

Celtic Knot Challenge

Celtic knots are a feature of Celtic culture and are used widely in jewellery and various forms of decoration. The knot has no beginning or end and may therefore symbolise the circle of life, the cycle of the seasons and eternity.



In modern times, we often think of Celtic design and art as specifically Irish, Scottish or Welsh. However, many of the first examples of the Celtic Knot can be traced from the southern part of the land that was called Gaul, which is now in modern day France.

The designs for these knots were used to express people's religious beliefs before Christianity came to influence the Celts. However, around 450 AD, people started to convert to Christianity and the knots were adapted to decorate early Christian monuments and manuscripts. There are many examples of this kind of artwork in Scotland. For example, in Govan Old Parish Church in Glasgow, graves decorated with Celtic Knots were found that may date back to the 5th century. In fact, the quality of the carving on the graves is so good that it is thought that these were the burial stones of the ancient kings of Strathclyde.

Not very much is known about what the original Celtic symbols mean, as very little exists in terms of written records from the time before Christianity. We do know, however, that these people wore clothes, jewellery, weapons and armour that were decorated by symbols. We can only guess at their meanings, but it is possible that the ancient Celts believed that these symbols had powerful religious and mystical powers that had the ability to ward off evil spirits and bad luck. Here are some ideas about what this design might mean.

The circle may signify perfection and protection. It might also represent the sun or the world.

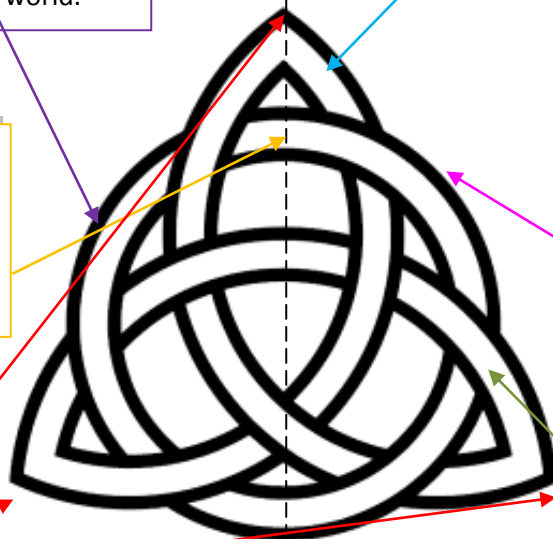
The shape is symmetrical. This might suggest the concept of harmony; humankind in harmony with the gods or the universe.

The three points could have signified earth, sea and sky to the ancient Celts. Early Christians adopted this knot as a symbol of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The triangle shape is called "triquetra" as it has three points. You can draw it without lifting your pencil from the paper so it could mean eternity as it has no beginning and no end.

The shapes are all linked together and can't be undone. This might mean unity.

Each of the three sections of the "triquetra" looks like a leaf or a fish. It could represent the sea or the oak tree.



Look at these other examples of Celtic designs. What ideas do you think that the original designers were trying to convey by these symbols? Can you offer some ideas about what they might signify? Remember to give some reasons to explain your thinking.



Taking it Further

There are lots of examples of Celtic design everywhere you look. Why do you think that modern designers continue to use these ancient patterns? Take some time to look around your local community and find some examples. You'll find it used in:

- architecture
- stained glass
- jewellery
- advertising and packaging
- textiles and fashion
- signs and labels

Gather together examples of what you find and make a collage or mood board. Now you have looked at lots of examples, you can create your own Celtic design. You could devise a set of success criteria so you and your partner can evaluate how successful your design is.

Animals and nature are often seen within a design, so you may choose to include some of the ideas and key features from the creation myth if you wish. You could also think about ways your design can demonstrate or symbolise some of the things that have special significance for you.

You will need to think about some of the main features of Celtic Knots such as:

- Symbolism
- Symmetry
- Shape

Once your design is completed, give it to your partner. See if he or she can work out what you were trying to symbolise in your art work.