

Lesson Plan: Coat of Arms Project

Social Studies or History or Art

Grade Level: 4-6

To build better behavior and foster a sense of community/collaboration/cooperation in the classroom. From several lesson plans on family history and making coat of arms, I have tweaked things and put this one together to help create “class glue.”

The class will already be composed of three or four teams (depending upon class size) who collaborate together. They will have already studied coat of arms and family mottos, and perhaps have already made individual coats of arms.

This assignment may lead to some rituals and fun activities within the class.

Assignment:

Design a Coat of Arms that **represents your class team**. The colors, symbols, and/or animals you chose should reflect your team, your personalities, and your goals.

The students will have examples of coat of arms to look at.

Make sure you complete all of the following components of the project:

- 1) design and draw your Coat of Arms: background design; animals/symbols; colors
- 2) write your personal motto in the banner area below the shield
- 3) describe your design in a paragraph on the back of the shield: Why did you choose the colors, symbols/animals, and motto you did? How does this shield represent you?

Description:

Coats of Arms date to the early Middle Ages. In the early twelfth century, helmets and other armor began making it difficult to tell armed warriors apart. One man in armor looked a lot like another, so the coat of arms was used to identify a knight in battle. In a society where few people could read and write, pictures were very important. The solution was for each knight or soldier to paint something personal on his shield. A coat of arms was more like a label for instant identification than it was like a painting. You wanted to know instantly who was coming toward you, so you could know which side he was on. **These designs were important in battle, but they also functioned like team uniforms when knights met in tournaments.** Over time, shield emblem designs became enduring symbols of their

owners and of their owners' families.

Shield Background/Color Use — *The assignment can be this structured, or not, depending upon teacher preference:*

The background of a shield is called the *field*. The basic rule is “metal on color, or color on metal, but not metal on metal or color on color.” This means that the field on your shield can be either a metal or a color. The main object or objects should be a color if the field is a metal, or it should be a metal (silver or gold) if the field is a color. If there is another object on top of the main object, it should be a metal if the background is metal, or a color if the background is a color. It does not have to be the same metal or color. You can have color-metal-color or metal-color-metal. The rule “metal on color or color on metal” is not always used when the charge is *proper*. Proper means in the most common colors found in nature for that object. A *bear proper* would be brown and a *tree proper* would be green with a brown trunk.

However, if the background is divided (such as per pale), those are considered as being *next to* each other, not *on* each other, so you can have two or three colors or two metals. This rule about colors and metals provides contrast, making the shields bright and easy to see. If you have a shield with a circle with a horse on it, the base color, the circle and the horse have to follow the metal/color/metal or color/metal/color rule. A gold shield with a green circle and a silver horse would be correct (metal/color/metal); a gold shield with a green circle and a black horse (metal/color/color) would not. However, if you have a horse below a circle, both the horse and circle have to be a color if the shield is a metal, or metal(s) if the shield is a color.

Charge:

A charge is what is shown on the base color of your shield. Animals were frequently used as a main charge. They were not drawn to look three dimensional, but were shown as if they were flat and with the most characteristic parts of them the most obvious. Generally the animals chosen were fierce, and they were often shown in postures of combat. Whatever their main color, fierce animals were often shown with red tongue and claws. Small details on a charge do not have to follow the metal/color rule. A gold griffin can have red claws on a blue field.

Heraldic Colors:

Yellow or Gold - Generosity
White or Silver - Peace & Sincerity
Black - Constancy (& sometimes Grief)
Blue - Loyalty & Truthfulness
Red - Military Fortitude & Magnanimity
Green - Hope, Joy & sometimes Loyalty
Purple - Royal Majesty, Sovereignty & Justice

Heraldic Animals:

Bear - Protectiveness
Bee - Industriousness
Camel - Perseverance
Dog - Loyalty
Eagle - Leadership & Decisiveness
Dragon - Defender of Treasure
Falcon or Hawk - Eagerness
Fox - Cleverness
Griffin (part eagle, part lion) - Bravery
Horse - Readiness to Serve
Lion - Courage
Pelican - Generosity & Devotion
Raven – Constancy
Snake - Ambition
Stag, Elk or Deer - Peace & Harmony
Tiger - Fierceness & Valor
Unicorn - Extreme courage
Wolf - Constant Vigilance

Heraldic Symbols:

Axe - Dutiful
Bridge - (signifies a governor or magistrate)
Crescent - Enlightenment
Crosses - Christian sentiments
Crown - Authority
Fire - Zeal
Flaming Heart - Passion
Hand - Faith, Sincerity & Justice
Heart - Sincerity
Horns & Antlers - Fortitude
Lightning - Decisiveness
Moon - Serenity
Oyster Shell - Traveler
Ring - Fidelity
Scepter - Justice
Star - Nobility
Sun - Glory
Sword - Warlike
Tower or Castle - Fortitude & Protectiveness

The dragon and griffin are mythological animals which often combine characteristics believed to be found in more than one animal. The griffin was part eagle and part lion. Since the animals were symbols of qualities, such combination animals were meant to indicate a combination of those qualities.

Mottos:

Coats of Arms also often included a motto which expressed the ideals of the family, including loftily of virtue, courage, loyalty, strength, and faith. The following are some examples from the Middle Ages and a few from modern times.

British monarchy: *Dieu et mon droit* (God and my right)

British Order of the Garter: *Honi soit qui mal y pense* (Shamed be he who thinks ill of it)

Culpeper Family: *J'espere* (I hope)

Wilkinson Family: *Tenez le droit* (Hold the right)

West Point: *Duty, Honor, Country*

Other suggestions for mottos:

Be All In

Stay Strong

United We Stand

We Are Not Quitters

Onward and Upward

We Can Do Hard Things