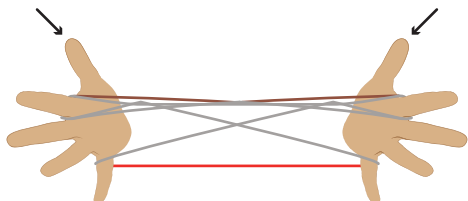


4. With index fingers pick up the first string around the thumbs.

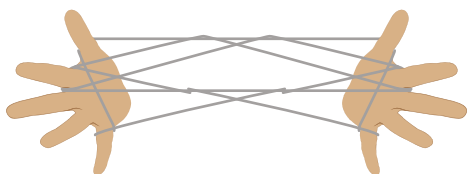




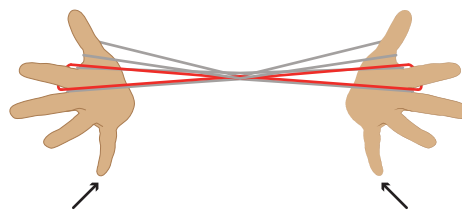
5. Drop the strings from both thumbs.



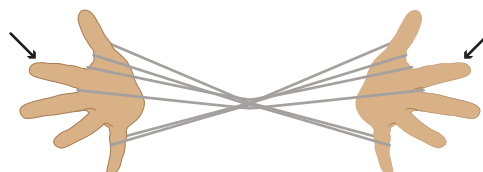
6. With both thumbs press the first strings around the index fingers down.



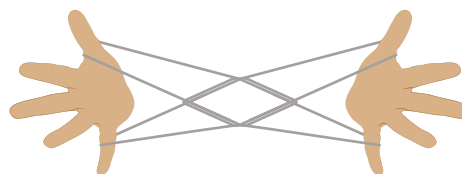
7. Hook the horizontal strings behind the pinkies by rotating your hands and pull toward you.



8. Drop the strings from the pinkies.



9. With the right hand pick up the top string off the left-hand index and loop it around the pinkie – repeat for the opposite hand.



10. Slowly let go of index strings and pull to the side.

Whai traditionally served to develop dexterity and entertain during long winter nights. Credited to the demigod Māui, from whom the game's full name, Te Whai-Wawewawe-a-Māui, is derived, whai is often accompanied by chants as players skilfully weave the string into complex patterns.

Whai also holds cultural significance among iwi, serving as a platform for storytelling and cultural transmission. The game's widespread presence in other Polynesian cultures highlights the interconnectedness of Pacific Island communities and the rich tapestry of artistic expression shared across Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.



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