

Mondays with MoMA



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Step 1 Look closely

Questions

1. What do you notice about this object?
2. What are some different ways this object could be used?
3. Why do you think it was designed to serve multiple purposes?

Step 2 Learn more

This Swiss Officers' Knife is a multitool object with 16 blades and attachments that can perform 29 functions. The first knife was designed in 1897 by Swiss company Victorinox to replace knives imported from Germany. Designer Karl Elsener placed a white cross and shield on the outside to distinguish the knife from other brands. They became internationally known when American soldiers started using them during World War II. Because the original Swiss name (Schweizer Offiziersmesser) was difficult for Americans to pronounce, soldiers called it the Swiss Army Knife.

There are 100 different models of Swiss Army Knives. Older models contained a blade, can opener, toothpick, tweezers, corkscrew, Phillips-head screwdriver, and magnifying glass. Some newer models of the Swiss Army Knife might include a USB flash drive, digital clock, a device that measures altitude, LED light, and a laser pointer. NASA astronauts have a Victorinox knife as part of their standard toolkit.

Step 3 Activity: Design a useful tool

Materials: pencil, paper, colored pencils, markers or crayon (*optional*)

1. Identify a task (or tasks) that you do every day. What about this task is challenging or inefficient? How could it be made easier?
2. Design a tool that can help you complete this task. Your solution could be one tool or a combination of several.
3. Think about how your tool will look. What shapes, colors, and forms will you use in your design?
4. Create a sketch of your new tool.
5. Optional: Make a 3D model of your tool out of recycled cardboard or any other materials you have.

Step 4 Share!

Share your useful tool with a classmate and tell them how you would use it. Or, you can email a photo of it to us at MoMA: schoolprograms@moma.org.



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Image: Victorinox Swiss Officer's' Knife Champion (no. 5012). After a design by Karl Elsener. 1968. Plastic and stainless steel. Gift of Golden West Merchandisers, USA