THE ORIGINS OF HERALDRY

It was during the early decades of the twelfth century, between the First and Second Crusades, that nobles, knights and princes began to identify themselves and their equipment, their shields in particular, by the use of simple figures in clear, contrasting colors.   This must be considered the origin of what is now called nothing new; it had been a feature of almost all ages and cultures, in Europe as well as elsewhere, since long before the twelfth century. The particular characteristic of these new shield devices was the fact that they remained more or less the same for each individual and then gradually became hereditary; that their use was extended to practically all classes and institutions in the community; and that this developed into a detailed and permanent system for the elaboration and application of the insignia within a short time.

The individual adopted the earliest arms at will, but from about 1400 onwards sovereigns began to grant insignia by means of letters patent, often, but by no means always, as the prerogative of the nobility. Families whose nobility originates in such letters patent or in similar elevations or creations are said to hold patents of nobility; the older aristocracy, whose origins are lost in the darkness of the Middle Ages, is known as the 'old nobility'. But concurrently with the granting of insignia by letters patent, people continued to assume insignia for themselves and, provided that devices were used that were not already the prerogative of others nor resembled another bearing too closely, this was tolerated, at least in the Middle Ages in most European countries.

From the warrior class the practice spread to the Church, to burghers and farmers, and to municipal governments, craft guilds, and other institutions. Almost from the beginning of heraldry, women, too, had the right to bear arms.

The word 'heraldry' is derived from the 'herald'. The herald of the Middle Ages was a messenger between rulers, a sort of ambassador, and he gradually became responsible for the organizing of state ceremonies and tournaments. Particularly in the case of tournaments it was of the greatest importance for him to be able to recognize the devices of the participants, and thus the herald became so expert in 'armory' that it was eventually named after him. Heralds attempted to work out registers in order to keep control of all the arms in use within their official sphere.

In Great Britain heralds have survived until the present day and still exercise a certain authority. In England this is invested in the College of Arms (the Corporation of Kings, Heralds and Pursuivants of Arms) and, and in Scotland, in the Office of Lord Lyon King of Arms. In other countries too there are offices, which deal with heraldic problems, particularly those of state and local government. This is true of Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Holland, Belgium, Spain, Ireland and South Africa. Most of these however are of more recent origin.

The principal component of a coat of arms is the shield, sometimes called the escutcheon, decorated with one or more devices or 'charges'; to this added the helmet with mantling and crest.

According to the bearer's rank, the fashion of the age or individual preference, there can be added coronets or other insignia of rank, insignia of office, supporters, mantling, badges, a scroll with motto, etc.

We know the colors of many very early arms only because the compilers of armorial rolls were such keen collectors. Even though it is not expressly mentioned by

the earliest authors, one quickly realizes when looking at these collections that in heraldry there are as few colors as there are modern traffic signs. There are, in fact, six: yellow, white, red, blue, black, and sometimes green; very occasionally we also find a purple tint, a mixture of red and blue known as purpure.

The basic rules for a heraldic painting stem from the function of arms as recognition sign on the battlefield. In every coat of arms, gold or silver – almost invariably represented by yellow and white – must appear at least once. These are the "metals" which in the classic heraldic traditions of medieval chivalry were always used alternately with the "colors". The colors in order of frequency of their appearance are red, blue, black, and green. They can be used for the ground of a shield or the coloring of a charge, but in each case the remaining parts should be in metal.

ASSIGNMENT

Design an escutcheon, a shield, for a personal coat of arms, decorating it with three to five features that depict you. Include appropriate colors. The shield should be approximately 2 ft. x 1 ½ ft. Be prepared to give an informal presentation (approximately three minutes), explaining your shield to the class.

SPEAKING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

A good presentation requires careful preparation. Make sure that your talk has a good introduction and conclusion. Try to arouse interest. Conclude strongly by summing up what you have said or by leaving in the mind of your audience a dominant impression of your talk. Look at your audience as you talk. Speak distinctly and pitch your voice so that you can easily be heard. Speak naturally as if you were conversing with friends. Rehearse your presentation. Use descriptive language. Enunciate clearly and accurately. Use nonverbal communication. Watch your posture. Establish good eye contact with your listeners. Choose gestures with care. Practice your speech at home in front of a mirror or ask a friend or family member to listen to and evaluate your speech or record your speech on audio- or videotape.

Be sure to review the grading rubric at the end of this handout.

EXAMPLES OF STUDENTS'
COATS OF ARMS

NAME:

DATE:

COAT OF ARMS EVALUATION FORM

RUBRIC SCALE: 5=Excellent

4=Very Good

3=Good

2=Fair

1=Poor

0= Unacceptable

ORAL PRESENTATION

CONTENT	FL SSS		POINTS
Interesting introduction	LA.C.3.4.2	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 1=	5
Clear statement of ideas	LA.C.3.4.2	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 2=	10
Clear organization of ideas	LA.C.3.4.2	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 2=	10
Conclusion	LA.C.3.4.2	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 1=	5
Effective use of language	LA.C.3.4.2	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 1=	5
Visual aid (Shield)	LA.C.3.4.2	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 4=	20
Communicates ideas through a work of art	VA.B.1.4.2	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 4=	20
DELIVERY	LA.C.3.4.1		
Eye contact	LA.C.3.4.1	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 1=	5
Volume	LA.C.3.4.1	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 1=	5
Pronunciation	LA.C.3.4.1	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 1=	5
Gestures	LA.C.3.4.1	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 1=	5
Poise and self-control	LA.C.3.4.1	0 1 2 3 4 5 x 1=	5
			100

COMMENTS:

Form created by

Cynthia Youngblood

Jay High, Santa Rosa