

Kite Making

From the Asia Society's *Video Letter from Japan: Making Things*, 1988, pp. 28-29.

Children in Japan often celebrate New Year's Day by flying long-tailed kites. The kites may be in any shape and may be very large or very small. They are usually made of paper or cloth over a wooden frame, but they also can be made of plastic. A favorite decoration is a dragon with a fierce face and a long tail. Some kites have faces of demons or brave soldiers painted on them.

Many Japanese children design and build their own kites. They make them look like butterflies, cranes or even fish. Some kites have wings or tails on them. Box kites are made for flying on very windy days.

The most important part of building kites is being able to fly them, either alone or with other people. Japanese children like to challenge others to launch and guide kites into the sky. Sometimes they have kite fights. In one area of Japan, knife-blades are fastened to kite strings so that those flying them can try to cut a competitor's string and make that kite fly off into the sky.

Materials

- A white plastic garbage bag or a piece of rice paper
- Markers (permanent markers are best if using plastic)
- Two wooden dowels-16" long -Packing tape (or equally strong tape)
- Kite string
- Cloth for tails

Directions:

1. Measure and cut the plastic garbage bag or paper to the dimensions shown in the diagram.
2. Decorate the kite with markers.
3. Tape dowels from A to B as shown in the diagram.
4. Attach tape to reinforce corners. Punch holes and attach string as shown. The length of string should be twice the width of the kite.
5. Make a loop at the center of the string and tie on the flying string.
6. Plan a kite-flying day. Divide the class into teams and see which group can get all of their kites in the air first, which kite can fly the highest, which can "dance" the most, which kite is most fierce looking, etc.

Discussion

1. You have just manufactured a useful object, a kite, from certain materials. Describe in words to each other what you have done. Did you start with raw materials (primary industry) or with already manufactured (secondary industry) products? What processes were used to make these products available to you?
2. Your kite started out as a piece of paper or plastic. What are some of the other things you could have made out of these materials? At what point did what you were making become a kite rather than some other product?
3. What do you think are the major differences between handmade and machine-made products? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of hand-crafting compared to industrial manufacture.

