

Polynesian creation myth

In the beginning there was a giant shell. In the top of it was the sky, **Rangi** and in the bottom was the earth, **Papa**. These were the parents of gods, humans and all life in the world. They loved each other very much, held each other in a close embrace and very soon they had given birth to six children. As the children began to grow there was not much room inside the shell and, longing for light and space, the children began to resent being confined between their parents' bodies. So they plotted to separate their parents and bring about the world as we know it.

The six sons: **Tawhirimagtea**, the god of the winds; **Tane**, god of the forests; **Tu**, god of war; **Tangaroa**, god of the sea; **Rongo**, god of peace and **Ru**, god of food could not agree on the best way to separate the sky and the earth and quarrelled violently. One son suggested killing the parents and Tawhirimagtea opposed separating them altogether and refused to take part in the plot. Tane however, eventually managed to prise Rangi and Papa apart. He did this by lying on his back and forcing the shell open with his feet pressing upwards, just as a tree has its roots in the earth while its trunk and branches stretch towards the sky. Rangi and Papa were finally separated and the sky and the earth have remained apart ever since.

Tawhirimagtea, the god of winds and storms, was furious with his brothers. He could not bear to see his parents being torn apart and decided to make his home between Rangi and Papa. He promised his brothers however, that they would forever have to deal with his fury so, from time to time, he sends storms, whirlwinds, thunder and lightening to the world, as a reminder of his anger.

When the space between the earth and sky was wide enough the sons decided to make humans. They worked together to mould people out of red clay. When they had finished Tane, god of the forest took the figures of man and woman and pressing his nose to theirs, breathed the spirit of life into their lungs. The humans' eyes opened. They sneezed and came to life.

Papa and Rangi were proud of what their sons had created but they still missed each other's touch. And so every night Rangi cries and in the morning the world is damp with the dew of his tears. The morning mists are Papa's sighs of sadness, as she thinks of her beloved Rangi, now separated from her embrace.