

# **Japanese Mon Collage and Design Project**

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## **Objectives:**

- To introduce Japanese Mon (family crest) motifs and patterns. These will be used as inspiration for the main element of a design project.
- To investigate the use of symbols in the Japanese culture and make comparisons to the use of symbols and colors during the European Middle Ages.
- To create an opportunity for interdisciplinary learning between Visual Art, Social Studies, and Math.
- To master the use of a compass, a protractor and a ruler.
- To use the Art Elements of color, shape and line in a prescribed design, which will include a circle, a rectangle and one other element of the student's choosing (can be a bead or beads made from magazine pages, multicolored panels, thread, twisted twigs in interesting shapes, a small fan or scroll, or calligraphy done with a brush)
- To use the Design Principles of repetition, balance and emphasis to create a unified design.
- To increase drawing and design skills.

## **Supplies**

Drawing paper (neutral colors)  
Prismacolor pencils in a variety of colors  
Ebony and Turquoise drawing pencils  
Compass  
Protractor  
Ruler  
Old magazines  
Toothpicks

Bleeding tissue paper  
Handmade papers in a variety of colors  
Marbleized paper  
Tracing paper  
Spray Glue  
Mat board (neutral colors)  
Elmer's Glue

## Procedure

1. View the following PowerPoint presentations before starting this project: 1. Comparing Japanese and European Armor, 2. Crest Examples on Kimonos and 3. Designing a Japanese Mon.
2. Create the third element of the design (all designs will have a circle within a rectangle – the third element is the student’s choice.)
  - If making beads out of magazine pages, cut the pages into long triangular strips. Starting with the wide end, roll the strip tightly around a toothpick, gluing the small end in place. Make as many magazine beads as possible in one class period. Choose only one or two to use in the collage.
  - If folding a fan or scroll, create marbled paper with the bleeding tissue paper. When it is dry, mount it on white drawing paper using spray glue.
  - If writing calligraphy, grind ink in a slate suzuri ink well, and paint characters with a fude (traditional calligraphy brush)
  - If creating panels, choose coordinating papers, glue them to white drawing paper, and cut panels to stack on top of or adjoin each other.
3. Use one of the special elements listed above as the basis for an overall **color scheme**. Select papers on which to draw your design and use as background and accent papers.
4. Using a compass, draw a 6 inch circle, making sure to mark the middle point. Use a protractor to divide the circle into sections. Create a pattern in one section, and then trace it onto tracing paper. Re-trace the design on the back of the tracing paper with Ebony pencil. Copy the design, right-side-up, in the other sections of the circle to finish the overall design. If the sections were measured carefully, every “slice” of the pattern will fit.
5. Copy the finished design onto the final circular paper.
6. Colors should be chosen as part of the overall composition. Make notations about color placement on the tracing paper (there should be a plan!)
7. Using *heavy pressure*, color the repeated pattern on the circular piece of paper with Prismacolor pencils.
8. When the circular Mon design is completely colored, assemble all the pieces and put them together using spray glue.
9. Mount finished piece on mat board.

## Vocabulary

**Mon** – Japanese family crest designs

**Collage** – assemblage of different pieces, often of various mediums

**Compass** – instrument used to draw circles

**Protractor** – instrument used to measure angles

**Symmetrical** – exactly the same on both sides

**Asymmetrical** – not exactly the same on each half (does NOT mean unbalanced!)

**Art Elements** – shape, line, texture, mass, space, value

**Design Principals** – unity, repetition, variety, balance, emphasis, proportion, movement

**Color scheme** – a plan using limited colors to create unity

## Grading

### Composition

**45%**

- Do all parts of the overall design (circular drawing, background and accent papers, and the special third element) seem to belong together?
- Are all elements unified by color?
- Is overall composition balanced? (It may be asymmetrical and still be balanced!)

### Technique

**45%**

- Are measurements done correctly with the compass and protractor?
- Does the pattern fit in each “slice” of the circle?
- Was care taken while tracing and coloring the circular design?
- Is the coloring on the circular design done with heavy pressure?
- Are all elements cleanly cut and neatly glued?

### Time management and clean up

**10%**

- Did you clean up your work area after every class?
- Did you put all of the supplies away after each class?
- Did you collect all of the pieces of your project and put them away after each class?
- Did you use your class time wisely?
- Did you finish your project on time?

## Japanese Mon (family Crests)

The origin of the Japanese family crest goes back to the eleventh century. Each of the high-ranking courtiers in those days began using a specific textile design for his most formal costume worn at the Imperial court. The powerful ruling Fujiwara family stimulated the practice of using a symbol for each family name. The courtiers, therefore, crystallized the costume designs as their family emblems and placed them on their carriages as well. These emblems later became the family crests used on costumes for formal occasions – one crest in the center of the back, one on the back of each sleeve, and, as the height of formality, one each on the left and right front. The emblems used by the courtiers were refined and elegant. They included wisteria, peony, iris, autumn bellflower and crane.

When the Heian Period came to an end and the warrior class took over the government at the end of the twelfth century, the warriors used their own emblems on their banners, flags, weapons and hanging screens to identify their camps and headquarters in time of war. The warriors, who recognized that they were less cultured, copied with admiration what the courtiers did.

The courtier and his household used the same crest among them. The warrior let his family use his crest as it was but had his retainer use variations of his crest.

During the Muromachi Period in the fifteenth century, the warriors' family crests underwent extensive development. With wars occurring more frequently and battles en masse replacing single combat, the family crests proved useful for identifying the opposing factions. Since identification on the battlefield became the main purpose of the crests, the warriors designed emblems that were simple, conspicuous and easy to recognize.

When the Edo Period began at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the family crests were more widely used. There were no more wars, and therefore the family crests once more became ornaments on formal costumes. Conspicuous, odd emblems were no longer in favor; symmetrical designs were liked, and a circle around the emblem became popular. In this period the common people began to use family crests to add to the beauty of their kimonos.

In the Meiji Period (1868-1912) which followed the Edo Period, the use of a crest representing any form of chrysanthemum was prohibited because it was the symbol of the Imperial family.

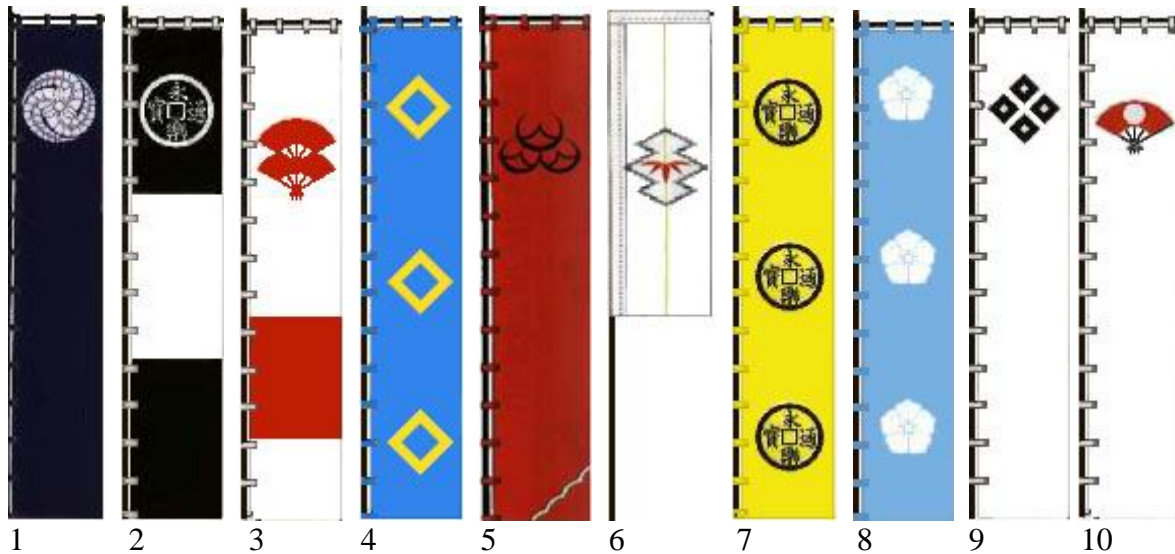
There are between 300 and 500 basic designs of family crests. If their variations are added, there are several thousands. They include animals, plants, natural phenomena, manufactured, manufactured objects and geometric forms. Circles, angular forms, geometric designs and diamond shapes are based on the primitive designs.

The refined floral and bird designs preferred by the courtiers have already been mentioned. The designs which the warriors used were the folding fan, dragon, arrow, arrowhead, hoe, dragonfly and other objects familiar to them. The shell, dragon and cloud, bat, Chinese hat, *shippo* ("seven treasures"), balance weight and others were taken from designs used under the Ming Dynasty.

In the Edo Period people began using objects familiar to them, such as the stylized snowflake, wild goose, rabbit, mountain and mist, sailboat, oar, spool, sickle, *tsuzumi* (a type of hand drum), spinning top, rice-pounder and ladder.

The family crests are still being used on formal kimonos and *haori* (short coats) for men, women and even children. However, the family crests seem to be losing their significance as symbols of the family names.

## Japanese Banners



1 **Kuroda Nagamasa** (1568-1623) Toyotomi, Tokugawa retainer

2 **Kuroda Kanbei** (1546-1604) Toyotomi, Tokugawa retainer

3 **Matsudaira Nobukazu** (1548-1632) Tokugawa retainer

4 **Hori Hidemasa** (1553-1590) Oda, Toyotomi retainer

5 **Naoe Kanetsugu** (1570-1619) Uesugi retainer

6 **Niwa Nagahide** (1535-1585) Oda retainer

7 **Oda Nobunaga** (1534-1582) One of the 'Three Unifiers'

8 **Akechi Mitsuhide** (1526-1582) Oda retainer

9 **Sasa Narimasa** (d.1588) Oda, Toyotomi retainer

10 **Satake Yoshinobu** (1570-1633) Daimyô of Hitachi

Images: <http://www.samurai-archives.com/mon.html>

## Examples of Japanese Mon (family crests)



Seki

Butterfly



Arima

Arrowroot



Asahina

Commas



Minamoto

Autumn  
Bellflower



Nagano

Fan



Mori

Crane

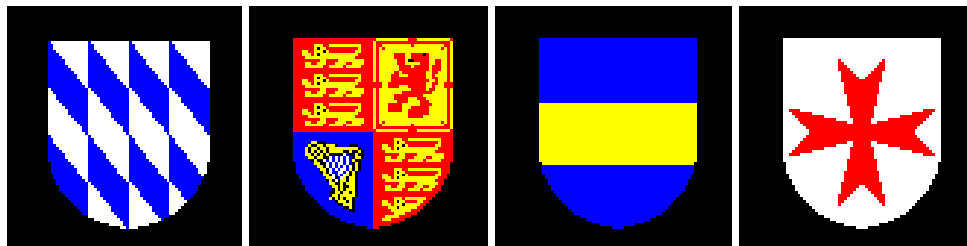
<http://www.samurai-archives.com/crest1.html>

## *European Heraldry*

Heraldry (symbols identifiable with individuals or families) originated as a way to identify knights in battle or in tournaments. With the advent of the "great" or "barrel" helm (ca. early 13th century) an individual's face became concealed. It therefore became necessary to create a method to distinguish ally from enemy.

Heraldic symbols ranged from simple geometric shapes such as chevrons, to more elaborate drawings of real or mythological animals. As with the honor of becoming a knight, heraldic insignia became hereditary, being passed on from father to son, or with the family name. Eventually heraldic symbols also came to signify kingdoms, duchies, or provinces as a medieval forerunner to our modern national flags.

Heraldic symbols were often worn on the knight's surcoat (thus the term "coat of arms"), shield, helmet, or on a banner (standard) that could serve as a rallying point for knights and others scattered in the chaos of battle. The standard was always to be elevated as long as the battle continued, and therefore was guarded well. A standard taken down would signal the allied combatants that the cause was lost and it was time to flee the field of combat.



Examples of heraldry

<http://www.knightsandarmor.com/heraldry.htm>

### **Symbolism of Heraldry**

**Or, yellow or gold** - Generosity.

**Argent, white or silver** - Peace and sincerity.

**Sable or black** - Constancy, sometimes grief.

**Azure or blue** - Loyalty and truth.

**Gules or red** - Military fortitude and magnanimity.

**Vert or green** - Hope, joy and sometimes loyalty in love.

**Purple, purple** - Royal majesty, sovereignty and justice.

**Tenne or tawney** - Worthy ambition.

**Murray or sanguine** - Not hasty in battle, and yet a victor.

The above symbolisms have been extracted from W. Cecil Wade's *The Symbolisms of Heraldry or A Treatise on the Meanings and Derivations of Armorial Bearings*, published in London in 1898.

<http://historymedren.about.com/od/heraldry/a/heraldrysymbols.htm>

## **Informative websites**

[http://smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson\\_plans/japan\\_images\\_people/intropage4.html](http://smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/japan_images_people/intropage4.html)

This site offers short descriptions of geography, climate, food, clothing, architecture, and furniture.

<http://www.tokugawa-art-museum.jp/english/index.html>

The Tokugawa Art Museum in Nagoya, Japan has a large collection of samurai artifacts, such as armor and weapons, as well as household items from the Tokugawa period.

[http://smithsonianglobalsound.org/sgs\\_live.aspx#Asia](http://smithsonianglobalsound.org/sgs_live.aspx#Asia)

Hear music and watch videos of Asian musicians.

[http://www.asia.si.edu/podcasts/radio\\_asia/player.html](http://www.asia.si.edu/podcasts/radio_asia/player.html)

The Freer / Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institute present Radio Asia.

<http://www.asia.si.edu/podcasts/default.htm#concerts>

Podcasts of global music (including many Asian choices) presented by the Smithsonian Institute's Freer / Sackler Gallery.

<http://www.samurai-archives.com/mon.html>

Images of Japanese banners and flags of the samurai era.

<http://www.samurai-archives.com/crest1.html>

Images of Japanese family crests.

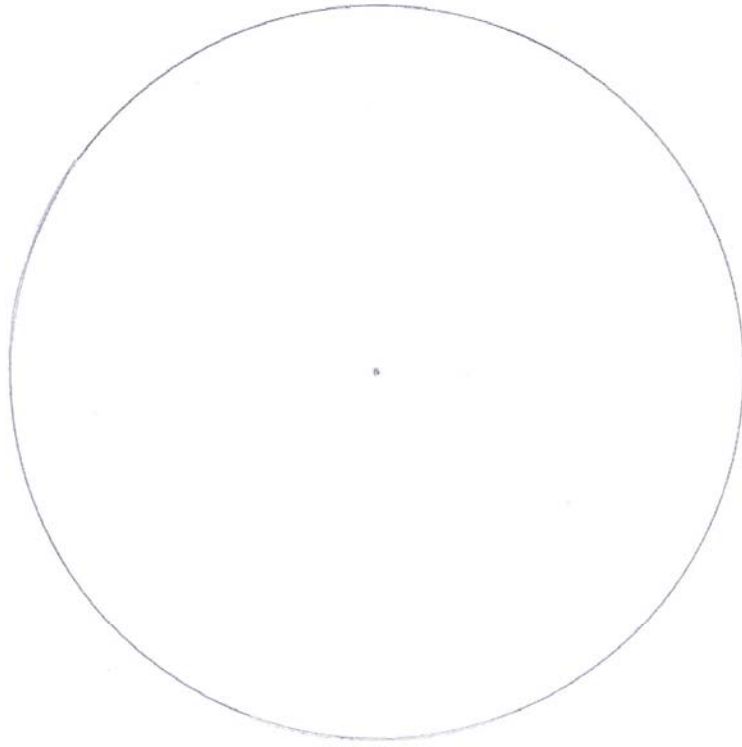
<http://www.samurai-archives.com/crest1.html>

Easy to read timelines from different periods of Japanese history.

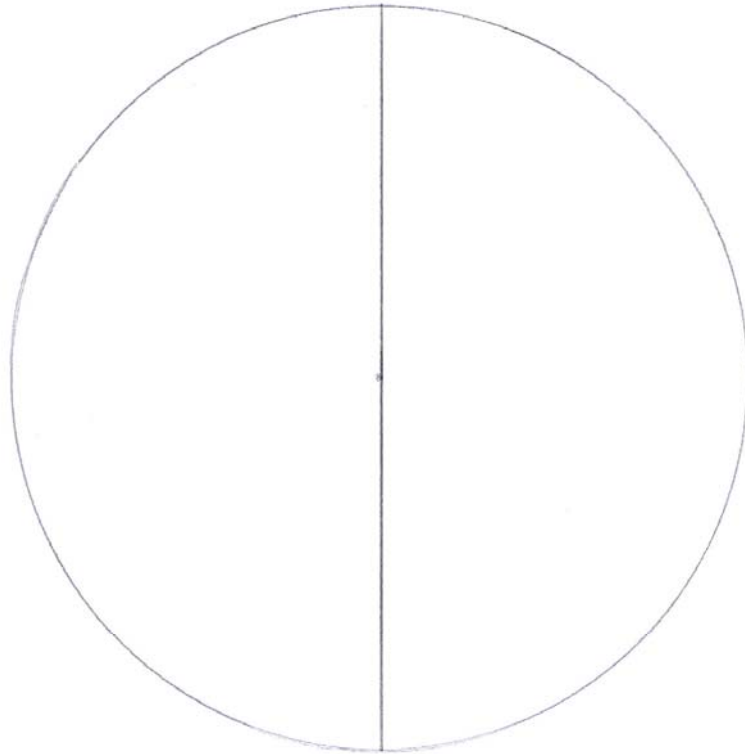
## **Books**

Japanese Design Motifs: 4,260 Illustrations of Japanese Crests, compiled by the Matsuya Piece-Goods Store, Translated by Fumie Adachi, Dover Publications, Inc. , New York, 1972 (originally published in Japan in 1913)

The Sumi – e Book, Yolanda Mayhall, Watson-Guptill Publications, New York, 1989

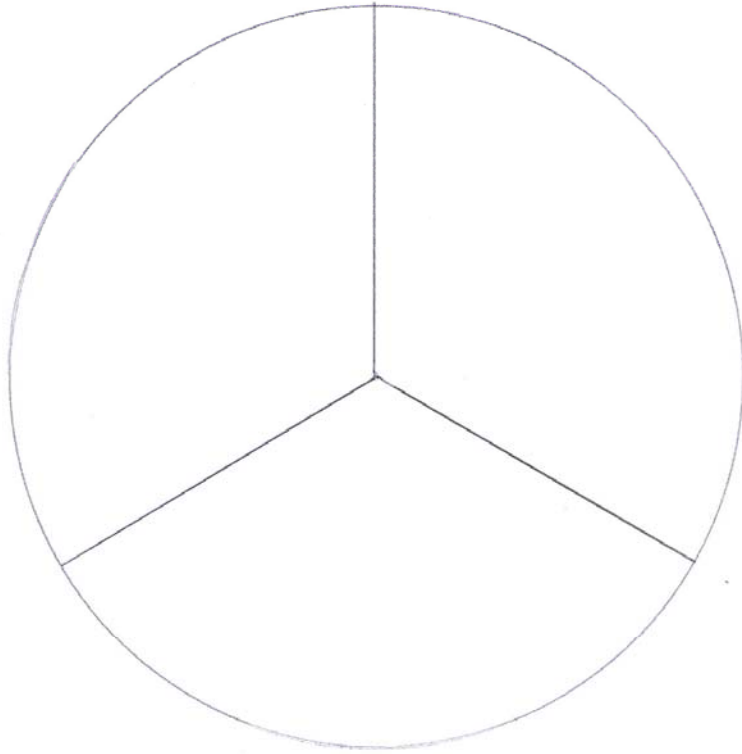


Whole circle  
360°



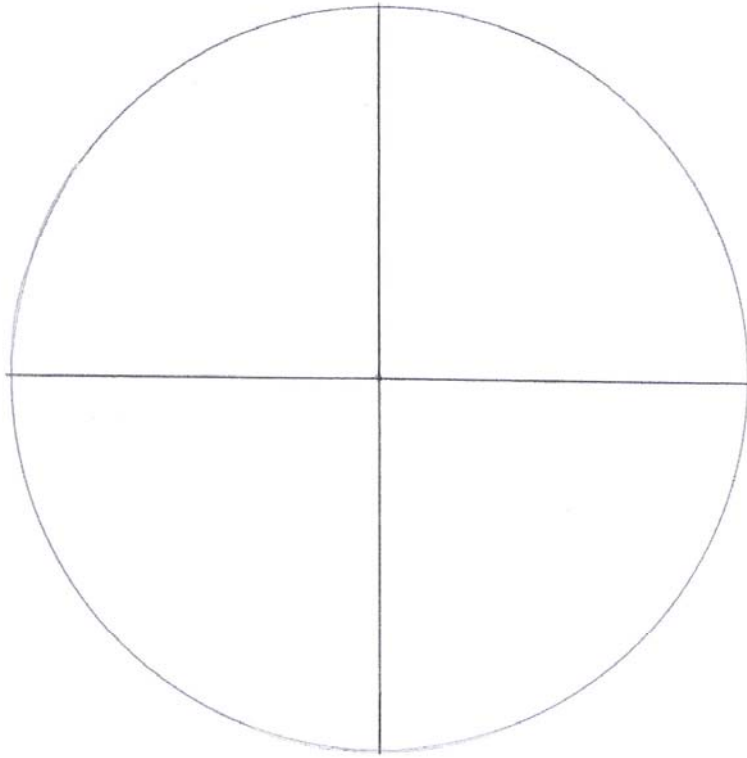
**Half**

Each section is  $180^\circ$

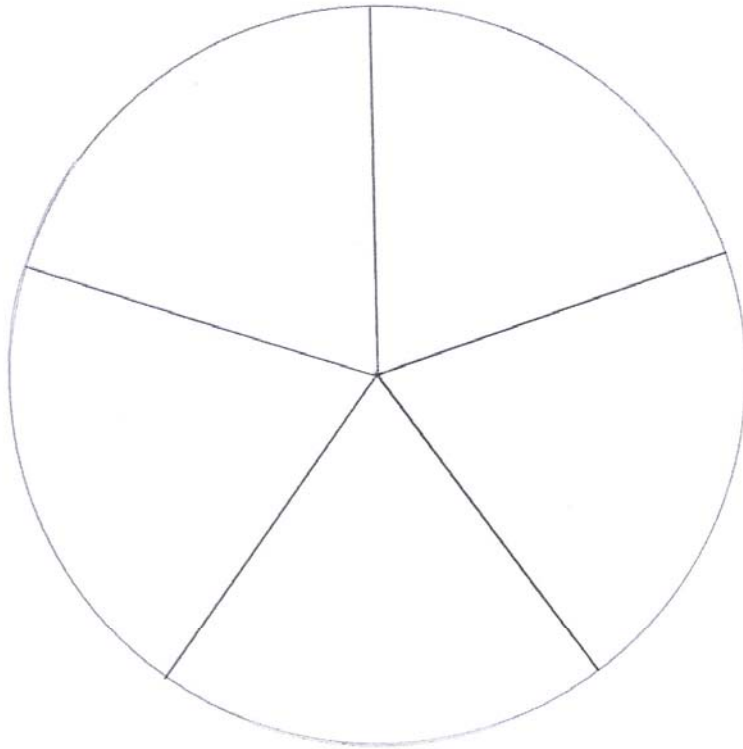


## Thirds

Each section is  $120^\circ$

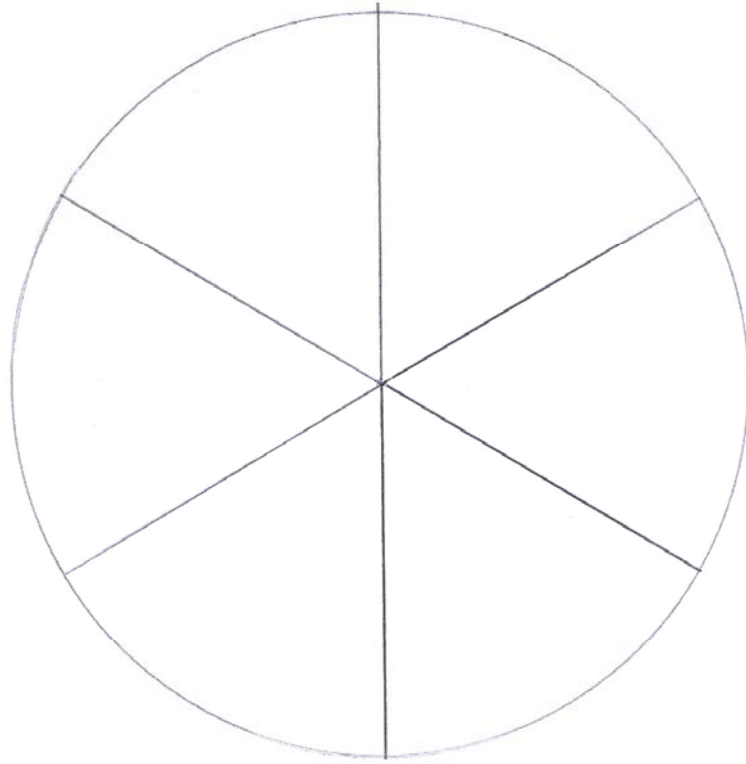


**Quarters (fourths)**  
Each section is  $90^\circ$



## Fifths

Each section is  $72^\circ$



## Sixths

Each section is  $60^\circ$