

## ***Eboshi-Shaped Helmet (Eboshi Kambuto) and Half Mask (Menpō)***, Japan, late 16th–17th century

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**H**ELMETS WERE A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF A samurai's armor. Styles changed over time but most were shaped in a simple dome and constructed of anywhere from three to one hundred iron plates. Some helmets had an opening on the top for ventilation and to allow the warrior to slip his topknot through.

Samurai often decorated their helmets with distinctive, fearsome embellishments. Such decoration became more important after the introduction of firearms to Japan in the sixteenth century. When guns were used, the battlefields became full of smoke and troops had difficulty seeing. In order to be easily recognizable in battle, warriors began wearing elaborate ornaments, such as the deer antlers seen here. This iron helmet, lacquered in gold, imitates a tall hat, or *eboshi*, worn at the imperial court. A youth of the samurai class received his first *eboshi* at the time of his coming-of-age ceremony, when he was twelve years old. Two crescent-shaped, stylized eyebrows (*uchimayu*) decorate the wide visor.

The mask, made of metal, provided protection for the samurai's face and throat. This half-mask covered the lower part of the face and is characterized by rounded cheekbones, a small nose, and a bushy mustache made of horsehair.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What qualities do you associate with deer?
- The deer antlers would have made the samurai readily visible to friend and foe alike. How does this exemplify the ideals of honor, duty, and courage associated with samurai?
- What does this helmet tell us about the samurai warrior who owned it? What can we tell about Japanese culture from it?
- Think about the different types of headgear people wear on different occasions—such as to play sports or to go outside when it's very cold or hot. How is it decorated? What symbols and/or embellishments are used? What does it say about the person wearing it?



*Eboshi-Shaped Helmet (Eboshi Kambuto) and Half Mask (Menpō)*

Japan, late 16th–17th century

Iron, gold lacquer, bronze, horn, and horsehair

Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Collection

Photograph by Brad Flowers

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## *Byōbu (folding screen)*, Japan, early 18th century

THIS SIX-PANEL FOLDING SCREEN SHOWS A FAMOUS scene from the warrior tale "The Heike Monogatari." The story chronicles the Genpei War (1180–1185), fought between two samurai clans, the Taira (also known as the Heike clan) and the Minamoto (also known as the Genji clan) for control of Japan. Here, two Minamoto warriors, Takatsuna and Kagesue, make a friendly wager with each other to see who can cross the rushing Uji River first. Here, Takatsuna charges ahead on his magnificent horse Ikezuki, renowned for his ability to swim, and arrives at the far side ahead of Kagesue. Their leader, Minamoto commander Yoshitsune, looks on from the right side of the scene. While most literature described the famous horse Ikezuki as white, the artist depicted him as brown, blending in with the undulating waves of the river. The Genpei War would result in the defeat of the Taira clan and the establishment of the Kamakura military rule under Minamoto Yoritomo in 1192.

Folding screens are lightweight and portable and were used as room dividers or as a backdrop during special occasions. The gold background would have helped to illuminate the dark interiors of a Japanese castle.

### Discussion Prompts

Read the following passage from "The Heike Monogatari":

As the chilly dawn broke, the river mist hung heavy over the water, so that one could not clearly discern the color either of the horses or the armor of their riders. Then the commander Yoshitsune rode up to the bank of the river, and wishing to try the courage of his men, with a glance at the foaming torrent, called out: "Shall we turn off to Yodo or Imoarai, or shall we go round by Kawachiji? Or what do you think of waiting until the flood abates?"

Then Hatakeyama Shoji Shigetada of the province of Musashi, who was then but twenty-one years old, stood forth and said: "This river is one that we have often spoken of at Kamakura, and is no unknown stream to baffle us; and moreover, as it flows out directly from the lake of Omi, its waters will not quickly subside, however long you may wait, and as for building a bridge, who is there who can do such a thing? In the battle that was

fought here in the era of Jisho, Ashikaga Matataro Tadatsuna crossed over, and he was but a youth of seventeen years, so here is no matter for god or devil. I, Shigetada, will be the first in the flood."

And as he and his band of five hundred followers were pushing together into the waves, two warriors were seen to gallop forth from the point of Tachibana-no-kojima at the northeast of the Byodo-in: they were Kajiwara Genda Kagesue and Sasaki Shiro Takatsuna. Each had made up his mind to be the first across, though no sign of their determination was visible to the onlookers: Kajiwara was about three yards in front of Sasaki. "Kajiwara, your saddle girth seems to be loose; this is the greatest river in the western provinces, so you had better tighten it up." Thus warned, Kajiwara dropped the reins onto his horse's mane, kicked his feet from the stirrups, and, leaning forward in the saddle, loosened the girth and tightened it afresh.

While he was thus engaged, however, Sasaki rode on past him and leapt his horse into the river. Kajiwara, thinking he had been tricked, immediately sprang in after him. "Ho, Sasaki," shouted Kajiwara, "Take care if you want to be famous; there is a great hawser at the bottom of the river. Look out." At this Sasaki drew his sword and cut through the rope as it caught his horse's feet, and in spite of the strength of the current, as he was mounted on the finest horse in the land, he rode straight through the river and leapt up on to the farther bank.

Kajiwara's horse Surusumi, however, was swept aside by the rush of the water, and his rider reached land some distance farther downstream. Then Sasaki, rising high in his stirrups, shouted with a loud voice: "Sasaki Shiro Takatsuna, fourth son of Sasaki Saburo Yoshihide of Omi, descended in the ninth generation from Uda Tenno, is the first over the Uji River."

Translation by A. L. Sadler

Compare and contrast the written description of the story with the scene on the screen. What is the most significant difference between the image and the text? Think of some reasons for this difference.



Six-panel Folding Screen (*byōbu*)  
*The Competition to Be First at Uji River*  
Mid-Edo period, Early 18th century  
Ink, color, and gold on paper  
The Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Collection  
Photograph by Brad Flowers  
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## ***Horse Armor (bagai), Horse Mask (bamen), Horse Tack (bagu)***

Momoyama to Edo period, 2nd half of 19th century

### ***Tachidō tō sei gusoku armor***, late Edo period, 1842

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IT IS BELIEVED THAT HORSES WORE ARMOR INTO BATTLE BY the early seventeenth century. Horses played a key role in military strategy and were a vital means of travel. Later, when battles involved thousands of men, many warriors fought on foot, with samurai on horseback leading the way.

Horses were also important during the peaceful Edo period (1615–1868). They conveyed prestige and power for their riders in parades, processions, and ceremonies since only samurai of a high rank were permitted to ride.

The extraordinary horse armor seen here was formed of small tiles of gold-lacquered leather, which were then stitched onto fabric to protect the horse's back, neck, shoulders, and hindquarters. The face of the horse was decorated with a mask; this one includes a gold disc ornament similar to a frontal crest. The saddle includes leather pads lacquered in green and emblazoned with a spray of gold waves, a traditional

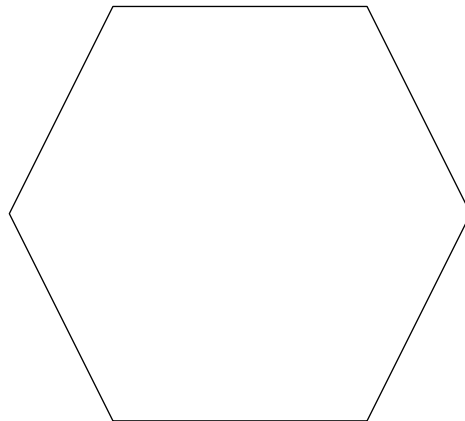
Japanese motif that signifies overcoming obstacles.

The rider here wears a black lacquered *tachidō*-style suit of armor (named for its "standing chest armor") that dates to 1842. The chest armor (*dō*) is dominated by a large gold heraldic family crest (*mon*), which may have belonged to the Sōma family. The helmet, mask, and chest armor are signed by Yoshikaz, the craftsman who probably made them.

#### **Discussion Prompts**

Family crests decorated samurai armor and banners in order to distinguish the different clans on the battlefield. Notice the family crest on the armor of the rider. How would you describe it? What symbols are used? What do the symbols communicate about the samurai and his family?

Use the shape below to design your own crest! What symbols will you use? What would you like to communicate about your family?





Horse Armor (*bagai*), Horse Mask (*bamen*), and Horse Tack (*bagu*)  
Momoyama to Edo period, 2nd half of 19th century (horse armor)  
Late 16th century (horse mask), 17th century (horse tack)  
Iron, wood, lacquer, leather, silk brocade, horsehair, gold, and hemp  
*Tachidō tōsei gusoku* armor, late Edo period, 1842  
Iron, gold, lacing, bear fur, silver, and wood  
The Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Collection  
Photograph by Brad Flowers  
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## *Tengu Tōsei Gusoku Armor*, Japan, 1854

A WARRIOR-MONK KNOWN AS A *JAMABUSHI*, MAY HAVE commissioned this remarkably complete set of armor. The distinctive iron helmet (*kabuto*) with the head of a crow represents a *tengu* (*karasu tengu*), a legendary hybrid creature from Japanese folklore that is half-man, and half-bird. *Tengu* can be mischievous and inclined to play tricks on humans but are also thought to have magical skills in the martial arts. They are characterized by their long beak-like noses. A small black lacquered cap that fits on top of the *tengu*'s head. This type of cap is worn by members of the Shugendō Buddhist sect of which the *yamabushi* belong, hence the belief that it was commissioned by a warrior-monk. A striking halo of stripped feathers forms the helmet's crest.

Samurai armor consists of a helmet (*kabuto*), mask (*mengu*), and chest armor (*dō*) paired with shoulder guards, sleeves, a skirt, thigh protection, and shin guards. A complete set might weigh between twenty and forty-five pounds in total. (See Samurai Armor diagram.) The armor, very light when compared to European or Persian armor, was made of small, perforated plates that were often lacquered and held together with colored lacing and silk cord. Many materials were required to produce a Japanese suit of armor that was as beautiful as it was functional. Iron, leather, brocade, and precious and semiprecious metals were often used.

The chest armor (*dō*) on this figure is made up of two parts fastened by a hinge on the left side. Seven horizontal plates lightly sculpted to imitate muscle structure lace together in the shape of a human torso. The iron plates covering the shoulder straps are attached with a hinge and are decorated with a family crest. Gold-colored cords suspended on each side from the second horizontal plate are tied in a shape resembling a double *vajra*, a Buddhist symbol.

Creating armor was a highly specialized art form that required exceptional knowledge and skill. Several artisans worked for many months to create a suit of samurai armor. Blacksmiths created the metal pieces, and leather craft workers designed the protective leather elements. Weavers and embroiderers made and embellished the textiles. Metalsmiths created and applied the gold and copper embellishments. Certain pieces stood out because of their construction and materials, while others bore striking motifs and symbols. The artisans found inspiration in many—and sometimes extraordinary—sources to create pieces that reflected samurai spirituality, folklore, and nature.

### Discussion Prompts

Look closely at the suit, and working with a partner, fill out the following jobs. Refer to the attached diagram of samurai armor.

Who?	What?	Where do you find this on the suit?
Blacksmiths	Created metal pieces	
Weavers	Wove and embellished the textiles	
Metal smiths	Created and applied copper embellishments	
Craft workers	Designed and made the leather weather-proof	



Armor of the Tengu Type (*tengu tōsei gusoku*)  
signed Kaei kanoetora aki kaigen Ansei Kiyotoshi kitaeru (forged by Kiyotoshi during the autumn of  
the kanoetora year of Kaei [1854], when the era name changed to Ansei) on helmet top, Munekiyo  
kitaeru (forged by Munekiyo) and Ryūsuikei saku (made by Ryūsuikei) on helmet side  
Japan, 1854

Iron, lacquer, vegetable fiber, bear fur, leather, feathers, and fabric

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Photograph by Brad Flowers

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# Components of a *tōsei gusoku* suit of armor

