

# V&A



Rice cooker  
Japan, 2014.  
Plastic and metal;  
electrical components  
© Victoria and Albert Museum

# JAPAN TEACHERS' RESOURCE

*Key stages 1 & 2: Art & Design, Design & Technology, English*

# JAPAN

## Teachers' Resource: Key stages 1 & 2

### Art & Design, Design & Technology, English

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#### Introduction

This resource introduces key themes and objects from the V&A's Japan collection and allows pupils to creatively explore aspects of Japanese art, design and culture.

The V&A has collected Japanese art and design since it was founded in 1852 and now holds one of the world's most comprehensive collections, including ceramics, lacquer, arms and armour, textiles and dress, prints, paintings, sculpture and modern and contemporary crafts.

- Watch this [film](#) showing highlights in the collection
- View a [map](#) showing where the gallery is located

The objects in the resource represent some of the key themes on display in the gallery. Each object is accompanied by an activity and some require pencils and paper. We have chosen objects that have alternatives as they can be removed from display at short notice.

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#### Pre-visit activities

- Introduce the class to the objects in the resource using an interactive whiteboard or large printouts. In small groups come up with questions about the objects. What materials are they made from, who or what might they be for?
  - Read the Story: 'The Return of the White Crane' and haiku. Authors include: Matsuo Bashō and Yosa Buson.
  - Use the glossary of motifs and symbols to learn about the meaning of imagery found in Japanese art and design.
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#### The Museum visit

##### The Samurai – Armour (image 1)

The samurai were the military class in Japan who developed from local warriors into the ruling elite that maintained power in the name of the emperor for 700 years. Their armour was elaborately decorated and made of many different materials including leather, silk and animal hair. Helmets often included the family crest of the samurai clan. Only the samurai were permitted to wear the 'daishō' – the pair of long ('katana') and short ('wakizashi') swords. Swords were said to represent the soul of the samurai. Sword fittings and scabbards would often be decorated with myths and legends or auspicious symbols.

##### Kimono (image 2)

Kimono are worn by children, men and women. They are tied by a sash around the waist called an obi, however, outer kimono would have been worn without. The design of this

outer kimono is hand-painted with pine trees, plum blossoms and cranes. Patterns depicted in Japanese art and design often refer to a time of year or an occasion. The plum blossom pattern on this kimono might indicate that it was worn at spring time, while cranes represent sincerity, purity and longevity.

##### Inro and Netsuke (images 3 & 4)

Inro are small decorative containers that were worn by wealthy, fashion-conscious men. This one, in the shape of a spinning top, alludes to New Year, when people of all ages play various games. Inro would have held seals, herbal remedies and other medicines. They were kept in place by a netsuke, attached to the end of the inro cord and slipped under the obi or waist sash. This netsuke depicts a frog resting on a gourd. Frogs in Japanese culture can represent good luck because the word for 'frog' is similar to the word for 'return'. So for example, wishing someone many happy returns or a safe return journey.

##### Gift Covers – Fukusa (image 5)

Gift giving is a common part of Japanese culture. Gifts are given at important times of the year, during national holidays like New Year and Golden Week. In the 18th century gifts would have been presented on a tray and covered with a piece of textile known as a fukusa. The flock of cranes decorating this fukusa conveys wishes for long life and happiness for the recipient.

##### Contemporary design – Rice-cooker (image 6)

You might think this cutesy rice-cooker is for children but it is actually for adults. Hello Kitty has huge appeal in Japan and features on a wide range of household appliances and consumer goods. In most of Japan, rice is generally eaten at every meal. The words for cooked rice, 'gohan' and 'meshi', also stand for a 'meal'.

##### Woodblock Prints – The Great Wave (image 7)

Woodblock prints are made by individually printing the separate areas of colour with painstaking accuracy. Katsushika Hokusai was Japan's most famous print artist. In his 'The Great Wave off Kanagawa' Mount Fuji can be seen in the distance, dwarfed by the enormous wave. Fishermen cling to their boats in the swell of the wave.

To see 'The Great Wave' and other works by Hokusai you will need to book a visit to our Prints and Drawings Study Room prior to visiting the Museum. [vam.ac.uk/info/study-rooms](https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/study-rooms) and [woodblock prints](#)

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#### Find out more

- Visit <https://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/japan>
- Search more of the Japan collection online. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/>

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## Samurai Armour

Suitable for KS1 & 2

National Curriculum Links:

Art & Design, D&T

### Let's investigate...

The suits of armour for samurai were made from many different types of materials.

*How many different materials can you spot?*

Think of words to describe the types of materials it is made from.

Imagine what it would have been like to put on and to wear in battle.

Pull a scary face like the masks worn by the samurai!

Watch the short video of the samurai putting on his armour.

### Design time...

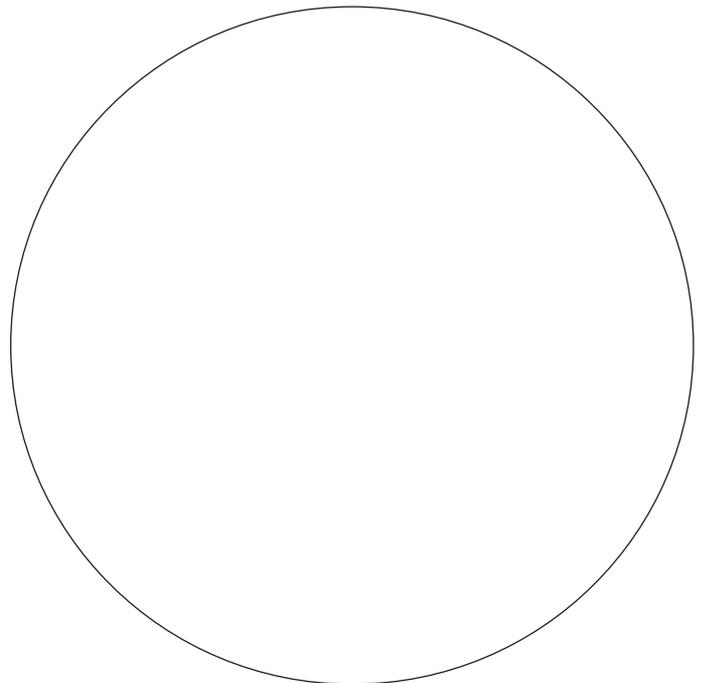
*Can you spot the special golden badges (mon) on the helmets?* These represent the family crest of the samurai.

*What symbols or patterns can you see?*

Use inspiration from around the gallery to design a symbol to represent your family or clan.

### Back at school...

Make a samurai helmet using the downloadable template at the end of the resource. Add patterns to the template pieces before cutting out and making into the helmet. Don't forget to include the badge you designed at the museum!





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## Kimono

Suitable for KS1 & 2

National Curriculum Links:

Art & Design, D&T

### Let's investigate...

Watch the nearby video showing how to put on a kimono.

Now look at some of the kimono on display. Compare the kimono with what you are wearing.

*How are they different?*

*Imagine what it would be like to wear a kimono.*

*How would you feel?*

*Can you describe some of the patterns you can see?*

*Do they make you think about a particular time of year? Or a special occasion?*

Art and design from Japan often includes symbols or patterns that represent character traits, seasons or good wishes for the person who wears or owns the object. There are symbols hiding all around the gallery. Using the set of symbols, see how many you can find. Hint - they may be objects themselves, like the netsuke, a special type of toggle, or used in a pattern to decorate a textile. Good luck!

### Kimono

Japan, 1860-1900

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Silk crêpe, painted, dyed, partly embroidered, lined with silk  
Murray Bequest

## Motifs and Symbols



### Animal

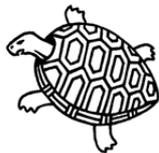
**Carp** = courage, youth and success, because in an ancient Chinese legend a carp swam upstream and turned into a dragon.



**Cranes** = sincerity, purity and longevity (1,000 years of life).



**Tiger** = bravery and power.

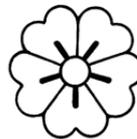


**Tortoise** = long life.

### Vegetable



**Bamboo** = endurance, constancy, integrity and honour. One of the 'three friends of winter'. Produces many offshoots so is linked to fertility. Often associated with bridegrooms.



**Cherry blossom/cherry tree** = spring, love of nature, the fleetingness of beauty and life. The flowers of the cherry tree symbolize the warrior spirit, in that they are blown away (die) when they are at their most beautiful.



**Chrysanthemum** = nobility, purity, long life. Also autumn, the season when they flower.

### Mineral



**Clouds** = elegance and high status. In Buddhism, clouds represent the 'Western Paradise' beyond earth; and in Shintoism, the spirits of the dead.



**Mountain** = Solid; unmoving.



**Water/wave** = power and resilience. Waves constantly ebb and flow and so symbolize great tactical ability.

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## Intro

Suitable for KS1 & 2

National Curriculum Links:

Art & Design, D&T

### Let's investigate...

*Did you know that Kimono don't have pockets?*

This special object is a container that would have hung from the belt worn around a kimono and would have been used to keep precious things, like seals, ink and medicines. They were only worn by men.

*If you had an intro what would you keep in it?*

Find the set of intro that represents the twelve months of the year. *Can you spot the one for January?* It is in the shape of a spinning top – to symbolise games that were played by children and adults at New Year.

*Can you find March and May?*

Describe the patterns and symbols you can see.

*What do you think they represent?*

March represents the special festival, Girls' Day, and May represents Boys' Day. The pattern on the March intro includes a game played with shells that was popular with girls, while the design of the May intro includes toy swords and arrows.

### Design time...

In Japan today there is a special day to celebrate the happiness of all children. Carp streamers (koinobori) are flown outside the house, while inside warrior dolls are displayed and special rice cakes are eaten. The carp became a popular kite shape for this festival as carp are associated with youth, courage and success.

Use the template at the end of the resource to design your own carp kite.

### Back at school...

Turn your design into a carp kite using the downloadable template.

## Intro

Japan, 1865

Shibata Zeshin

Gold and red hiramakie and takamakie lacquer inlaid with pearl shell

Pfungst Gift



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## Netsuke

Suitable for KS1 & 2

National Curriculum Links:

Art & Design, D&T

Read this Haiku to the class in front of the case of netsuke.

*Old pond,  
leap-splash –  
a frog*

*Spring rain –  
under trees  
a crystal stream*

Matsuo Bashō (1644-94)

See if the children can spot the netsuke that links to the haiku.

## Design time...

Printed haiku were often illustrated with beautiful images. Split the class into smaller groups of five or six. Give each group a haiku. There are some examples below but you may wish to bring some others as well. Using the gallery and objects as inspiration, the children can sketch or draw images while they listen to the haiku.

*The crow has flown away:  
swaying in the evening sun,  
a leafless tree.*

Natsume Soseki (1867-1916)

*O snail  
Climb Mount Fuji,  
But slowly, slowly!*

Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828)

*Light of the moon  
Moves west, flowers' shadows  
Creep eastward.*

Yosa Buson (1716-1784)

## Back at school...

Suitable for Key Stage 2

Traditional haiku consist of 17 syllables, in three phrases of 5, 7, and 5 respectively. Have a go at writing a haiku inspired by the objects you saw at the Museum or choose a theme of your own.



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Fukusa

Suitable for KS1 & 2

National Curriculum Links:

Art & Design, D&T

## Storytime...

Find the fukusa (gift cover) decorated with cranes on display in the gallery. The crane in Japanese culture represents sincerity, purity and longevity. Read the story of *'The Return of the White Crane'*. Use other objects nearby, like the kimono, to help illustrate the story.

## Let's investigate...

Describe what a fukusa is used for in Japanese culture. Discuss present-giving in our culture.

*When we give presents?*

*How do we wrap them?*

*Who do we give present to?*

*Can you describe the most exciting present you have ever received?*

*Who was it from?*

*What did the wrapping look like?*

## Design time...

Design a pattern for a fukusa. Decide who your fukusa is for. Your design could represent that person or what you would wish for them, like happiness, long life or success. Don't forget the symbols that you have learnt about already!

### Fukusa

Japan, 1840-1870

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Satin silk with embroidery in silk and metallic thread

Given by Mrs Watts

## *The Return of the White Crane*

A kind-hearted old man and his wife lived in the forest. They were both weavers and lived by weaving cloth and selling it in the nearby town. One winter day the man was out collecting firewood, when he discovered a crane with her leg caught in an animal trap. The crane was pure white and was the most beautiful bird the man had ever seen. He rushed over and set the crane's leg free. The crane bowed to the old man as if to say thank you, and with a few beats of her wings flew up high over the forest.

That night there was a surprise knock at the weavers' door. A tired young girl wearing a bright red and white kimono was outside. Her skin was as white as the snow, and she had long hair as black and as shiny as lacquer.

"I have lost my way in the snow. Could you give me shelter for the night?" asked the girl.

"Come in, of course you can stay," said the couple, and they sat her down by the fire and gave her some grilled rice-cake.

Next morning the girl looked refreshed, and she thanked the couple and asked if she could repay them. But the couple refused.

"Then, could I use your loom?" asked the girl. "I could weave you some cloth."

The couple eventually agreed, but before the girl started weaving, she made a strange request. She made the couple promise that they would never disturb her while she was weaving.

The girl was weaving a long time. She was weaving when the old man left to sell his simple cloth in the town, and the loom could still be heard when he returned in the evening. The couple fell asleep by the fire waiting for her to stop weaving, but they did not disturb her and break their promise.

In the morning the girl woke them to give them the cloth she had been weaving. It was the most perfect, the most beautiful they had ever seen. It was silky white, and was covered in small silver cranes. It was soft and as weightless as a feather. The girl refused to say how she had made it, but gave it to the couple as a gift, for the man to sell in the town.

He hurried off, and returned soon afterwards. To his astonishment, people in the town were fighting to buy the cloth. It was finally bought by the local lord for the highest price ever paid for cloth in the town. The old man came back with enough food to last many months.

Two nights later as the snow was falling, the girl started weaving again. In the morning the couple could still hear the loom, but it was getting fainter and fainter. They decided to ask the girl if she wanted any breakfast. But when they went into the weaving room, the girl in the red and white kimono was not there. Instead, the white crane that the old man had helped was sitting wearily at the loom. She was plucking out her feathers and weaving them into the cloth. When she finished the cloth she turned to see the couple in tears.

"Why do you hurt yourself to help us?" they cried.

"Because you saved my life, and so I am returning your kindness. Please take this cloth as my last gift. But now I must go as you have discovered my secret."

The crane then bowed to the couple, and flapping her wings, flew out of the door and into the air. The couple watched her soar upwards and disappear into the sky.

Adapted from a traditional folk story.

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Design & Technology, English



Rice Cooker

Suitable for KS1 & 2

National Curriculum Links:

Art & Design, D&T

### Let's investigate...

Find the Hello Kitty Rice-cooker.

*Do you think it is for children or adults?*

It is for adults! Hello Kitty is a really popular cartoon character in Japan. Cartoons and anime are popular with children and adults. Many cities and towns in Japan have their own cartoon character mascot, known as yuru-chara. They can be found on school uniforms, trains, buildings and posters.

### Design time...

Design a yuru-chara for your school.

*What type of animal or creature could it be?*

*How would it link to your school or area?*

Use some of the animals you can see in the gallery as inspiration.

**Rice cooker**

Japan, 2014

Plastic and metal; electrical components

富嶽三十六景  
神奈川  
浪裏



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## The Great Wave

Visit the Prints & Drawings study room to see the Great Wave and other woodblock prints by famous Japanese artists.

Groups are welcome and visits must be booked in advance.

To find out more visit  
[vam.ac.uk/studyrooms](http://vam.ac.uk/studyrooms)

### **The Great Wave (Woodblock print)**

Japan, ca. 1831

Katsushika Hokusai, born 1760 - died 1849

Colour print from wood blocks, on paper

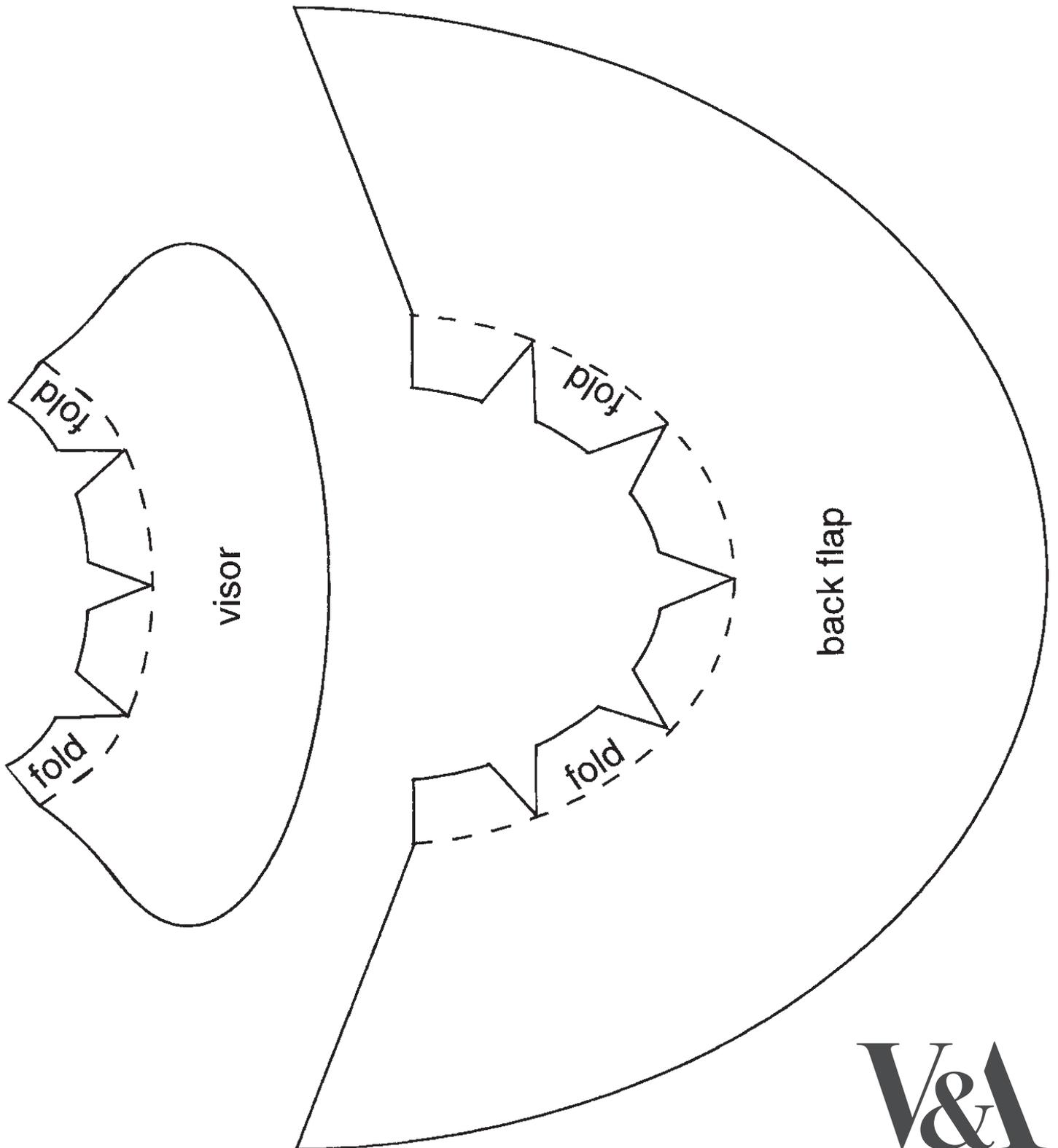
Gift of the Misses Alexander

## ACTIVITY

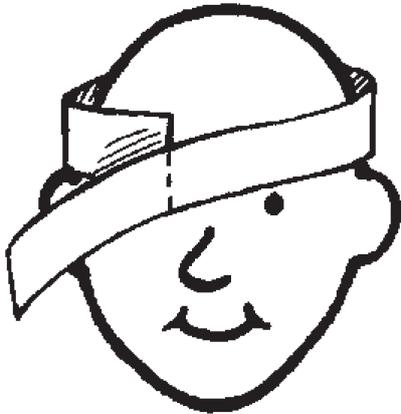
### Make a Samurai Helmet

Younger pupils can use this template to make a samurai helmet and decorate or embellish it with drawings inspired by objects in the Gallery.

1. Enlarge the templates of the back-flap and the visor by 200% on a photocopier. Use the templates to transfer the shapes to thick paper and cut out. Cut little V-shapes in the edges as shown on the template.

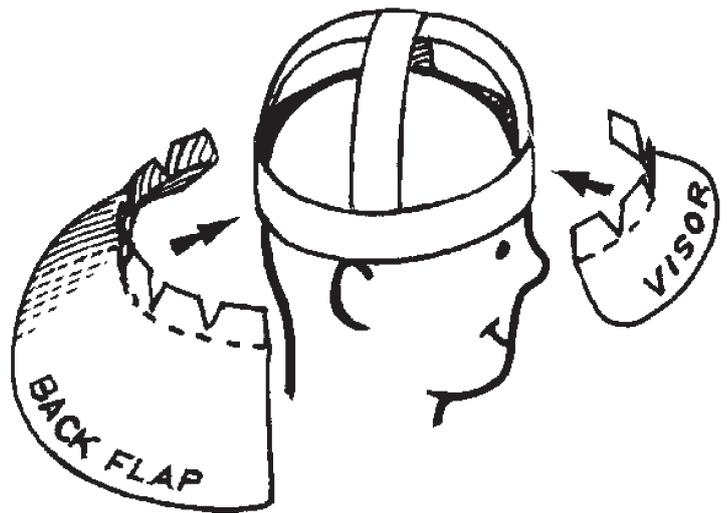


2. Cut a strip of paper, 3.5 cm wide and long enough to fit around a child's head. Sellotape together to form the headband.



3. Cut two more strips 3.5 cm wide and long enough to fit over the head, front to back and side to side. Attach to headband and fix with sellotape. This is the frame of the helmet on to which the other pieces will be attached.

4. Stick the back-flap onto the back of the headband and the visor on to the front with sellotape, curving the pieces around the frame.



5. Cut two side flaps and a decorative shape out of coloured paper for the front of the helmet. Cutting V's will help the side flaps curve around the headband. Use sellotape to join these pieces to the warrior's helmet.

6. Now cut out and attach the badge design from the Museum visit.



## Make a Paper Carp Streamer (koinobori)

Traditionally fabric carp streamers (koinobori) are put outside the home and in public spaces during the children's festival. The carp is an auspicious symbol, representing youth, courage and success.

### You will need:

- Pencils
- Colouring pencils
- A3 template
- Scissors
- String
- Tape
- A piece of wooden dowel or bamboo cane

### To make your own carp streamer:

- Photocopy the template overleaf onto A3 paper
- Decorate and colour in your fish shape
- Cut out your fish shape
- Ask a teacher or adult to help staple the fish at the mouth and body to make it cylindrical
- Collect a bamboo cane and some string
- Tie the fish to the string and secure the string to the cane with some tape
- Your mini Koinobori is complete



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