

Magnetic Mon

The Japanese version of the family crest is called a “mon.” Learn about graphic design with a mon that attaches to the family chariot!

(art + history)

Originating in feudal Japan, mon are emblems used to identify families or clans. Like European heraldry, they were originally used by aristocratic families on articles of clothing, flags, and battle standards.

In modern Japan, families still display and wear their mon for formal occasions such as weddings and funerals. Important sites such as shrines, temples, museums and theaters have their own mon, as well as groups and organizations. However, many have evolved to be associated with particular trades and are used as logos. They are commonly seen on signs and packaging to suggest tradition and pride associated with a product. The word “kamon” refers to a mon that is still used specifically for family identification.

The majority of historic mon are round and draw upon objects from nature. Uncomplicated designs were favored for instant recognition and the preferred Japanese aesthetic of simplicity. Unlike the family crests that developed in Europe, mon did not use the actual family name, just designs and symbols. In Europe, heraldry was controlled by rules and regulations to keep the patterns intact, but mon were not protected by law or forced guidelines. Variations occurred when families merged, but only with modifications to a particular mon, never replacing it with a new mon. A married woman often retained her maiden mon and passed it to her daughters. Therefore, in the current age, making a direct link from a single mon to a family name is very rare.

Why not create a “mon” for a modern, Western family? Consider some of the most familiar logos and how shapes, not only letters, identify products and information about them. As a lesson in the graphic design of logos and brand identity, students can create their own family mon using colorful magnetic sheets and permanent markers, then display them proudly on a locker or on the family vehicle or refrigerator!

GRADES 2-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Web research will turn up numerous examples of Japanese mon. Note how objects are simplified and stylized sometimes to the point of abstraction. Also consider western logos and the association of imagery apart from text. Research will probably produce some modern, recognizable logos with roots in Japanese mon!
2. Cut magnetic sheeting into 6" x 6" pieces using scissors or a paper trimmer.



Materials (required)

[Flexible Magnetic Sheet](#), 24" wide, sold by the foot, assorted colors (28921-); share 3 ft among class

[Westcott® Soft Handle Scissors](#), Package of 12 (58477-1005); need one scissors per student

[Elmer's Painters Paint Markers](#), assorted colors, fine point (21312-); share across class

Optional Materials

[Outdoor Mod Podge](#) (02916-1008)

[Blick Matte Acrylic Color](#) (00727-)

[Blick Studio Brush Markers](#) (24532-)

[Sharpie Fine Point Markers](#) (21316-)



Process

1. Before creating a magnet, students design their mon on paper, keeping simplicity in mind and limiting the artwork to two or three colors.

Ideas for creating mon:

- They can be based on family history or identification through location or occupation.
- They can be based on names and their meanings or origins.
- Rather than creating a family mon, students can create a personal mon based on something they identify with in nature or something that has a strong influence in their lives.

Since this is an emblem of self, students should avoid using trademarked images, logos, and other existing designs.

2. Once the design is finalized, students will make a magnetic mon. The design can be placed over the magnetic sheet on the back side (black side) and the outer edges traced using a ball point pen and heavy pressure. Because the material is soft, a light line is created that can be followed to cut out the shape of the mon.
3. On the front side, complete the design using markers, paint markers, or paint. Permanent markers must be used if the magnets will be displayed outdoors. Magnets can also be stamped, screen-printed, die-cut, or airbrushed. Use opaque media on black and colored magnetic sheets. Some markers will require extra dry time on the slick surface.

Options

1. Seal with two coats of outdoor Mod Podge for protection.
2. Older ages can create more intricate, multi-sectioned magnets.



Step 1: Design a mon on paper first, then transfer it to a magnetic sheet using a ball point pen and firm pressure.



Step 2: Cut out design and complete it with markers.



Step 3: Display mon on lockers, refrigerators, or vehicles.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.