

# Background of Coats of Arms

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. Over time, 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  
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:**

Axe - Dutiful  
Bridge - (signifies a governor or magistrate)  
Crescent - Enlightenment  
Crosses - Christian sentiments  
Crown - Authority  
Fire - Zeal  
Flaming Heart - Passion  
Fleur-de-lys (stylized Iris flower) - Purity (associated with France)  
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

**Sample Coat of Arms**

