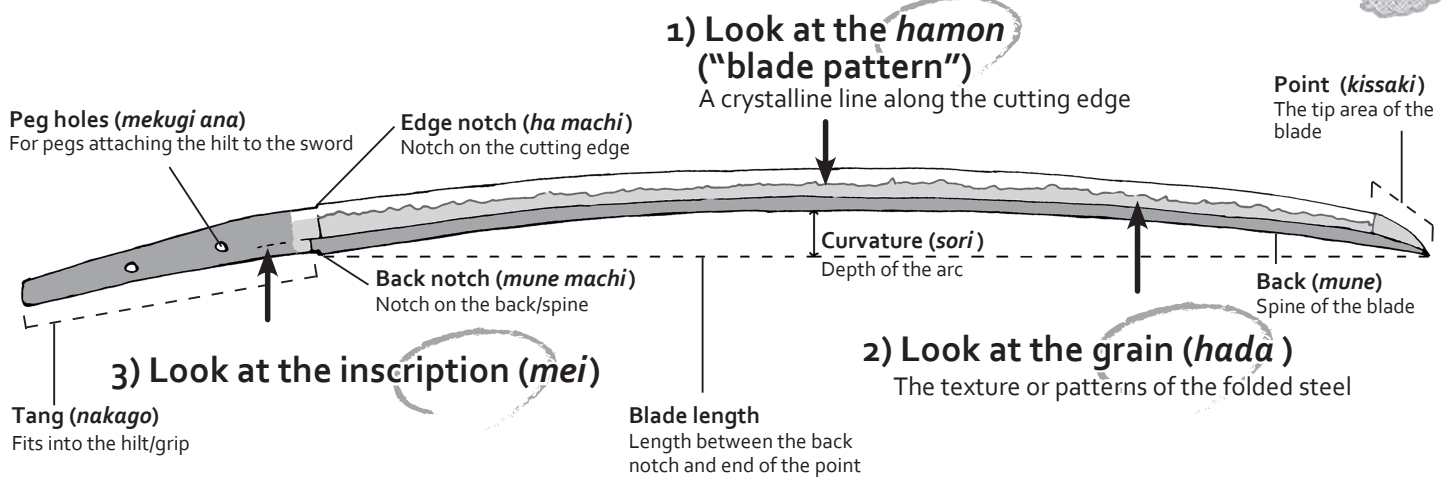


Introduction to Japanese Swords

Japanese swords are some of the most technically sophisticated blades in the world. Famous swords have been preserved over history for various reasons—visual beauty, technical supremacy, historical significance, legendary stories, prominent former owners, famous smiths, etc. This worksheet gives introductory pointers for understanding and appreciating the blades shown in this once-in-a-lifetime exhibition.



1) Types of *Hamon*

Through the quenching process, a smith can make a variety of different "blade patterns," which become a visual focal point of the sword. The *hamon* can show the smith's skill and might be distinctive to his school.

Straight *Hamon* (*Suguha*)

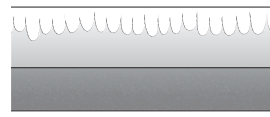


Many straight *hamon* actually have a subtle curve.

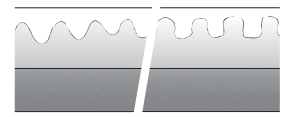
Irregular *Hamon* (*Midareba*) Wavy blade patterns



UNDULATIONS (*NOTARE*)
A gently undulating blade pattern. There might be cloves within the undulations.



CLOVES (*CHŌJI*)
A tightly scalloping blade pattern, named after clove buds.



ALTERNATIONS (*GUNOME*)
Literally "alternating eyes." A continuous line of tightly alternating waves or zigzags along the blade.

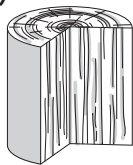
2) Types of Steel Grain (*Hada*)

Hada refers to the surface texture resulting from folding, forging, and quenching the steel. This wood-like grain may help indicate the period or region of manufacture.

Straight Grain (*Masame*)



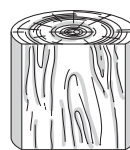
Nearly straight, parallel lines.



Cathedral Grain (*Itame*)



Irregular mountains and waves. The most common type of grain.



Burled Grain (*Mokume*)

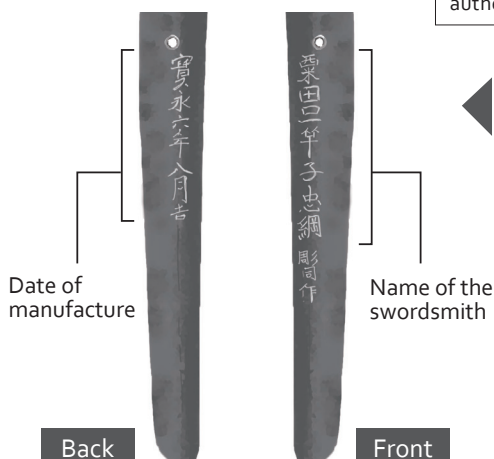


Patterns with concentric circles.



3) Inscriptions (*Mei*)

The tang (*nakago*) is the area of the blade normally hidden inside the hilt (grip). It might be inscribed with the smith's signature, the date of manufacture, or the provenance. These inscriptions are important for authentication and appraisal.



No.160

Important Cultural Property

Long Sword (*Tachi*). Inscription: "Blade and carving made by Awataguchi Ikkanshi Tadatsuna / An auspicious day in the 8th month, 1709." Kyoto National Museum.

Sword Shortening (*Suriage*)

Sometimes long swords are shortened for practical or aesthetic reasons by cutting off part of the tang and, with it, part or all of the inscription(s).

Ōsuriage (large scale shortening) is when the entire tang is cut off during the shortening of a *tachi* into a *katana*. Sometimes a new inscription will be added later after the blade has been shortened. Shortening can greatly change a blade's curvature and balance.

Types of Swords

Tachi	A classical long sword worn with its blade facing down. It is suspended from the waist, slung by straps from a belt, usually for fighting on horseback.
Katana (also <i>uchigatana</i>)	A newer type of long sword worn with its blade facing up. Its mounting is inserted directly into a belt at the waist. It was developed for fighting on foot.
Wakizashi	A short sword usually paired with a <i>katana</i> . Like the <i>katana</i> , its mounting is inserted into a belt with blade facing up.
Tantō	A dagger (short sword) usually around 24 cm in length, with various uses. Also called a <i>koshigatana</i> , <i>futokorogatana</i> , etc.



What kind of sword is that?

You can use this information to figure out which kind of sword is shown on display or in a painting.

- ◆ Blade facing down: *Tachi* (long sword)
- ◆ Blade facing up: *Katana* (long sword), *wakizashi* (short sword), and *tantō* (dagger)
- ◆ Inscription placement: Usually on the outside when a blade is worn on the left hip

Sword Names: What is a *Gō*? What is a *Meibutsu*?

Some swords have a proper name called a *gō* ("artistic name"). Others have the word *meibutsu* ("celebrated object") before such a proper name, which indicates that this sword was included in an early list of prized swords. *Gō* or *meibutsu* names might derive from stories about a sword's history, previous owners, or other things. They often include the name of the swordsmith at the end.

Names Deriving from Historical Episodes

Ex. *Gō*: Kasen Kanesada
(Name: "Immortal Poet" Kanesada)

This sword was owned by warlord Hosokawa Tadaoki (Sansai, 1563–1646), who was also the leading poetry scholar of his day. Legend has it that he used this to kill thirty-six disloyal subordinates (though there is no documentary evidence for such). The name is a pun on the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets of the Heian period. Kanesada is the name of the smith.

Names Deriving from Physical Attributes

Ex. *Meibutsu*: Mikazuki Munechika
(Name: Crescent Moon Munechika)

This name derives from the crescent moon-shaped pattern of the *hamon*, which look like they are glowing in the sky when seen in the right light. Munechika is the smith.

Ex. *Meibutsu*: Namazuo Tōshirō

This *wakizashi* resembles a catfish tail (*namazu-o*). Tōshirō is a nickname of the smith Yoshimitsu.

Names Deriving from Illustrious Owners

Ex. *Meibutsu*: Maeda Tōshirō

This was once owned by the daimyo lord Maeda Toshimasa. Tōshirō is a nickname of the smith Yoshimitsu.

Ex. *Gō*: Akashi Kuniyuki

This sword was an heirloom of the Matsudaira clan, lords of Akashi, who were a branch family of the Matsudaira of Echizen. Kuniyuki is the name of the smith.

Sword Terminology

Yamashiro Swords (Yamashiro *mono*)

Swords made in and around Kyoto, dating from the late Heian period (794–1185) through the Heisei period (1989–present).

Kotō ("Old Swords")

In general, any sword made before the beginning of the 17th century. More specifically, classical or medieval *tachi* and 16th century *katana*, *wakizashi*, or *tantō*.

Shintō ("New Swords")

In general, any sword made after the beginning of the 17th century, more specifically *katana* blades, in comparison to *kotō*. In Kyoto, these were made by the Umetada, Horikawa, Mishina schools, etc.

Branches of the Yamashiro Swordsmiths

Sanjō School

A group of swordsmiths working along the street Sanjō dōri in Kyoto during the late Heian period. Founded by Munechika.

Awataguchi School

A school of swordsmiths working in the Awataguchi section of eastern Kyoto during the entire Kamakura period. Awataguchi Yoshimitsu appears many times in the *Kyōhō meibutsu chō* directory of celebrated *meibutsu* blades.

Rai School

A group of swordsmiths working in Yamashiro province (Kyoto prefecture) from the mid-Kamakura period through the beginning of the Nanbokuchō period.

Hasebe School

A group of Nanbokuchō-period swordsmiths, led by Kunishige and Kuninobu. They came from Yamato (Nara), went to Kamakura to learn local swordmaking techniques, and then moved to Kyoto.

Umetada School

Originally a family business specializing in *tsuba* (hand guards) and other metal sword fittings, this school was known for blade carving. The master Umetada Myōju lived in Kyoto's Nishijin area.

Horikawa School

This group of smiths lived and worked around the intersections of Horikawa and Ichijō streets in Kyoto in the early 1600s. Their founder was Horikawa Kunihiro.

794	Heian period	Kotō
1185		
1333		
1392	Kamakura period	Shintō
1573		
1615	Edo period	