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TEACHING TUESDAY

KUMIHIMO

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If you've ever looked closely at Japanese samurai armor, or even a kimono or haori jacket, you may have noticed their intricately woven cords that tie everything together. These cords are made by kumihimo (組み紐), the traditional Japanese form of braid-making. First created as a form of finger-loop braiding, it later evolved into a way of making complex braids in a short amount of time.

Meaning to gather or combine cord or thread, the earliest recorded use of kumihimo dates back to the Nara period. Strong but slender, the cords were used to tie kimonos together, and also for decoration and religious ceremonies. The earliest kumihimo are generally monochromatic or limited in color, as they were all created by hand. In the Heian period, the development of kumihimo looms, called the takadai and the marudai, permitted more complex and colorful patterns. Kumihimo reached their most prominent use in the Kamakura era under the samurai class, who used the cords to tie together both their armor and their horses' armor.

Today, kumihimo cords are most commonly used as ties on haori jackets and obijimes for obi. There are many different styles of kumihimo, each developed by different kumihimo masters, including the round braid, half round braid, hollow braid, and spiral braid. These techniques are now taught worldwide, and are still an important part of Japanese culture and fashion!