

# THE KIMONO

*Emily Sandagata*

**L**earning about the kimono is a great way to explore pattern design and Japanese culture at the same time. The kimono is the traditional clothing commonly associated with Japan, and is still worn today by both men and women, although generally only for celebrations and wedding ceremonies. My students were excited to explore these elaborate fabrics.

The idea for a kimono lesson came from my personal interest in Japanese culture. I was first introduced to the traditional art of shibori dyeing and motifs found in modern clothing by an inspirational college textile professor. I came across a real kimono in a thrift shop and knew that having this to share with and model for my students would make it even more exciting.

### **Preparation**

I begin by developing packets of traditional kimono patterns and symbols as references for each group of students. I include everything from cherry blossoms and dragonflies to cranes. Students enjoy discussing

what each symbol means. I design a kimono template large enough to fit the patterns and drawings of my students.

### **Using Templates**

Templates are traced and cut and students are ready to be designers! I require students to follow this process:

1. Sketch
2. Make repeat patterns.
3. Paint with water colors.

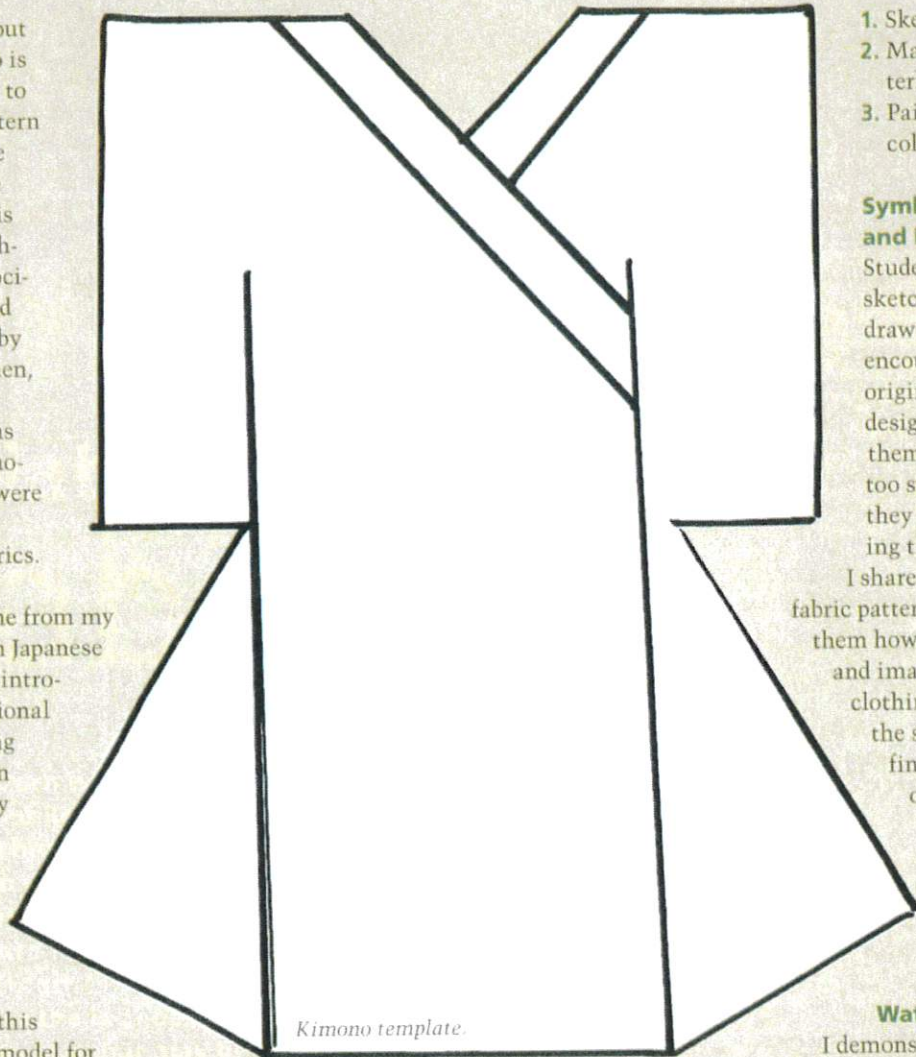
### **Symbols and Patterns**

Students have fun sketching their drawings while being encouraged to bring originality to their designs. I remind them not to draw too small. Before they begin repeating their designs, I share examples of fabric patterns and show them how some shapes and images go off the clothing's edges. When the sketches are finished, students outline their patterns with fine-tip black permanent markers.

### **Painting with**

### **Watercolors**

I demonstrate using watercolor first and encourage students to paint lightly so that the patterns remain visible. In order to prevent the colors from coming out too dark, I have them dab their art with a tissue as they paint. I limit the colors that students use by requiring them to choose a palette. When the time comes to paint, I allow them a brief amount of time to test and



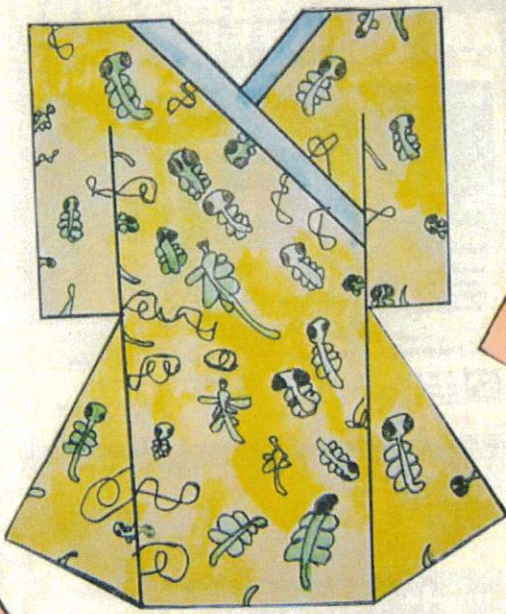
*Kimono template.*

大竹 Bamboo strength



Camee Haws, grade two.

Dragon-fly the beginning of life  
 蜻蛉



Maricella Rivera, grade three.

bamboo strength 大竹



Meagon Garner, grade two.

experiment with the colors so that they can come up with a plan.

By the end of the lesson, students have designed a Japanese kimono with patterns that clearly show characteristics of Japanese culture, while improving their watercolor technique and experiencing a taste of the fashion design process.

**Japanese Calligraphy**

When their paintings are complete, I give each student a rectangular piece of white paper and the calligraphy handouts. They write their chosen symbol in both Japanese and English. They try it in pencil first and use the black marker once they've completed the task correctly. Finally, their kimonos and writings are glued down to a black piece of construction paper.

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**Cultural Awareness**

While completing this project, many of my students were able to make connections to their own cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Our school is located in a very diverse community and this fact was reflected in my students' conversations. After finding out that several of their classmates had Japanese heritage, others chimed in with information about being Mexi-

can, Native American, German, or another culture.

One first grader who had moved to our school from Japan shared examples of Japanese language and calligraphy. The class was amazed to see real life examples of the symbols and language they had learned during the project. Although this lesson focused on Japanese culture, students also learned about each other's backgrounds in a way that made all of them feel comfortable and proud.

**Materials**

- white tag board or watercolor paper
- black fine-tip permanent markers
- glue and scissors
- watercolor sets and brushes
- black construction paper
- pencil and ruler
- kimono templates (teacher-made)
- Japanese reference materials

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**NATIONAL STANDARD**

Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures.

**WEB LINK**

[www.japanesekimono.com](http://www.japanesekimono.com)