

## Start at home

### Tsuba Story



.名月の御名代かや白うさぎ

meigetsu no gyomei dai ka ya shiro usagi  
are you the harvest moon's  
ambassador?  
white rabbit

- Haiku by Kobayashi Issa, 1819

### About the artist

When you first encounter a Japanese *tsuba*, you might mistake it for a coin or a belt buckle. These ornate metal discs with their decorative patterns, animals and flowers seem a world away from bloodthirsty samurai warfare. But *tsuba* were an important part of samurai long swords such as the *katana*. Sitting between a sword's grip and its deadly blade, a *tsuba* protects the warrior's hand and helps to give the weapon balance. From the peaceful Edo Period onwards, *tsuba* have become collectible ornamental treasures rather than tools of battle.

### About the work

When Autumn begins and the moon is bright and full, children in Japan are told the legend of *Tsuki no Usagi*: the Rabbit in the Moon. This humble rabbit showed great kindness to the Old Man of the Moon. He was rewarded with eternal life, and can still be seen in the markings of the moon today. This two hundred year-old *tsuba* depicts the moon rabbit dressed in an elegant kimono, pounding *mochi* (rice cakes) for his elderly companion. Several cultures throughout the northern hemisphere tell their own version of the moon rabbit tale.

Presented by



## Materials you need

- a sheet of black card
- scrap paper
- a lead pencil
- an eraser
- a roll of masking tape
- a white pencil
- a gold pen or texta
- scissors

## Take it further

The underside of this tsuba depicts a tortoise in the moonlight. Choose a different character or moment from your story to illustrate on the reverse side of your tsuba.

Use recycled cardboard to craft a whole samurai sword!

Many children in Australia don't know about the moon rabbit. Why do you think this might be? Does the moon look the same from everywhere in the world?

## Create your own Tsuba Story

- 1 Place the masking tape roll on the black card and trace around it to make a circle. Carefully cut out the circle shape.
- 2 Fold your circle in half. Draw a triangle in the centre, on the fold line.
- 3 Cut out the triangle, then unfold the circle. This is your basic tsuba shape! The diamond-shaped hole where you cut out the triangle is where the sword blade would go on a real tsuba.
- 4 Now think of a story to illustrate on your tsuba. This could be a fairytale, a favourite book or movie, or a folk story from your own culture... or you can make something up!
- 5 Choose your favourite character or moment from the story, and draw it on your tsuba in lead pencil. You could use scrap paper to work out your drawing if you like.
- 6 Now use white pencil to bring out your drawing. Try pressing gently to build up soft areas, and pressing hard to go over lines and bold details.
- 7 Use gold pen to embellish your tsuba with decorative lines, pattern or flowers.

*Tsuba, obverse; hare in the moon, pounding rice; reverse: a tortoise near a river, sparkles of moonlight on the water is on display in Gallery 20 as part of Samurai*

We would love to see your work! Ask your parent or carer to post a photo on Instagram and tag the Art Gallery of South Australia. Or you can email your photo to us at [public.programs@artgallery.sa.gov.au](mailto:public.programs@artgallery.sa.gov.au)

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