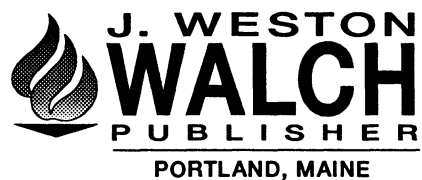


Hands-on Culture of **JAPAN**

Kate O'Halloran



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Mon: Heraldic Crests



OBJECTIVES

Social Studies

- Students will see how different cultures can express a similar need.

Art

- Students will design graphic symbols to represent some aspect of themselves or their families.

MATERIALS

Mon: Heraldic Crests handout
white paper
colored construction paper
pencils
scissors, compasses and protractors
rulers

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute the handout and initiate a discussion of symbols. At the idea-generating stage, it can be helpful to have students work in small groups to brainstorm possible symbols. Good starting points include sports, hobbies, ethnic background, an initial from a name, and the original meaning of a family name.
2. Once students have chosen a symbol, they should work individually to simplify it.
3. The final step is to cut the symbol out of one piece of construction paper, either dark or light, and mount it on a piece of contrasting paper. Since indigo blue and white are very common colors for Japanese fabric printing, you might want to have students use only navy and white, then display the completed mon in the classroom.

VARIATION

- Have students include a one-sentence explanation of their symbols and why they chose them.
- Have students work in groups to design a mon for your class or school, then display the completed mon in the classroom.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

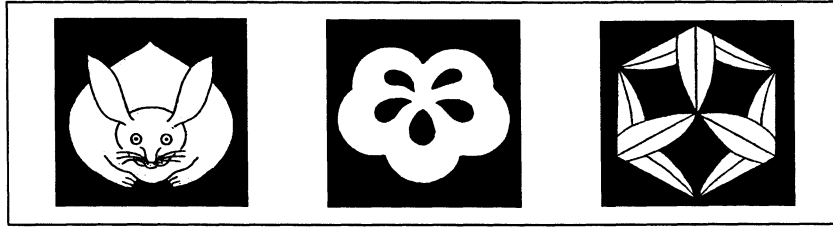
Have students use the mon they designed in this activity as the stencil design in the Katazome: Stencil Dyeing activity on page 45.

ASSESSMENT

Did students create a simple graphic design, cut it out, and mount it on contrasting paper? Is the finished product visually appealing?



Mon: Heraldic Crests

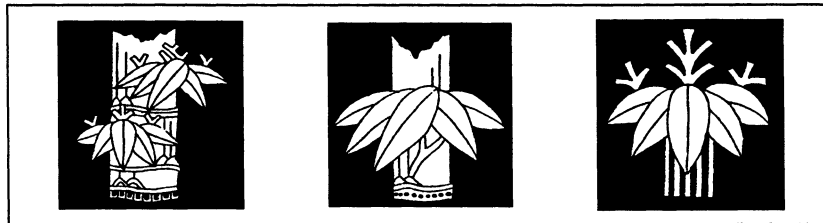


Japanese society in the medieval period had a lot in common with medieval European society. Both were feudal societies: A rich ruling class held all the land and let other people use it in return for their services. And both societies developed a system of heraldry, or symbols used to identify people and families. The European system was very complicated, with its own special vocabulary. The Japanese system was much simpler.

Beginning in the eleventh century, high-ranking Japanese families began using one specific design on their most formal clothes. Soon these designs came to be used as symbols for the family name. The designs, called *mon*, or crests, were used on clothes, carriages, banners and screens, furniture, and weapons. Many of the designs were based on elegant natural forms: wisteria, peonies, irises, and cranes. One flower—the chrysanthemum—was reserved for the emperor.

Unlike European crests, Japanese *mon* were usually very graphic, well suited for stenciling on fabric. They were often enclosed in a circle, a square, or a hexagon. The symbol was usually chosen because it had some kind of meaning, a connection with the family or the family's name.

In this activity, you are going to design a *mon*, or heraldic crest, for yourself or your family.

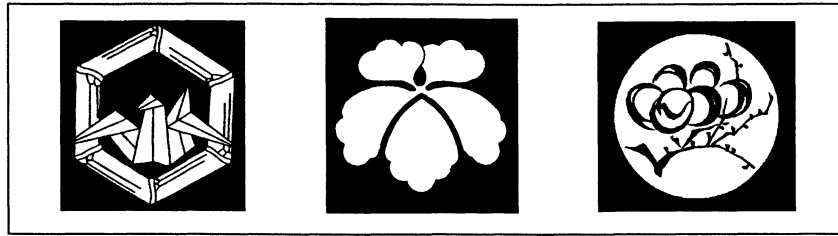


1. Start by thinking of things that are special or important to you or to your family. Then look for some aspect of those things that you could use in your design. For example, you might decide that baseball is one of your family's most important activities. In that case, you might use a baseball or a pair of crossed baseball bats or a catcher's mitt as the basis of your design.

(continued)



Mon: Heraldic Crests (*continued*)



2. Once you have decided on a symbol to use in your design, try to simplify it as much as possible. The symbols you see at the top of this page are Japanese mon. Do you see how much they have been simplified? There are very few details in the pictures, so that the image is as clear as possible. Take out as much detail as you possibly can. Your symbol should show the essence of the thing, not a detailed picture.
3. When you have finalized your design, transfer it onto a sheet of construction paper. Make your design the size of the full sheet of paper.
4. Finally, cut your design out of the construction paper and mount it on a sheet of paper of a contrasting color. Effective color combinations include navy blue with white, purple with yellow, white with black, or you can choose a combination of your own.