



Textured Lives

Japanese Immigrant Clothing
from the Plantations of Hawai'i

ACTIVITY GUIDE

The clothing included in this exhibition are from the collection of scholar Barbara F. Kawakami.

Many of the pieces can also be viewed online at janm.org/exhibits/texturedlives/collection

Immigration and Adaptation

Before World War II, many Japanese men and women immigrated to Hawai'i to work on plantations, which are like farms. Hawai'i presented new environments, lifestyles, and working conditions to adjust and adapt to. In preparation for their new lives in America, many Japanese women brought hand-made kimono with them that were carefully woven, dyed, and painted. A *kimono* is a long robe with long sleeves that is traditionally worn in Japan.

Find a kimono in the exhibition and look closely at it. Draw a picture of it in the box below. What interesting things do you notice?



Imagine working outdoors in the hot sun surrounded by sharp sugarcane leaves. Is a kimono something you would want to wear? Why or why not?

What changes would you make to be more comfortable while working?

When Barbara Kawakami was a young girl growing up on plantations in Hawai'i, she noticed the different styles of clothing that people wore, depending on the type of work they did.

What are some differences that you notice between the kimono you drew and work clothes you see worn today?



Gift of Barbara Kawakami, Japanese American National Museum (2004.127)

Many pieces collected by Mrs. Kawakami belonged to women who were “picture brides” from Japan. Through the exchange of photographs, these women were matched up with Japanese men working on plantations in Hawai‘i. Upon arrival in Hawai‘i, they learned that living conditions were much harsher than expected.

The clothing brought from Japan was not suited for plantation conditions. Women cut their beautiful kimono fabrics to transform them into more practical styles that would better fit their work while allowing them to keep a sense of their cultural identity. As one of the few items brought from Japan, clothing was an important reminder of home and fashioning something new out of kimono became a form of creative cultural expression.

Design

Look at the designs on the kimono in the exhibition. Some are hand-dyed while others are hand-painted. You will also notice embroidered family crests on many.

These designs are linked to unique personal stories and histories of each kimono. **What types of symbolic images do you see?** Some examples are various tree designs. Pine is strong and rugged, bamboo is enduring and unbreakable, and plum is sweet and pure. When you think about these characteristics along with the challenges that Japanese women faced in their new country, the designs become more meaningful.

Make a design that symbolizes you. Think about your identity, hobbies, family, favorite things, and anything that would tell the story of you. Draw it here:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for drawing a design that symbolizes the user's identity, hobbies, family, favorite things, and anything that would tell their story.

Research to do at home

Does your family have a family crest? (If your family has a Japanese name, your crest would be called a *mon*.) See if you can find it and find out what the images or symbols represent.

If you can't find your family crest, do some research to find a seal for your country, city, or state. (Hint: If you look at the back of a dollar bill, you'll see the Great Seal of the United States.)

What stories are being told with the images and symbols in these crests and seals?

Activities to do at home with the help of an adult

Many of the stories in *Textured Lives: Japanese Immigrant Clothing from the Plantations of Hawai'i* are about adaptation, which means making changes and adjustments to fit new circumstances or to serve a new purpose. Try adapting old t-shirts that you have. Here is one idea to get you started. Let your own creativity lead you to new ideas!

T-SHIRT BELT

Supplies:

- 1 t-shirt
- scissors
- safety pin

1. Lay the t-shirt flat and starting from the bottom, spiral cut three 1 1/2" wide strips. Each should be long enough to wrap around your waist twice.
2. Knot the three strips together at one end.
3. Using a safety pin, attach the knot to a pillow (or you can have a friend hold the end for you instead!)
4. Braid the three strips together.
5. Leave about 6" unbraided at the end and tie that into a knot.
6. Wrap it around your waist and tie it to make a belt.
7. Using the same shirt, cut off the neckpiece to make an instant matching headband!

Shibori is a Japanese dyeing technique used to create the designs on some of the textiles in the exhibition. It is similar to tie-dyeing techniques. Here's how you can try tie-dyeing at home.

TIE-DYING

Supplies:

- fabric dye
- rubber bands
- rubber gloves
- water
- fabric garment (a t-shirt is probably easiest to find)

1. Bunch your fabric together and tightly wrap rubber bands around it to create different designs. The areas wrapped in the rubber bands will remain white while the other areas will be dyed. Another fun idea is to wrap marbles in the fabric and rubber band around them, creating several little buds. Each marble will make a little circle.
2. Prepare the dye according to the package directions. Be sure to wear gloves to protect your hands!
3. Place your prepared garment in the dye for at least 15–20 minutes. The longer it stays in the dye, the darker it will be.
4. Remove the garment from the dye and rinse according to the package directions. Wring out the garment until the water runs clear.
5. Remove the rubber bands to reveal your design!

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February 27 through May 30, 2010

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

SAT
Mar 13

Wear This! 11 AM-4 PM • FREE ALL DAY

Target Free Family Saturday
Enjoy a day of family fun with clothing
at the National Museum.

SAT
May 15

Unique Flowers: Straw Lei Workshop 1 PM

Make a straw lei in this hands-on workshop
with Elizabeth Asawa. \$9 members; \$14 non-
members, includes admission and supplies.
Reservations required; 15 participants max
(ages 12 and up).



JAPANESE AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

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