TEACHING

KIMONO

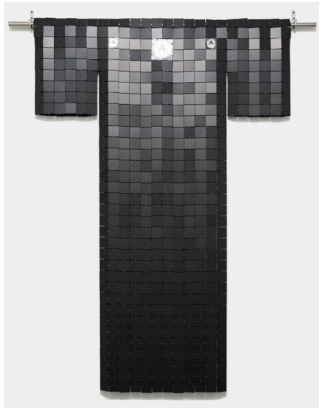
Garment, Canvas and Artistic Muse

Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum

IA&A INTERNATIONAL ARTS AND ARTISTS

Itchiku Kubota, *Ohn Fuji and Burning Clouds*, 1994, tie-dye, ink painting, and embroidery on silk crepe (chirimen) with gold wefts, 58" x 60", Image courtesy of the International Chodiev Foundation, © Arneb Holding PTE Ltd.

Contemporary Artists



Miya Ando

Miya is an American-based visual artist well known for her paintings, sculptures, and installations that focus on themes of interdependence, impermanence, and temporality.

Miya Ando, *Mofuko (Formal Mourning Kimono)*, 2024, dyed anodized aluminum, steel rings, 71 x 48 1/2 x 1 1/2, image courtesy of Miya Ando, © Miya Ando.

Gordon Chandler

American artist Gordon Chandler starts each sculpture with simple materials such as steel drums before bending and shaping them into sleeves and collars to create recylced kimonos.

Peter Liashkov

Peter Liashkov's work focuses on the human figure and utilizes mixed-media techniques on two-dimensional surfaces like synskin, fiberglass mesh, and other translucent materials.

Kristine Aono

Kristine Aono's artwork explores personal narratives and history while implementing stories of her family's Japanese-American experience. Her sculptures and installations utilize research, unconventional materials, and community interaction to reflect on historical and present-day conflicts.

Kristine Aono, *Flag Kimono*, 1993, Wire mesh, thread, sewing needle, paint, aluminum rod, wire, 93 x 72 x 6, Photographed by Jakrarat "Oi" Veerasarn, Image courtesy of Kristine Aono, © Kristine Aono.

Reiko Fujii

Reiko Fujii is an artist who experiments with a varity of media including photography, book arts, video, monoprinting, kiln-formed glass, and installation art.

Karen LaMonte

Karen LaMonte creates dresses and kimonos that are uninhabited by the human body. Her glass, ceramic, bronze, and rusted iron-draped figures give commentary on beauty and cultural standards as well as investigate identity, music, climatology, and art history.

Maria Papatzelou

Maria Papatzelou is a visual artist and scenographer based in Greece who focuses on paper works. Her interest in Japanese philosophy, mythology, and design led her to begin creating authentic Japanese paper kimonos.

Maria Papatzelou, *Second Skin*, 2000, Japanese handmade paper (washi), pigments, gold leaf, collage with maps and aquarelle pencils, 63 x 60, photographed by Maria Papatzelou, image courtesy of Maria Papatzelou, © Maria Papatzelou.

CAMY

CAMY is a sculptor who utilizes a variety of mediums, including marble, clay, and bronze. The latter of which allows her to play with the use of light through various applications of patina.

Michael F. Rohde

Michael F. Rohde focuses primarily on fiber works. His artwork focus on stimulating reactions and emotions that raw color and spatial relationships can have on the viewer.

Michael F. Rohde, *Fall/Nara*, 2001, hand-dyed wool on linen warp, 59 x 48, photographed by Andrew Neuhart, image courtesy of the artist, © Michael F. Rohde.

Na Omi Shintani

Na Omi Shintani is a Japanese-American artist who focuses on storytelling and remembrance. Shintani creates assemblages, installations, performances, and social engagement activities to generate visual stories and create the interacting works about historical issues she is most widely known for.

A Visual Guide to Kimono Terminology

eri: the collar of a kimono

juban: undergarment of a kimono

obi: a wide sash or belt that holds the kimono shut

obijime: a woven cord that is tied around the obi to help keep everything in place; can be round, flat, thick, or thin for different formailities

tabi: a sock worn that separates the big toe from the other toes so that zori (sandals) can be worn

Karen LaMonte, *Odoriko (Dancer)*, 2011, glazed ceramic, and gold leaf

kitsuke: the way of wearing or putting on a kimono

kimono: "a thing to wear;" the outer most garment

Common Types of Kimonos

Yukata: an informal kimono made with cotton fabric worn in warmer months to street festivals, bath houses, or inns

Tsukesage: a semi-formal kimono with a design that has been dyed onto the bolt of fabric before being sewn; typically worn for weddings and tea parties.

Furisode: "swinging sleeve;" a formal kimono worn by unmarried women; features long sleeves and bright, playful designs; typically worn to weddings, tea ceremonies, or coming of age days

History of Kimonos

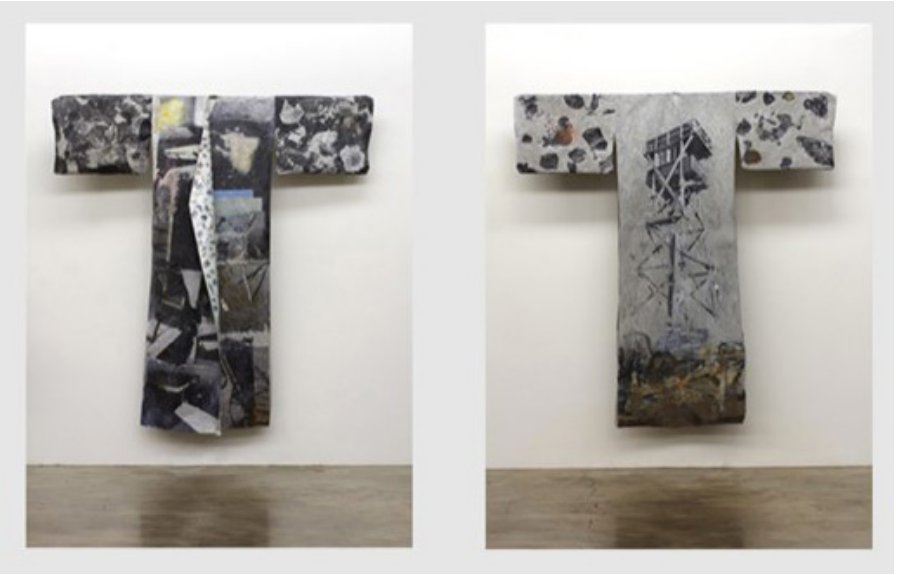
Prior to the third century, Japanese clothing consisted of hemp sarong-like garments for men and ponchos for women. These garments were heavily influenced by Chinese and Korean cultures. With the introduction of silk from China, the Japanese nobility began adopting silk robes, tunics, skirts, and trousers into their everyday wear.

Discussion Question

How does your culture influence what you wear?

As a class, discuss different clothing items that are traditional in your culture. Why do people wear those items? What are they made out of? Do you know the history behind them?

Interview a family member to find out how the clothing they wear has evolved throughout their lifetime.



Peter Liashkov, *Manzanar Kimono*, 2014, print transfer, acrylic, ashes on propylene fabric, 132 x 72, photographed by Ellen Giamportone, image courtesy of Ellen Gianportone, © Peter Liashkov.

Words to Know

kimono: "a thing to wear;" a long, loose robe with wide sleeves and tied with a sash, originally worn as a formal garment in Japan.

culture: the way of life for a group of people, including their shared beliefs, values, and practices.

silk brocade: a heavy, decorative fabric woven with raised patterns, often in gold and silver threads; made from colored silks.

Michael F. Rohde, *Nobility*, 2001, hand-dyed wool and silk on linen warp, 47 1/2" x 36 1/2 , photographed by Andrew Neuhart, image courtesy of the artist, © Michael F. Rohde.

During the Heian period (794 - 1185), a new method of kimono-making developed, called the straight-line cut method. This method involved cutting fabric into straight pieces and sewing them together, which made it easier to make kimonos without having to worry about the shape of a person's body.

During the Edo period (1630-1867), kimonos were utilized to help identify social status and wealth among members of society. Wealthy members of Japanese society, namely samurai women, began showing their wealth through the beautifully printed and heavily embroidered kimonos they wore. Merchants, those responsible for creating the kimonos that nobility were wearing, also began experimenting with kimono fashion, choosing adventurous prints or styles. To continue to ensure that it was evident which social class people belonged to, members of the ruling elite began passing laws to restrict color, types of dyes and even the fabrics that merchants or common citizens were allowed to wear. Members of lower classes began hiding elaborate fabrics or bold embroidery designs on the inside of their kimonos to help get around these restrictive laws.

As time passed and Japan continued to be globally influenced, the government required government officials to wear Westernized clothing, while ordinary citizens continued to wear kimonos decorated with family crests, or kamon. Today, kimonos are rarely worn. Instead they are saved for formal occasions, special events, or festivals.

Teaching: The Kimono as Garment

silk fabric

hemp fabric

cotton fabric

Bolts of fabric used to make kimono cloth, or *tanmono*, were traditionally made from cotton, hemp, or silk. The type of fabric a kimono was made from also helped distinguish a person's social status. **Silk**, a thin, strong fiber produced by silkworms, is difficult and expensive to produce. This meant that kimono cloth made from silk was reserved for nobility. **Hemp**, a plant fiber that was grown and processed into rope and cloth, is much easier to produce and everyday people typically wore hemp kimonos. Later, in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, **cotton** was grown in Japan and replaced hemp as the main fiber for everyday people's clothing.

Discussion Questions

How are your clothes made?

Often our clothes are made from two different natural fibers, cotton or wool, and manufactured in many different ways.

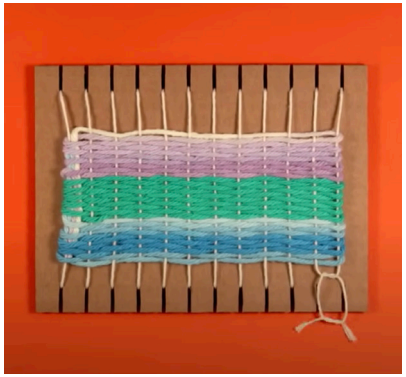
Become experts on how one type of fiber is made into clothing! Watch a video on cotton, or wool fibers and then add the information you learned to a Venn Diagram. As a class, dicuss how the different fibers are made and then weigh in on which you think may be the most common or the best for the environment.

Investigate the tag on your clothing to see what fiber makes up your shirt or sweatshirt. Then, start a tally as a class to see which is the most common. You could even use a world map to track where in the world your clothing is produced!

Weave on a Mini Loom

Materials: cardboard, ruler, pencil, scissors, yarn, tape, plastic embroidery needle

Follow along with #MetKids to learn how to make a loom, thread it, and weave a colorful fabric. How do you think weaving on this mini loom compares to the large looms used to create silk for kimonos? What challenges might you encounter if you were weaving on a *jibata* loom?



Video courtesy of #MetKids

How Mountains of Worm Cocoons Are Turned Into Expensive Silk in Vietnam

Historically, Japan received silk imports from China. However, today Vietnam is the leading producer of silk fibers. Watch the video to learn how one village is continuing the tradition of harvesting silk.

How was it made? Japanese hikihaku obi | V&A

Obi, a wide sash or belt that holds a kimono shut, are made through many different processes. For this *obi*, a technique called *hikihaku* was used. *Hikihaku* is the process of weaving with precious metallic thread.

Teaching: The Kimono as Canvas

Symbolic Pictionary

How do we use symbols to represent ideas or emotions? As a class, discuss what symbols students may be familiar with including a peace sign, a green traffic light, or a heart.

Now its time to play symbolic pictionary! Break up into teams, making sure each team has a whiteboard and dry erase markers. Use our Symbolic Pictionary slideshow, to share one word with the teams at a time. After seeing the word, each team will have 2–3 minutes to discuss ideas for different symbols and draw one that best represents their word on their whiteboard. When the time runs out have students share what they drew and why.

Extension: Have students examine the kimonos below. How do the symbols on the kimonos help us understand more about the person wearing it? Do more elaborate symbols carry a different meaning than simple symbols?

Unknown, *Unlined Summer Kimono (Hito-e) with Landscape and Poem*, Edo Period (1615-1868), embroidered and resist-dyed silk gauze (ro), 64 x 47 1/4, Gift of Margaret Wishard, in memory of her mother, Mrs. Luther D. Wishard, 1947

Words to Know

symbol: a picture or object that represents something else.

motif: a repeating pattern or important idea that shows up again and again in a story, picture, or even a song

visual metaphor: an image that represents something else, like an idea or feeling, by using a comparison to something familiar

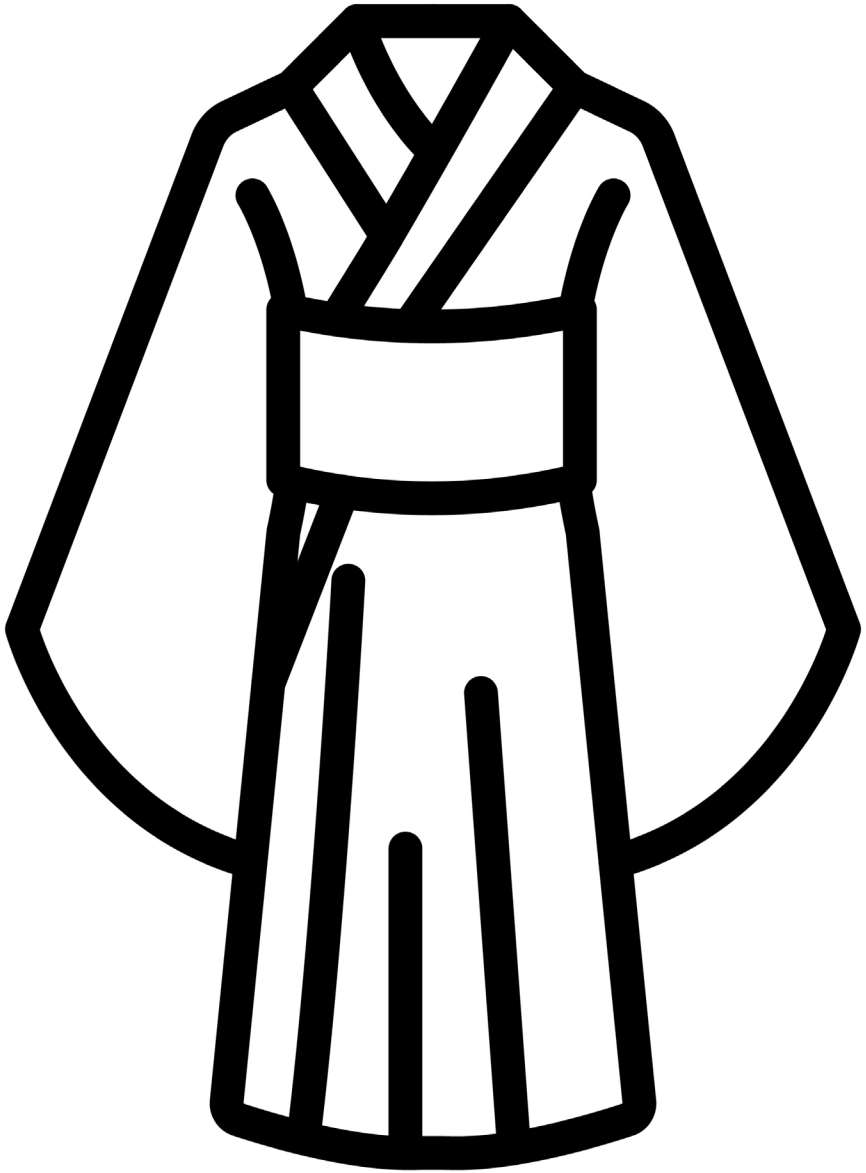
Kimonos often use symbols, motifs, and colors to convey different meanings. This imagery helps indicate who is wearing it, their virtues, or the season or occasion the kimono is meant for. Wearing a kimono during the appropriate festival, season, or occasion was thought to bring good fortune to the person wearing it.

Colors: In Japan, colors have specific cultural meanings. Specific plants were used to dye the silk fabric because it was believed that the medicinal properties of the plant would also be transferred to the cloth when it was dyed. For example, indigo was used for blue dye and also to treat bites and stings. So wearing blue fabric was believed to help repel snakes and insects.

Nature Motifs: Objects or symbols from nature are featured frequently as motifs on kimonos. From flowers like cherry blossoms or chrysanthemums to the Three Friends of Winter—pine, bamboo, and plum—natural elements can be strong symbols of longevity, perseverance, renewal, or indicators of the changing seasons.

Stories and Poems: Kimonos have a strong association with storytelling, especially classical literature or popular myths. While it is unusual to find people shown on kimonos, objects like fans help signify their presence in the story. In the early 20th century, symbols like cars, trains, and airplanes were used to tell the story of Japan's progress and growth.

Teaching Kimonos: Create a Kimono



"All About Me" Kimono

Designs on kimonos are used to help us learn about the person wearing them. Whether it tells us about their social class, what they value, where they live, or what festivals they celebrate, imagery on a kimono can tell us a lot about someone.

Use the questions below to help come up with symbols or a motif to decorate the fabric of your kimono. What important ideas about yourself do you want to communicate? How can you use different colors or symbols to show that?

Favorite animal _____
Investigate what characteristics are associated with that animal. Are they cunning? Wise? A trickster?

Favorite color _____
Brighter colors are used to represent spring, pastel colors are typically used for summer months, and darker colors represent fall and winter.

Think about what season each color is associated with. Does your favorite color match a season that you like? How could you represent that on your kimono?

Hobbies _____
When you were playing Symbolic Pictionary, you came up with symbols that represented different characteristics or places. What symbols represent hobbies or experiences that are important to you? How could you repeat those symbols to create a motif on your kimono that best represents you?