

# LESSON 4

Highland houses:  
The case of *honai*  
and *tongkonan*

<b>Subject</b>	History/Social Studies
<b>Topic</b>	Highland houses: Culture and environment interaction
<b>Level</b>	Lower secondary
<b>Key idea</b>	Across time, people respond to the varied natural environment of a region in multiple ways that shape their worldviews and way of life.
<b>Key concepts</b>	Environment, highlands, lowlands, coastlands People, worldviews, way of life Commonalities and diversities
<b>No. of periods/lessons</b>	1 period (1 period is approximately 50 minutes)
<b>Facilities needed</b>	A/V equipment and Internet access to play the video clips (or hard copy with similar content) Sources and handouts for distribution
<b>Prerequisite knowledge</b>	No prerequisite knowledge required. Understanding the attributes of highlands (as explored in Lesson 3: Highlands and agriculture) is a plus.

**Learning objectives**

By the end of the lesson, the students will be able to:

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify key features and the significance of highland homes.</li> <li>2. Link the community's way of life and their traditional building methods to the environment.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Examine images and videos to identify and explain the significance of the materials and structures of highland homes.</li> <li>2. Create and rationalize future homes suitable for the environment they live in.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrate awareness that environment shapes our worldviews and way of life.</li> <li>2. Cooperate in groups to complete the tasks assigned.</li> <li>3. Recognize how people's environments and values shape their housing.</li> </ol>

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
Introduction [5 minutes]	<p><b>1. Hook activity</b></p> <p>1.1 Show videos of houses in highlands (Source 1).</p> <p>1.2 Ask the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you seen such houses before?</li> <li>• Where do you think you can find this type of house?</li> </ul> <p>1.3 To bring across the concept of sharedness, point out to students that such houses are found in highlands across the region (and not just in any country).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source 1: Video clip (3 m) Black Hmong Vietnamese Village <a href="https://youtu.be/CYaEhcN7J_U">youtu.be/CYaEhcN7J_U</a></li> </ul>	The hook engages students in the lesson and acts as a link to the previous lesson.
Development [35 minutes]	<p><b>2. Group work: Source (image/video) analysis</b></p> <p>2.1 Divide the students into two groups. One group is given the photo of the <i>honai</i>, a traditional house from the Wamena highlands (Source 2), and the other group should be given the picture of the <i>tongkonan</i>, a traditional home from the Torajan highlands (Source 3).</p> <p>2.2 Ask students to discuss the following questions with their group, using the questions provided on Handout 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you notice about the structures in the picture?</li> <li>• What kind of characteristics do you notice about these structures?</li> <li>• What kind of materials do you think were used in the construction of these structures?</li> <li>• What do those materials tell you about the place or environment in which these people live in?</li> </ul> <p>2.3 Students share their responses with the class.</p> <p><b>3. Option 1 for an A/V equipped classroom: Two column note taking on the Papuan Voices video clip</b></p> <p>3.1 Play the five minute video from Source 4: Papuan Voices, <i>Honai</i></p> <p>3.2 Students take two-column notes on what they see in the video. In one column they record how the people in the video describe the <i>honai</i> and in the second column they record their responses to these descriptions.</p> <p>3.3 Before viewing the video, students should be reminded to look for answers to the questions that were posed in the first activity regarding the materials, shape, structure and environment surrounding the <i>honai</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source 2: <i>Honai</i> (traditional house from the Wamena highlands)</li> <li>• Source 3: <i>Tongkonan</i> (traditional home from the Torajan highlands)</li> <li>• Handout 1: Question guide for Papuan Voices video</li> <li>• Source 4: Video Clip Papuan Voices, <i>Honai</i>, <a href="https://papaunvoices.net/2015/01/18/honai.html">papaunvoices.net/2015/01/18/honai.html</a> (5 m 52 s)</li> </ul>	<p>This activity introduces students to the structures of highland homes in Toraja and Papua. It guides them in exploring how the structures are used and in what ways they are connected to their surrounding environment.</p> <p>Option 1: Students are exposed to the cultural perspectives about the <i>honai</i> as a cultural structure and its meaning in Wamena society, leading them to think critically about how cultural values and the environment shape and reflect material culture and living styles.</p>

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
	<p><b>4. Option 2 for a non-A/V equipped classroom: Two-column note taking on Houses of the Highlands: The <i>tongkonan</i> and the <i>honai</i></b></p> <p>4.1 Students read the excerpt about the <i>tongkonan</i> and <i>honai</i>'s social functions (Source 5).</p> <p>4.2 In one column they record the key ideas of the text, and in the second column they record their responses to these ideas.</p> <p>4.3 Before reading the text, students should be reminded to look for answers to the questions that were posed in the first activity regarding the materials, shape, structure and environment surrounding the <i>honai</i> and <i>tongkonan</i>.</p> <p><b>5. Discussion</b></p> <p>5.1 Students can be asked to evaluate their original assumptions about the region, people, use of, and materials used in the construction of the <i>honai</i> and <i>tongkonan</i>.</p> <p>5.2 Once the activity is completed, point out the role of environment in people's way of life. Highlight that as a result, the way of life is similar in many highlands in many parts of the region.</p> <p>5.3 Students compare housing from their own country's highlands with housing being examined in this lesson.</p> <p>5.4 Students discuss the similarities and differences and to explain why such characteristics exist.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> The two case studies of housing in highlands can be replaced by examples of housing from highlands from your country. However, it is important to make comparisons across the case studies provided in this lesson plan (or own country's examples) to highlight the shared way of living amongst these highland communities across the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source 5: Excerpt about the <i>tongkonan</i> and the <i>honai</i>'s social functions</li> </ul>	<p>Option 2: Students are exposed to the cultural perspectives about the <i>honai</i> and <i>tongkonan</i> as cultural structures and their meanings in Wamena and Torajan society, leading them to think critically about how cultural values and environment shape and reflect material culture and living styles.</p>

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
Closure [10 minutes]	<p><b>6. Performance task</b></p> <p>6.1 Divide students into small groups.</p> <p>6.2 Students brainstorm the layout of their future homes according to the environment that they live in using Handout 2.</p> <p>6.3 Ask the following guiding questions to help students visualize their new homes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is each room in your home used for?</li> <li>• Who uses the rooms in your house?</li> <li>• What kind of materials were used to build your home?</li> <li>• What kind of activities are done in your home or in certain rooms?</li> <li>• How is your home a response to the environment?</li> </ul> <p>6.4 Students should list the rooms in their homes and what each room expresses about what is important in their community.</p> <p>6.5 Students present their visualization to the whole class.</p> <p>6.6 Summarize the lesson:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our way of life (housing) is shaped by the environment we live in.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handout 2: How does your house reflect what is important in your community?</li> <li>• Markers/pens</li> <li>• Large sheets of paper</li> </ul>	

## Sources and handouts

### Glossary

Shifting cultivation: crops are planted in small plots of land. After a harvest, farmers plant new crops in a different plot of land and burn the old fields. Sometimes the village is moved to another location.

Structure: refers to a built house.

Toraja: ethnic group indigenous to a mountainous region of South Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Wamena: the largest town in Indonesian Papua's highlands, in the Baliem Valley.

## Source 1: Black Hmong village in Viet Nam

### Black Hmong Vietnamese Village

Video clip (3 m 00 s)

[youtu.be/CYaEhcN7J\\_U](https://youtu.be/CYaEhcN7J_U)

Source: offthemap





**Source 2: *Honai***



**Source:**  
[id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berkas:Honai\\_Papua.jpg](https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berkas:Honai_Papua.jpg)



### Source 3: *Tongkonan*



**Source:**

Zwegers, Arian. [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tana\\_Toraja,\\_Kete\\_Kesu,\\_tongkonan\\_\(6823189476\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tana_Toraja,_Kete_Kesu,_tongkonan_(6823189476).jpg)

## Source 4: Highland houses

### Highland houses

#### *Honai*

Video clip (5 m 52 s)

[papaunvoices.net/2015/01/18/honai.html](http://papaunvoices.net/2015/01/18/honai.html)

**Source:** © Yerry, Papua Voices - Engage Media

Director: Niko Asso

The traditional *honai* house is the centre of community life in the central highlands. It is in the *honai* that all cultural rituals take place, from clan gatherings to peace making. As time has progressed, the people of Wamena have lived in a new type of abode, which they call *rumah sehat* (healthy houses). Although the young generation has settled in these houses, they still believe that *honai* resembles the centre of their ethnic groups, which need preservation.



### Transcript

- Isak Asso,  
resident of Wamena: *Honai* are very important to us, the people of Wamena, especially in the Wamena valley. Because whenever we want to talk about anything, according to the culture of Wamena, it has to be discussed in a *honai*.
- Fery Asso,  
chieftain of Aso tribe: There are many types of *honai*. There's a *honai* for tribal celebrations and for war preparation, then there's also *hakohonai*, *ebeaila*, *oma*, *oo*, *siraila*, *sawula*. There is a variety of *honai*. Outsiders consider them all the same but that's incorrect. Two different kinds of *honai* are the *adat honai* to prepare for battle and a *honai* for all celebrations of the tribe.
- Lesaniroke Wetipo: It is said that it is sacred. Because we didn't eat anything else a long time ago. We didn't eat tapioca. We ate humans. It is said that the *honai* is sacred because we ate humans. And because it is sacred, women lived in the *ewe oma* and men lived in the *honai*. If our plants are less fertile and produce a low yield, we need to go to the *honai* and talk about how to fix it.
- Primus Oagay,  
resident of Wamena: All the economic development and progress has made us less and less aware of our *honai* traditions. In the old days, our system of working together in the Baliem Valley was very strong. But now they give money instead of working together. That wasn't the case in the past, but people are too ready to give money now.
- Ninia Asso,  
wife of the Aso tribe chieftain: I don't want to stay in a modern house. If we had an authentic *honai* with a grass roof that would be better. It's much better than living in these modern houses. These modern houses, they are just like children's toys to me. If the *honai* was damaged, I would rather build a new *honai* because I don't like modern houses. Even if there was no wood or grass, I would ask my husband to tell his friends to build a *honai* together. It's not good if there are no *honai* and only modern houses. If we have a *honai*, it's good. I don't like modern houses because they look like toys to me.
- Chief's son: *Honai* are important to me. As the son of the chieftain, and as a practitioner of *adat* (indigenous ceremony), even though I live in a modern house or I am a local official, I will still return to the village.
- Narrator: From 1970 to 1990, the government implemented the 'Healthy Houses' programme which had limited uptake as it did not fit the communal way of living and the new design was not suitable for the cold climate of Papua. Recently the government has adopted traditional and modern building methods for healthy *honai* allowing communities to maintain their way of living in addition to providing appropriate weather protection

## Source 5: Excerpt about the *tongkonan* and *honai*'s social functions

### Houses of the Highlands: The *tongkonan* and the *honai*

The *tongkonan*, recognized as a cultural heritage object by UNESCO, is built according to the principles of *Aluk To Dolo*, the indigenous beliefs of the Torajan people of the mountainous region of Toraja, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The *tongkonan* represents the extended family unit and the descendants of particular clans, and is considered a living organism. The colors and symbols carved into the exterior of the *tongkonan* tell a story of the extended family members who belong to the clan associated with the house, and their status in society.

*Tongkonan* are built in accordance with the cardinal directions, a division of space that reflects ritual rules in the practice of *Aluk To Dolo*. *Tongkonans* are built facing North towards the source of the rivers, the right side of the house facing East, the direction associated with living things and the 'smoke rising' realm. The left side of the house is associated with 'smoke descending' rituals that correspond to death. The house is also divided from bottom to top representing the underworld, the realm of humans, and the realm of the gods.

The *tongkonan* is divided into the *tangdo*, a northern room where unmarried young women sleep, the *sali* on the Eastern side that is used as the family's living and cooking space, and the *Sumbing* to the south that is the quarters for the head of the household. Each house has a 'naval post' that ties it to the land and represents the family. In one Torajan ritual that is related to the *tongkonan*, bamboo is venerated as both an essential resource and a representation of the unity of the family, as represented in the form of the *tongkonan*.

The *honai*, the traditional home of people in the highlands of Wamena, in West Papua, Indonesia, also reflects the social and cultural shape of society in Wamena. The short, dome-like shape of the *honai* is uniquely adapted to the colder climate of the highlands, and is constructed from renewable materials such as sago palm fronds. Within the house there is an area for cooking sweet potatoes and pigs, and the stove is designed both to warm the interior and to allow the smoke to escape.

*Honai* are usually inhabited by ten to fifteen people. Three types of *honai* are used for different groups: the structure called a *honai* is exclusively for men, the *ebai* for women, and a third type, the *wamai*, used for the housing of pigs.

### Vocabulary

Cardinal directions or cardinal points:	north, east, south and west.
Clan:	a group of related families.
Extended family:	a family with more than 2 generations living together, e.g. grandparents or other relatives.
Indigenous:	local.
Realm:	kingdom.
Renewable:	able to be replenished.

## Handout 1: Question guide for Papuan Voices video

What do you notice about the structures in the picture?

What characteristics do you notice about these structures?

What materials do you think were used in the construction of these structures?

What do those materials tell you about the place or environment in which these people live in?

## Handout 2: How does your house reflect what is important in your community?

Name of the room	Who uses the room?	What kinds of activities are done in the room?	How does the room reflect something important in your community?