

# Family Coat of Arms Activity

**Grade:** Pre-K – 5 (though anyone can participate!)

## **Introduction:**

Hundreds of years ago, the royal families of Europe created crests and coats of arms to identify themselves on the battlefield and to represent their achievements and values. In the centuries that followed, other families also began adopting their own coats of arms to distinguish themselves, even if they were not of royal blood. Today, many families, as were as colleges and universities, the armed forces, and even entire towns and cities, cherish their crests and coats of arms as a part of their history and identity.

Creating a family coat of arms can be an engaging and meaningful way for family members to think about what makes their family special. This activity works well with elementary aged children, but it can be scaled to be more or less elaborate, and anyone in the family can participate!

## **Vocabulary:**

- Coat of Arms: A shield with symbols and figures that represent a family, person, a group or other organization (ex. a company, a town, or a college). Although once used as a way of clearly showing identity on a battlefield, it came to refer to a person and/or their family and their achievements and values.
- Crest: In heraldry, a symbol that sits on top of the coat of arms that also represents some aspect of a person or family. Originally, the crest was worn on top of a knight's helmet to identify him in battle, but like the coat of arms, the crest became more symbolic over time.

## **Materials:**

- Shield template (see below), or other paper
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- Glue sticks and scissors (optional)
- Magazines (optional)

## **Activity Structure:**

### **Step 1: Talk about coats of arms, and about what makes your family unique.**

- Ask your child if they have heard of a coat of arms before. If they are not familiar with the term, review the definitions under the “Vocabulary” section of this activity.
  - Note: Depending on the age of the child, the definition included may be too complex. It may be simpler to say that a coat of arms tells about the person and family who owns it.
  - It may also be helpful (and fun!) to look at some examples of coats of arms and heraldic symbols in history. See the “Resources” section at the end of this activity for a few helpful links!
- Start brainstorming as a family about the content of your coat of arms. Here are several questions to help generate some ideas:
  - What makes your family different or special from other families?
  - What is your favorite part of being in your family?
  - What makes your family strong? Or cool?
  - What is important to your family? What do you all value?
  - What do your family members have in common?
  - What do you and your family members like to do together?

Once you have thought through some of these questions, you're ready to begin designing your coat of arms.

## **Step 2: Create your coat of arms!**

- As a family, decide how you want to design your coat of arms. Some questions to consider:
  - What shape will you use as the foundation? Traditionally, a coat of arms was placed on a shield, but you could use any shape (circle, triangle, rectangle, square, etc.) of your choice to serve as a foundation.
  - Which symbols will you use on your coat of arms? These symbols should represent or stand for aspects of your family.
    - Note: For young children, the concept of “symbols” may be difficult to understand. Ask them what their favorite thing about their family is, and help them come up with something that represents it. Allow them to draw it, or draw it for them and let them color it.
  - How many symbols will you use? If you have four family members, will you choose four symbols, or more?
  - How will you organize your coat of arms? Coats of arms are often divided into three or four sections, but they do not have to be. You could divide your coat of arms into sections for each family member, if desired.
  - Will the colors you choose have specific meanings? Will these colors help describe your family?
- Once the design has been agreed upon, color each symbol with markers, crayons, or colored pencils. Alternatively, you could search for images in magazines or on the Internet and create a collage with glue and scissors.

## **Step 3: Share it!**

- Take pictures of your coat of arms and show it to your extended family and friends. Be sure to explain your symbols—as with coats of arms of old, they may not be as obvious to the beholder as they are to the creator!

## **Resources:**

- “Online Exhibitions” (College of Arms). A series of online exhibitions of primary sources featuring ancient coats of arms and crests, from the institution that regulates heraldry in the United Kingdom. <https://www.college-of-arms.gov.uk/about-us/online-exhibitions>.
- “Coat of Arms Glossary” (MyBlazon). An illustrated glossary of symbols in European coats of arms and crests. <http://www.myblazon.com/heraldry/glossary>.

