

ACTIVITY

SAMURAI: REAL AND IMAGINED

Design Your Own Symbol

The imagery on a samurai's armor expresses that samurai's identity and source of inspiration or empowerment.

Is there an image you connect with most? Use an image from the Asian Art Museum or create your own to decorate the armor or *tsuba* on the template.

DURATION

10 minutes or longer

VOCABULARY

Mon: circular family crests used as identifying marks on battlefield flags and many other goods owned or commissioned by high-ranking samurai.

Samurai: literally “one who serves”; members of the military or warrior class, active in Japan between the 12th and 19th centuries.

Tsuba: a sword guard; a metal guard on a samurai sword between the handgrip and the blade.

PROCEDURE

- 1 Reflect on the next page: Is there an image, either from the Asian Art Museum or your personal life, you connect with most?
- 2 Pair-Share: Turn to a partner and share why that image appeals to you.
 - How does it connect to something you care about or think about in your own life?
 - How would your image help you stand out in a crowd?
 - Think about the meaning of the word “samurai.” How might this image inspire you to be “one who serves”?
- 3 Now, use that image or create your own to decorate the armor on the template. You can draw it on the chest plate, helmet, or *tsuba*.
- 4 Extension: If you have the materials and time, add colors and other details to your symbol.



Sword guard (*tsuba*) with design of two torn fans, approx. 1700–1800. Japan. Edo period (1615–1868). Iron with brass inlay. Asian Art Museum, Transfer from the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, B87W13. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

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