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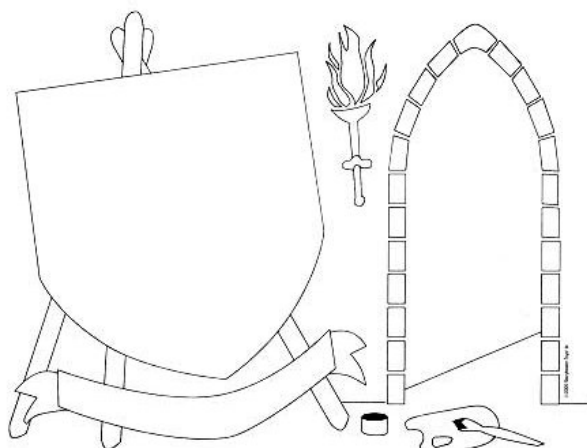
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Design Your Own Coat of Arms Lesson Plan

Brief Description:

Creating a Coat of Arms is a wonderful challenge for students because it obliges kids to weigh personal values and think about how to symbolically and artistically represent them. There are certainly traditions to heraldry, but very few firm rules. Heraldic design has always been an opportunity for great personal expression.

Keywords:

Coat of arms, heraldry, chivalry, medieval Middle Ages, family history, fleur-de-lys.

Materials Needed :

Tapestry template (see above), colored pencils, crayons, or markers. Arthouse is recommended

Lesson Plan - Motivation :

Imagine you're a knight in battle, you can't tell friend from foe, and then you realize your friends don't recognize you either. You need a new plan. This is it.

Lesson Plan - Background and Historical Information :

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. The solution was for each knight or soldier to paint something personal on their shield. These designs were important in battle, but they also functioned like team uniforms when knights met in tournaments. Overtime, shield emblem designs became enduring symbols of their owners, and of their owners' families.

It became quite fashionable to have a "coat of arms", so people hired artists to design them. The designs weren't just used on shields. They were applied on tunics, saddle blankets, banners and tapestries. They were duplicated in sculpture and architectural features. They were used in signs and advertisements. They were carved into coins, jewelry (e.g. signet rings) and the personalized stamps for sealing letters.

Soon, Coats of Arms weren't just for soldiers! From about 1210 A.D., some priests are known to have had them. The first women known to have had their own coat of arms got them around 1220. Around 1230 towns and cities began having coats of arms. Tradesmen and even peasants started using coats of arms around 1250. In an era when few people could read or write, coats of arms made it easier for people to recognize each other's marks.

Before you design your own coat of arms, it'll be useful to look at a few traditional heraldic designs. Observe the traditional design elements. What do you think they symbolized for the people who chose to wear them? Below is a list of some elements you may want to include in your designs.

The Language of Heraldry

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

Example Coats of Arms:

Selected Provinces of Canada



Ontario



Manitoba



Northwest Territories



Yukon



Prince Edward Island



"The small under the protection of the great." - motto of Prince Edward Island

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- Double Eagle & 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:

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

Common Design Features (heraldic terminology):

- Bend - a diagonal stripe
- Chevron - an upside-down "V"
- Chief - broad stripe across top of shield
- Dexter - the righthand side of the shield (from its user's perspective)
- Ermine - a white fur pattern (with black tail tips)
- Fess - broad horizontal stripe through center
- Pale - broad vertical stripe through center
- Passant - an animal shown walking
- Rampant - an animal standing on hind legs
- Sinister - the lefthand side of the shield (from its user's perspective)

Other important design details:

Besides simple fields of color, a coat of arms may contain other design motifs, such as checkerboards, polka dots, or fur patterns. One traditional design rule is that two solid-color fields shouldn't appear side by side unless one of the two is "metallic". Even this "rule" has been broken by many famous and historical coats of arms.

Few laws have ever been passed about the design of coats of arms, and even fewer of have ever been enforced! However, most European nations began requiring registration of coats of arms by the seventeenth century. The registration requirements were somewhat like modern trademark laws - they were primarily intended to stop people from copying each other's designs.

Lesson Plan - A Few More Project Ideas:

Ask student's to interpret each other's designs. Have students create their personal designs in secret, and then have them try to identify each other by their designs. Have student's design a coat of arms for their school, or perhaps for their favorite sports teams. How about having students design coats of arms for characters in literature? For example, how would Gryffindor House and Slytherin House coats of arms differ? (The Harry Potter books are full of clues for this example, but there's still a lot of room for creative interpretation!)

Lesson Plan - Assessment

Make students stand up and present their coats of arms. Ask them to interpret each other's designs. Observe that ArtHouse is ideally suited for displaying student artwork for classroom presentations and discussions!

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