

KIMONO

OSAKA'S GOLDEN AGE



Teacher notes

Introduction

Kimono: Osaka's Golden Age showcases the sumptuous culture of the traditional kimono – its style, design, meaning and forms, as well as how to wear one.

Kimono highlights the golden age of prosperity experienced in Osaka 150 years ago – a time when wealth was expressed through luxurious and splendid fashions. The exhibition displays lavish kimono and accessories from the Osaka Museum of History. The exhibition is part of the Immigration Museum's 10th birthday program, and, with support from the City of Melbourne, celebrates 30 years of the Melbourne–Osaka sister-city relationship.

Kimonos originated during the Heian period (794-1192) and have remained largely unchanged for the past 400 years. During the late Edo and Meiji Periods (1850-1900), when Osaka was the commercial capital of Japan, the city's rich merchants and their families wore extremely flamboyant kimonos to display their wealth. These used the most expensive fabrics and the most intricate designs.

Kimono: Osaka's Golden Age displays approximately 60 highly decorated kimonos, along with shoes and hair ornaments. All exhibits date from the end of the Edo Period (1867) to the present day. The kimonos include those worn by men, women and children, along with more unusual examples, such as a fireman's kimono.

A special area within the exhibition encourages students to actively experience Japan's clothing traditions by learning how to dress in a *yukata* kimono. This area includes an information video on the kimono and how to wear it, as well as adult and child samples for visitors to try on.

Acknowledgements

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Project co-ordinator: Jan Molloy, Programs Co-ordinator, Humanities, Immigration Museum, Museum Victoria.

Curriculum Links

Kimono: Osaka's Golden Age provides a resource that relates to a number of curriculum strands, and offers a range of learning tasks for both primary and secondary students. Links to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) are specified in the table below.

VCE

A visit to this exhibition will provide a rich resource for the following VCE studies:

1. Japanese Language
2. Studio Arts
3. Visual Communication and Design

VELS Curriculum Links

Level	Strand	Domain	Exhibition Context	
Levels 1-3	Physical, Personal and Social Learning	Interpersonal Development	Students interact with others in a shared public space viewing traditional kimono and accessories and also experience the opportunity to dress up.	
		Discipline Based learning	Humanities	Traditional kimono and accessories offer the opportunity to investigate the beliefs, values and artistic styles of Japan in the Meiji and Edo periods. Over centuries people have displayed their occupation, social standing, wealth and spiritual beliefs through kimono.
	The Arts			
	LOTE Japanese Intercultural knowledge and language awareness			
	Interdisciplinary Learning	Communication	Design creativity and technology	The exhibition provides stimulus material for discussion, writing and visual communication. Students have the opportunity to view the collection of kimono and accessories and respond in a range of forms.
			Thinking	
Levels 4-5	Physical, Personal and Social Learning	Interpersonal Development	Students interact with others in a shared public space viewing traditional costumes. They have the opportunity to identify aspects of Japanese culture and traditions.	
		Civics and Citizenship		
	Discipline Based learning	Humanities - History	Traditional kimono and accessories offer the opportunity to investigate the beliefs, values and artistic styles of Japan in the Meiji and Edo Periods. Over centuries people have displayed their occupation, social standing, wealth and spiritual beliefs through kimono.	
		The Arts		
		LOTE – Japanese Intercultural knowledge and language awareness		
	Interdisciplinary Learning	Communication	Design, creativity and Technology	The exhibition provides stimulus material for discussion, writing and visual communication. Students have the opportunity to view the collection of kimono and accessories and respond in a range of forms.
Thinking				

Level 6	Physical, Personal and Social Learning	Interpersonal development	Students have the opportunity to learn with others by attending an exhibition, and to develop knowledge and skills that will help them to become informed, confident members of a diverse and inclusive Australian society.
		Civics and Citizenship	
	Discipline Based learning	Humanities – History	The exhibition offers a window into traditional cultural activities of the Meiji and Edo periods. There is extensive information related to the beliefs, symbolism and traditions associated with kimono. The exhibition includes reference to class distinctions, the influence of the West and the role of traditional dress in rites of passage. The exhibition allows students to explore products and performances in a cultural context.
		The Arts	
		LOTE – Japanese Intercultural knowledge and language awareness	
	Interdisciplinary Learning	Communication	The exhibition provides stimulus material for discussion, writing and visual communication. Students have the opportunity to view the collection of costumes and respond in a range of forms.
Design, creativity and Technology			
Thinking			

Exhibition Text

People everywhere know the kimono as the national dress of Japan, yet it is far more than that. Over centuries, people have displayed their occupation, social standing, wealth and spiritual beliefs through kimono. This simply constructed garment offers a glimpse into the complexity of Japanese history and tradition.

The kimono presented here span the time from the end of the Edo Period (1603-1867), when Osaka was the heart of Japan's economy, to the present day. The garments and accessories represent a wide range of styles, and include kimono for children, firemen, wealthy merchants and ladies of the nobility.

Osaka has more than 1300 years of history as the water capital of Japan. The most prosperous era was the Edo Period, when Osaka was the commercial centre of Japan and goods and people streamed into the city. Kimono was the garment worn by almost everyone during this period, from farmers to aristocrats. Today it is the traditional dress of Japan and is known around the world as the symbol of Japanese culture.

About 120 items, including kimono for men, women and children and kimono accessories, are showcased to present the diversity of Japanese culture and the prosperity of life in Osaka in the middle of the 19th century. The majority of items presented here were created and used around the time of Australia's gold rush and Victoria's independence. The kimono in this exhibition offer an opportunity for students to see how people in Osaka lived during a time of great importance to both of our cities.

Wealth, Leisure and Culture

Osaka is a harbour city at the head of Osaka Bay, about 50 km southwest of Kyoto. Although the area has been inhabited for 10,000 years, the town of Osaka only came to prominence in the 16th century, when the feudal lord Hideyoshi Toyotomi built Osaka Castle. Merchants were attracted to the castle and the protection it offered, and Osaka grew into a major trading city.

In the Edo Period (1603-1867), Japan was governed by the dynasty of shoguns known as the Tokugawa. Osaka was at this time the centre of the Japanese economy. It was known as 'the kitchen of the country', an expression that described its role as the driving force in distributing goods and setting commodity prices throughout Japan. Osaka enjoyed a thriving urban culture, with private schools, theatres, pleasure quarters and a vibrant artistic community.

The merchants of Osaka had great wealth but lacked political power. Because they could not join the ranks of the nobility or the warrior class, they compensated with a stunning display of riches, including dazzling and expensive clothing. The merchants and their wives were as well dressed as the aristocrats in the imperial centre of Kyoto, and their kimono were prized possessions.



Osaka was a rich and powerful city for hundreds of years. Many of the people who lived there were merchants and wore beautiful and expensive clothing. Some kimono were so valuable that thieves would try to steal them.

From Everyday to Special Occasion

In the Edo Period, everyone in Japan wore kimono. The higher social classes wore subdued and modest clothing, but merchants and other commoners became increasingly flamboyant. In an attempt to discourage this extravagance, the shoguns passed sumptuary laws that strictly regulated who could wear certain clothing, when it could be worn and how it could be decorated. But people still found ways to get around the laws and indulge their love of fine clothing.

With the arrival of American ships in 1853, which demanded access to Japanese ports for military and trading purposes, the country was opened to Western influence. In 1868 the emperor was restored to power and the Meiji Period (1868-1912) began. The lives of Osakans changed dramatically, yet they continued to wear kimono and do their hair in traditional style. It was not until after 1945 that Western dress was adopted for daily wear.

People today rarely wear kimono in everyday life, but it plays an important role both as traditional and as formal dress. Children are dressed in kimono for *Shichi-Go-San*, an event that celebrates growth and healthy development. Young women often wear a long-sleeved kimono for their coming-of-age ceremony when they turn 20, and a kimono with a black background is worn by many women for formal occasions.



Although Japanese children today wear Western-style clothing for school and play, they still wear kimono for special occasions like *Shichi-Go-San*, a festival that celebrates growing up strong and healthy.

The Culture of Kimono

The origins of the kimono can be found in the Heian Period (794-1192), nearly 1200 years ago. The style has remained largely unchanged for about 400 years, with only slight variations from one century to the next. A kimono is created by cutting and sewing a length of cloth about 40 cm by 12 m. Fabric was specially woven to the exact dimensions needed for a kimono.

The simple tailoring of the garment means that the beauty and complexity of the kimono are expressed through its fabric and decoration, which vary widely according to individual taste, social class and historical period. Silk, cotton or hemp fabric can be embellished with dye, paint, embroidery or applied motifs, frequently using a combination of these techniques. Symbolic animals, flowers and *mon* patterns (circular crests often displayed across the shoulders) add layers of meaning. Nature, especially the changing seasons, also inspire decoration.

To understand the significance of the kimono, we need to pay attention to the details.



Everyone who wears a kimono, male or female, wraps the left side over the right side. The only time the kimono is worn with the right side over the left is for dead people.

A Contest of Style

Women in the Edo Period took great pride in wearing the most beautiful and sophisticated kimono. They paid careful attention to their hair style and accessories as well as the kimono itself, trying to outdo each other in fashionable displays of wealth.

Women could choose from two styles of kimono. The *furisode* had long flowing sleeves and was worn by unmarried women. By the end of the Edo Period this style was generally reserved for formal wear and special occasions, although girls from wealthy families continued to wear *furisode* on a daily basis. The *kosode*, on the other hand, had narrow sleeves and was more practical for everyday wear. The modern kimono is based on the *kosode*.

By the time of the Edo Period, when the earliest of these kimono were made, an elaborate *obi* had become an important part of the outfit. This wide, long sash was wrapped around the waist and tied in an elaborate bow. Women could vary the look of a kimono by changing the style and width of the *obi* worn with it, although by the end of the period the *obi* had reached a standard width of 38 cm. The outfit was completed with shoes, socks, a carefully chosen hair style and hair ornaments.



The wives of rich merchants would compete with each other to have the most beautiful and expensive outfits. Every detail was important, from their hairstyles down to the shoes and socks they wore.

Understated Opulence

Men's kimono appear plain when compared to the brilliant colours and extravagant decoration of women's clothing. Although a man's kimono was very subdued and sober, it told a lot about his status and could be just as expensive as women's clothing.

Kamishimo, for instance, is an outfit composed of two pieces: *kataginu* (jacket) and *hakama* (very wide trousers) in colours of black, dark blue or brown. *Kamishimo* was originally worn as ceremonial dress by warriors and was later adapted as formal clothing for commoners. Many of its details, from the length of the trousers to the size of a pleat across the shoulders, were strictly regulated.

The patterns on the fabrics used for men's kimono, called *komonzome*, were produced by a special dyeing process known as resist dyeing. The *komon* patterns, along with crests displayed on the jacket could identify the family of the person wearing the kimono. Toward the end of the Edo Period, as restrictions on women's clothing became tighter, many women adopted the darker colours and subtle *komon* patterns for their own clothing.



At one time, the only people allowed to wear *kamishimo* were the *samurai*, the warriors, but by the Edo Period it was the outfit for common people like merchants to wear on special occasions.

Working Class Heroes

Houses in Osaka were lightly constructed of wood and paper, and fire was a constant threat. By the Edo Period, the fire-fighting brigade was an established public service. The *hikeshi*, or fireman, was a dashing figure of popular culture, as well known for his vulgar ways as for his acts of bravery.

Firefighters wore a short, heavy coat made from many layers of quilted fabric. The coat was soaked in water before it was worn to protect the wearer from heat and flames. This was worn with *hakama*, the wide trousers, along with gloves and a hood.

The fireman's coat was a solid colour with a printed lining. It was worn with the plain side outermost during the fire and was reversed when the fire was extinguished, to signal the end of the danger. The *hikeshi* paraded home in their colourful coats to the applause of the local residents.



When the fire was out, firemen would turn their coats inside out and show off the bright designs on the lining, to tell people that they had saved the city from fire.

Little Treasures

Boys and girls in the Edo Period wore the *furisode*, the kimono with long, sweeping sleeves. Soft fabrics like silk were used for children and, like today, clothing was often made a size larger than necessary to allow room for them to grow. The colour red was used in many children's kimono because it was believed to ward off illness and protect children from harm.

Children as well as adults had formal clothes for special occasions, like *Shichi-go-san*. This festival, which means Seven-five-three, was observed by boys at the age of five. Girls celebrated twice, at the age of three and again at seven years old. Children's clothing was not regulated by law, so many of the kimono were very brightly coloured and decorated with designs believed to bring good fortune.

Boys became men and put on the narrow-sleeved *kosode* at their coming-of-age ceremony; girls wore the *furisode* until they married. Today, girls still wear the *furisode* for their coming-of-age ceremony, but boys of any age wear only the *kosode*.



Red was a lucky colour for children's clothing because people believed that wearing red would keep them healthy and safe. They also thought that special designs on the clothing would help children grow up strong and brave.

The Height of Fashion

In the Edo Period, no fashionable women's outfit was complete without an elaborate hairstyle. Men were mostly limited to a topknot, but in the 19th century women had over 200 different hair styles to choose from.

Very long hair was considered a sign of great beauty. For ceremonial occasions, high-ranking women would wear their hair flowing down their back to show its length, but most often women wore their hair up. The hair was slicked with oil, then twisted into elaborate shapes and anchored with combs. Accessories like hairpins of lacquer and silver added the final touch.

Women in the Kansai district of Japan, which included Osaka and Kyoto, had a reputation for very stylish and showy hairdos. Women from all classes, from housemaids to the wives of high-ranking *samurai*, could be recognised by their unique hairstyles.



Wealthy women would have their long hair stiffened with oil, then twisted into fantastic shapes which were decorated with silver ornaments. They had more than 200 different styles to choose from.

Kimono, the Soul of Japan

The kimono as we know it today is based on the *kosode* and *furisode* of the late Edo and Meiji Periods, but there have been changes. The kimono is no longer allowed to fall in folds about the feet, but is lifted with a sash that wraps under the *obi*. The *obi* itself is still very wide, but there are different styles that are easier for one person to manage. Accessories include the *objime*, the cord that holds the *obi* together, and the *obidome*, a clasp that is worn on the *obi* and is the only piece of jewellery worn with the kimono.

There are no longer laws that regulate how the kimono must be worn, but a new set of rules and customs has arisen about appropriate taste and style. Today, some young women learn the intricacies of kimono wearing by attending a 'kimono academy'.

Today, kimono are worn almost exclusively by women for formal and ceremonial occasions. To the woman who wears it and those who observe her, the kimono conveys a powerful sense of continuity and belonging, a cultural unity that defines Japan in the eyes of the world.



To learn how to wear kimono properly, some young women go to a school for kimono lessons. They believe that wearing a kimono is an important way to express their pride in being Japanese.