

Introduction to Emaki

The *emakimono* or *emaki* is a horizontal illustrated narrative scroll that is distinctly Japanese. Its predecessors originated in India and, along with Buddhism, came to Japan through China. Scrolls were used to depict stories of historical events, provide religious commentary, illustrate works of fiction and poetry, or serve as a form of creative expression for the artist.

Scrolls were most often made of paper or occasionally from silk. They were attached to a wooden dowel at the left end and then rolled up for storage on shelves or in boxes. The story or narrative was read by unrolling the scroll a little at a time, from right to left, like Japanese is written. Japanese is traditionally written in vertical lines from right to left so the format of scrolls, with the text alternating with pictures, was a format compatible with Japanese writing conventions. The scenes developed in movie-like fashion, unrolling the narrative for the viewer. After the scroll was viewed, it was rolled up.

Pictures were drawn with ink, painted, or stamped. The ink or water-soluble colors were applied with animal-hair brushes. There was no way to correct a mistake or to repaint, as can be done with oil or acrylic paint. Planning ahead was important; because painting was done on the spot, the result was a spontaneity and freshness to the work. Work was intense because a single brush stroke could ruin a scroll.

Scrolls were generally 8 to 20 inches in height and could reach up to 60 feet in length. A story could take from one to as many as ten scrolls. Scrolls were enjoyed as they were unrolled with one or two feet viewed at a time. The gradual revealing of the story was what gave the scroll its life; the effect is lost when the whole length is spread out. Some of the scenes were independent, and some were pictures that evolved from the right to the left within one "frame." The artist illustrated time and place as the scroll was unrolled.

A feature of note is the absence of definite borders for the scenes. In European, Indian, and Persian art, most pictures are carefully framed. Frequently in Japanese *emaki*, diagonal lines of buildings and slanting spaces are used to restrict the focus of attention and to highlight certain features. A diagonal structure that runs down the right will point to a certain event or object at the left side of a scene. Figures leaving always face left and those arriving always face right.

The Japanese were the first to develop this genre, which is thought to have influenced the later development of woodblock prints. (Some scholars even claim a link between *emaki* and *manga* and *anime*, but others refute the claim.) The typically Japanese form of painting seen in the *emaki*, depicting local life and landscape, is known as *yamato-e*, signifying a native Japanese subject matter. The *yamato-e* developed during the Heian period. Previously, Chinese scenery and styles dominated Japanese art.

The most famous Japanese narrative hand scroll that was created during the late Heian period is the *Genji Monogatari emaki*. It depicts important scenes from *The Tale of Genji*, Japan's first and perhaps most important novel. The *Shigisan engi emaki* (*Legends of Mt. Shigi*) illustrates a folktale about the miracles associated with the founding of a temple. The *Ban Dainagon ekotoba* (*The Tale of the Courtier Ban Dainagon*) is an historical account about court intrigue, concerning events of the Ōtemmon Conspiracy. The *Chōjū giga* (*Scroll of Frolicking Animals*) is a humorous caricature of animals acting like humans.

It is unclear who created most of these scrolls. Only the *Ban Dainagon ekotoba* can be confidently attributed to the court painter Tokiwa Mitsunaga. Some scholars attribute the *Chōjū giga* and the *Shigisan engi* scrolls to the Buddhist clergyman Toba Sōjō. The *Genji Monogatari emaki* is believed to date from the first half of the twelfth century, as is the *Chōjū giga*. The *Shigisan engi emaki* dates from after 1150, and the *Ban Dainagon ekotoba* was created between 1157 and 1180.

Chōjū Giga (Scroll of Frolicking Animals)

Chōjū giga is an unusual scroll because of the use of animals and the lack of text or writing. Most scrolls have a narrative in calligraphy that accompanies the paintings. Because there is no narrative in the *Chōjū giga*, its purpose or intent is unclear.

The *Chōjū giga (Scroll of Frolicking Animals)* is attributed to the monk Toba Sōjō and is at the Kōzan-ji temple in Kyoto. There are four scrolls in all. The scenes on the *Scroll of Frolicking Animals* can be divided into five different scenes. The scroll begins with rabbits and monkeys swimming and playing in water. Then the action switches to rabbits and frogs in an archery tournament. Next is a festival scene, followed by frogs and rabbits wrestling. The final scene shows a monkey as a priest giving an offering to a fat frog seated on a lotus leaf throne, an image that mirrors representations of the Buddha. He sits next to a leafless tree with an owl. Three clerics represented by two foxes and a monkey seem to be reacting to the ceremony. A fox and a rabbit hold Buddhist rosaries and seem to be praying at this Buddhist ceremony.

This scroll has been named a National Treasure in Japan. Art critics highlight the remarkable composition and masterful use of ink and brush. The brush strokes have been described as delicate and bold with simple lines. The effect is light and lively, which creates the humor in the panels. The scroll features lots of curves, and angular brushstrokes and lines are varied in width to show motion and action. Empty space and action are balanced in the scroll. Notice how the composition is asymmetrical. The mood, tone, or emotion suggests humor and playfulness in a fantasy world.

Many theories exist to explain why this scroll was painted. It may have been created simply for entertainment, as a commentary on Buddhist rituals, or as a satire on court and religious life. Some think the scroll is commenting on the changes in the late Heian period. The exquisite high culture of the nobility was losing control of the government as the warrior class was gaining power. Competition between different Buddhist sects had seen warring monks competing for power. During this time, there was an increase in Buddhist ceremonies and rituals to honor the imperial family and to protect its well-being. These rituals were performed to insure the power and interests of imperial control. The ceremonial rituals were possibly the target for parody and satire in the *Chōjū giga*. The changes from imperial authority to rule by an aristocracy and then back to control by ex-emperors created conflict and insecurity.

In many periods of history, humor, satire, and parody have been used to express concern about political, social, economic, and cultural changes. Some art historians think the *emaki* is the beginning of a cartoon tradition, with the *Scroll of Frolicking Animals* being one of the first examples. Later, this tradition would influence woodblock prints. Some scholars even claim that the *emaki* influenced *manga* and eventually *anime*, but others refute this claim.

Genji Monogatari Emaki (The Illustrated Tale of Genji)

Genji Monogatari emaki reflects a connection between *emaki* and literature. The *monogatari* or romantic tales were a natural way to read and enjoy a famous tale in convenient scroll form. An illustrated narration of *The Tale of Genji*, the *Genji Monogatari emaki*, depicts important scenes from Japan's first and perhaps most important novel. Combining painting, calligraphy, literature, and papercraft, the *Genji Monogatari emaki* has been studied for clues to aristocratic life and culture in the world of Heian Japan. The tale, which relates the life and loves of the emperor's son Genji, provides a fictional description of court life. Genji is a romantic, handsome, cultured man who has many loves. Heartbreak, death, ghosts, flirtations, and court intrigue are explored in the novel. Scholars have used the novel and the *emaki* as sources for learning about court life in Heian Japan. At court, demonstrating the ability to compose poetry, draw calligraphy, dress luxuriously, and outwit your companions was important. How you acted, who you knew, and where you came from were also of utmost importance. The *Genji Monogatari emaki* illustrates the artistic and complicated relationships of the times.

Only a few scenes of the scroll now exist due to frequent fires and the effects of time on these works on paper. Scholars believe that originally all 54 chapters were illustrated, with one to three paintings per chapter. Scholars believe that teams of artists and noblemen worked on the project. First a scene was sketched with fine black lines in ink. Then layers of opaque paint were applied—a technique called *tsukuri-e* or “makeup.” Last, the details of the faces were added. The formula for this was “a line for the eyes, a hook for the nose,” or *hiki-me kagi-bana*.

Court life was ruled by a strict etiquette. Dignity and manners were very important. People's emotions were controlled and not expressed. People did have feelings, of course, and the *Genji Monogatari emaki* brilliantly tackles these emotional experiences. Mood is shown not with facial expressions, which would go against the highly refined court manners, but with formally posed figures placed in strategic architectural locations. Through the composition of space and the arrangement of walls, screens, and doors, the moving experiences are expressed. The figure in the space acts as a metaphor for the emotions felt in the narrative, capturing the moment in quiet and emotional intensity. The colors and patterns were carefully chosen to create mood as well. Each scene stands alone with beautiful calligraphy.

Notice that the inside of the house is shown by the removal of the ceiling to show the interior on different planes in slanting arrangements. The figures are big masses and are organized on planes one in front of another.

One theme in *The Tale of Genji* is that all acts have consequences, a central Buddhist belief. People are rewarded with good fortune if they do good works; sins bring misfortune. In the picture from the chapter called “*Suzumushi*” (“The Bell Cricket”), Genji is visiting Reizei, the emperor. The nobility and imperial court think that Reizei is Genji's half-brother, but he is actually Genji's son from an affair with his father's wife (Genji's stepmother). The composition of the picture creates physical and emotional distance between the two men. Facing each other at the left, they seem not to be talking. At the right, the figures are in different colors and seem to be part of a different world than Genji and Reizei.

In the second panel selection, Genji faces another emotional challenge. In this illustration from the “*Kashiwagi*” (“The Oak Tree”) chapter, Genji is in the upper left, holding a son Genji must say is his own; the child is really his youngest wife’s from an extramarital affair. This scene is of a ceremony honoring the newborn. As the viewer reads from right to left, first there is the bottom of a twelve-layered robe, the clothing of a lady-in-waiting. Next is a curtain; above it are plates with food for the ceremony. The child’s mother is the pile of clothing at the bottom left. Genji sits cramped in the upper left corner stuffed into the sharply slanting floor where he can barely raise his head. Does he look like he has been punished for something he has done? This is a good example of how emotions were expressed in the composition of the panel.

Ban Dainagon Ekotoba (The Tale of the Courtier Ban Dainagon)

Ban Dainagon ekotoba (The Tale of The Courtier Ban Dainagon) is an *emakimono* (hand scroll painting) depicting the events of the Ōtemmon Conspiracy, an event of Japan's early Heian period. The painting is attributed to Tokiwa Mitsunaga, who is believed to have painted it during the late Heian period.

During Heian times, there was competition for power. The limited number of positions in the court resulted in struggles within families and between families. Many different ways were used to get ahead. A family could gain power by marriage, by doing brave deeds, by writing or painting great works of art, or in some cases by murder, warfare, and deceit. This *emaki* tells of this kind of historical intrigue.

The full-color scroll depicts the events of March 866, in which Ban Dainagon, a local government minister, set fire to the Ōtemmon gate of Kyoto. He blamed one of his political rivals, Minister Minamoto no Makoto, for the fire. The *Ban Dainagon ekotoba* narrates the incidents surrounding the fire. The first scroll of the *Ban Dainagon ekotoba* centers on the fire and the excited crowds. The second scroll highlights a fight between two boys. This fight resulted in the true story of who set the fire being told. The third scroll shows the trial of Ban Dainagon and the tragic effects of his banishment on his family.

The panel you are examining dramatizes the fire at the main gate of the palace. Two different methods create the action and movement. The first technique, where pigment is built up on the surface, is called *tsukuri-e* or "makeup." The heavy black smoke is a good example of use of this technique. The second technique is the lively and free flowing lines of the figures. These lines emphasize the movement away from the dark massive fire. What will happen to the people as they run away? The contrast of color between the lighter hues of the crowd and fiery red flames creates movement and emotion. The individual expressions on the common people show shock and amazement as they run away. The scene is so vivid, the viewer feels the crowd's fear and the heat of the fire.

The scroll uses an ingenious plan to tell its story. The story continues from the edge of each picture to create successive scenes showing the passing of time. One scene moves into another in a movie-like fashion. This effect was entirely new for its time.

Shigisan Engi Emaki (Legends of Mt. Shigi)

Some *emaki* were connected to literature, and *engi* tales were a natural way to read and enjoy a famous story in convenient hand scroll form. The *Shigisan engi emaki (Legends of Mt. Shigi)* draws on folklore to tell of miracles attributed to the monk Myōren, who founded the temple of Chōgōsonshi-ji near Nara in the latter part of the ninth century. One scroll is the story of Myōren and his relationship with the rich man, Yamazaki. The second is Engi Kanji, the story about Myōren curing the emperor, and the third is Ama-gimi, the search of Myōren's sister, a nun, to find Myōren.

Buddhism was central to life in Heian Japan and affected how people lived their daily lives. Prayers, rituals, and Buddhist ways of thinking influenced literature, government, architecture, life, and death. Monks and priests were important people who taught the Buddhist way of life. There were many stories about monks because of their role as influential teachers. The wealthy nobility, people in government, and the everyday folk relied on monks and priests for advice in their spiritual and daily lives. The *Shigisan engi emaki* shows different aspects of the role of religion in Heian daily life.

In the panel from the first scroll, Myōren makes a magic rice bowl fly into the air, taking the rich man's rice storehouse to the top of a mountain. In another scene, bags of rice fly out of the storehouse when the rich man does not provide a bowl of rice to Myōren.

The freely drawn action and movement are painted by lively and varied brush strokes. The line work is done in light ink with solid black used occasionally for hair. Sometimes there is no color at all. Strong colors are used in some parts to highlight items, like the gold bowl. In general, thin pigments were used in order to avoid hiding the outlines of the figures. The main color scheme is light gray, blue, and yellow.

The rice bowl is carrying away the storehouse because the rich man, who usually provided Myōren with food whenever the magic rice bowl appeared, was busy. When the bowl arrived to be filled, he became annoyed because he always had to fill the bowl with food. He threw the bowl into the storehouse and locked it in. But the magic bowl slipped out, and the storehouse started to fly away with all the rice bales in it. One of the selected pictures from the scroll illustrates this event. There is great excitement as the rice bowl lifts the storehouse. The figures in the scroll panel include three travelers, servants with the rich man, and priests—all of whom seem to be running after the building. The action seems to happen right in front of the viewer's eyes as the travelers run through the gate and the rich man prepares to get on his horse. The composition is one of action and movement. The diagonal lines of the fence add to this movement to the left with the corner of the storehouse just out of view.

The scroll uses this ingenious method to unfold the events in the story. The story continues from the edge of each picture to create successive scenes showing the passing of time. One scene moves into another in a movie-like fashion. This effect was entirely new for its time.

The story continues with the rich man coming to Myōren to get his warehouse back. Myōren plans to keep the warehouse; however, he will send the rice bales back. So he puts one

rice bale in the magic bowl and then, like a flock of geese, all the rice bales leave the storehouse and follow the magic bowl back to the home of the rich man. In the selection depicting this scene, the movement again carries to the left. Light calligraphic lines draw the mountain and deer. The bales become smaller and smaller as they fly off the page.

There is a great emphasis on the humor of the moment in the drawing of common people and this folktale. This style and technique make this *emaki* one of the examples of the beginning of a cartoon tradition in Japan. Later this will influence woodblock prints. Some scholars even claim that this style influenced *manga* and eventually *anime*, but others disagree.

Scroll Analysis

1. Observe

Make a check mark by the characteristics that describe the mood, tone, or emotion of the scroll. If more than one applies, check those that best describe what you see.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet | <input type="checkbox"/> Active |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Humorous | <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noble, aristocratic | <input type="checkbox"/> Dynamic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Common, mundane | <input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally intense |

Would the nobility, everyday people, Buddhists, and/or government officials enjoy looking at this *emaki*? Explain your answer.

2. Analyze

Study the panels from the scroll for a couple of minutes. Form an overall impression of the pictures and then look at the details. Divide the pictures into quadrants and study each section to see what you observe.

What is the subject(s) of the scroll? Look at the objects, people and/or animals, activities, and location in the scroll panels. Describe what you see.

List three things that you think are important in the scroll.

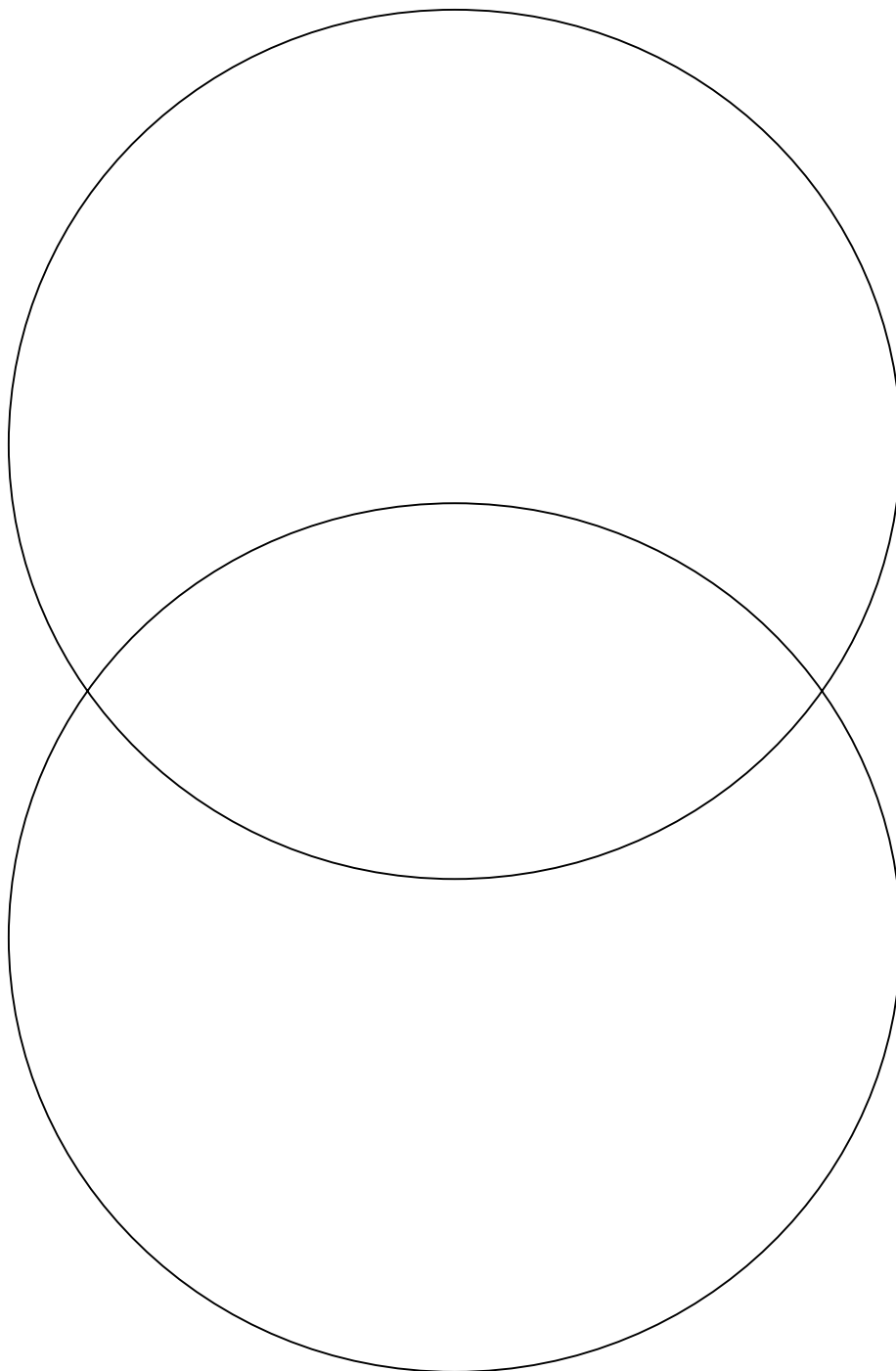
3. Infer

What might the painter have been trying to communicate? What evidence supports your answer?

Based on the *emaki* you examined and the information on the handout, list three things you might infer about religion or court life or life in Japan in the Heian period.

Scroll Comparison Diagram

Put the name of one scroll above the top circle. Put the name of the other scroll below the bottom circle. With your partner, identify the similarities between your scrolls, looking at art characteristics, content, and purpose. List this information in the space where the circles overlap. Identify differences by listing each scroll's unique features in the circle representing that scroll.



Creating a Poster for a Heian *Emaki* Exhibit

Your group is going to create a poster for a museum exhibit of the four hand scrolls studied in this lesson. The scrolls are being exhibited to teach the public about Japan in the late Heian period. It is your task to create something that will draw people to the exhibit. Decide what would be interesting and help give the public an overview of how Japan in the late Heian period is represented by these scrolls.

The poster your group creates should:

- Be presented **in color** on a standard piece of posting paper.
- Include **two to four illustrations** that highlight or feature parts of the scrolls (your art talent is not what's important here!).
- Highlight two to four **characteristics of Japan** in the late Heian period that museum-goers will learn from the exhibit.
- List **significant dates** for Heian Japan.
- Include a paragraph that clearly presents **your interpretation** of Japan in the late Heian period. How does your group summarize what took place, why it occurred, and why it is important or distinctive?
- Give the title, location, and dates of the exhibit.
- Be neat, easily readable, and understandable on its own.

The finished posters will be hung around the room. The class will “read the walls” in preparation for a discussion of the question: What can we learn about Japan in the late Heian period from the scrolls?

A Brief History of Heian Japan

The Heian period is remembered for the classic culture of the aristocracy and the imperial court. The emperor was sovereign but the nobility held power for most of the Heian period until the end of the Heian when ex-emperors controlled the government. Large military families formed around members of the court aristocracy. These families, mainly the Fujiwara family, gained prestige.

Court life in Heian Japan was sophisticated, full of intrigue and a level of refinement that has never been equaled. The highly developed cultural and artistic court life was characterized by a preoccupation with beauty. Dress, manners, daily pastimes, and etiquette were all guided by aesthetics and rituals. A life of pleasure involved court festivals, attention to beauty, love affairs, and skill in poetry, painting, calligraphy, and music. The poetry, literature, and art from this period were inspirations for future generations. The development of two new forms of Japanese writing created a unique Japanese vernacular literature, much of it written by women from the court. *The Tale of Genji*, written by Lady Murasaki c. 1000 C.E., is still considered by some as the greatest piece of Japanese literature. The illustrated hand scroll from the first half of the twelfth century is a National Treasure. Much of what we know about court life comes from these sources. The Heian period produced paintings of court life reflecting the aristocratic culture, religious art that influenced the growth in Buddhism, and secular art that honored the Japanese landscape, subjects, and taste.

Buddhism spread throughout Japan. Two major sects, Tendai and Shingon Buddhism, competed for followers, prestige, and patronage from the royal family and nobility. Pure Land Buddhism, based on personal salvation, emerged in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Religion and government depended on each other, and the Heian culture in general reflected the secular and religious role of Buddhism in daily life. The secular power of the clergy grew. As their wealth increased, so did the competition for patronage from the nobility and imperial family. Monks participated in the secular and religious affairs of the state. The monasteries, the imperial court, and the aristocracy thus had close ties. The imperial court and the aristocracy depended on monks for Buddhist rituals for health, wealth, good weather, and protection for the state, to name a few. Rivalry between the sects led to the growth of temples and shrines, intimidation of officials, and violent protests outside Fujiwara and other noble families' homes. There was no separation of church and state.

Late in the Heian period, imperial authority reemerged, with ex-emperors being influential over the affairs of the day.

Art Characteristics

Make a check by the characteristics that describe your scroll selection. If more than one applies, check those that best describe what you see.

1. Look at the scroll panel's characteristics. Notice how the painting is done with brush using ink on paper. What do you notice about the brush technique? Which of the following describes the brush strokes?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Delicate lines | <input type="checkbox"/> Colorful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bold lines | <input type="checkbox"/> Free, flowing, lively |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Simple lines | <input type="checkbox"/> Mainly straight lines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complex lines | <input type="checkbox"/> Mainly curving and angular lines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tight lines, constrained | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lines vary in width to show motion and action | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Few brushstrokes, mainly shapes and textures | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mainly outlines with some filling in of detail | |

2. How would you describe the use of color?

- Dark colors that are opaque and intense
- Light colors
- Patterns and textures
- Colorful
- No or little color with everything expressed by the line

3. What do you notice about the use of space and composition?

- Some empty spaces give room for movement and change.
- Composition is asymmetrical.
- Sometimes feels cramped and tight.
- Image and action go to the left.
- Feels movie-like.

4. What do you notice about the faces?

- Emotions are conveyed.
- Everyone is different.
- One stroke depicts eyes and nose.

5. What mood, tone, or emotion does the scroll create?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet | <input type="checkbox"/> Active |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Humorous | <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noble, aristocratic | <input type="checkbox"/> Common, mundane |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally intense | <input type="checkbox"/> Dynamic and active |

