

Children's Heraldry Presentation

Suitable for elementary-school-aged children

by Lady Esclarmonde de Porcairages

This presentation is written in complete sentences to keep ideas clear. Please feel free to use your own words as you present and expand on ideas depending on time allotted, audience interest, and the age of the children.

Questions to ask kids are in bold

Answers and notes to speaker are in italics

Section headings are underlined

Note to speaker: NEVER start talking unless the kids are quiet. If you start talking when they are talking – at any time during the presentation – they will only learn that it is OK to interrupt because you don't care. ALWAYS wait for silence. Ask for it if you have to; say "Please quiet down" or "Please finish your conversation later." By the way, saying "please" to kids can go a long way to earning their respect.

Introduction

Greeting, everyone! I've come to talk with you about something very important in the Middle Ages, called heraldry. I'm going to try to show you how heraldry is really a lot like some things you are familiar with. While I'm talking, I will be asking questions to get you involved and to see if you're listening. If you want to answer, please raise your hand and I will call on you. OK?

Voice Heraldry

How many of you like to watch professional sports? Which ones do you watch?

Hundreds of years ago, in the Middle Ages, people played sports, too. But they played different sports. **What kind of sports did they have?** (*If no one mentions them, describe tournament fighting and jousting.*)

How many of you have been to a live professional game?

Is it sometimes hard to see what happened, or which players are doing what?

If you can't see what happened, or which player did what, how do you find out? (*If no one mentions it, bring up announcers and announcements made on electronic display boards.*)

People in the Middle Ages had the same problem sometimes, except they didn't have instant replays because there was no television. Writing things on a board wouldn't help, either, because most people couldn't read. They did not have microphones, amplifiers, or PA systems. So someone with a loud voice had to say what was going on. This person was called a herald.

Just like a baseball announcer says who is up to bat, a herald in the middle ages might announce who was going to be fighting or jousting. A herald would also cheer on the fighter he was working for, like a baseball announcer might complement a good play. A herald could also announce who won if it wasn't clear to the audience.

The Purpose of Armory

When you are watching a sports game live or on TV, how can you tell which players are on which team? (*Uniforms are different.*)

If you can't see a player's face, how can you tell which player is which? (*Name on uniform.*)

In the Middle Ages, the herald and the audience wanted to know which fighter was which, too. The fighters also wanted to know whom the other fighters were, because it was important that they hit their enemies and not their friends! But, it was very hard to tell who was whom because each fighter would be wearing a helmet, so you couldn't see his face. But they didn't put their name on their clothes. **Can you guess why?** (*People couldn't read.*) So, instead of putting names on their clothes, each person would use different colors and pictures on their clothes and equipment so that the people watching and other fighters could identify them. They would put the same picture on their shield, their clothes, and their horse's blanket so that everybody would know who they were. (*Show sample shield if possible.*) The picture was called "arms" or a "device."

Since heralds had to announce what was happening at a tournament, the heralds had to know which fighters were using which pictures. Herald's would keep track of this in a book called a "roll of arms." Since heralds kept track of the pictures, the pictures became known as "heraldry."

Heraldic Design -- Charges

Many different types of pictures were used for heraldry. Let's think about professional sports again. **What kind of mascots and symbols do professional sports teams have?** (*Whenever they mention one that is heraldic, such as animals, birds, or people, tell them that one was used in the Middle Ages.*)

Some of those types of things were used in heraldry in the Middle Ages, too. Animals were especially popular. Some of the most popular animals were lions and eagles. **Why do you think that is?**

What are some other types of pictures you think could be used for heraldry? (*If they don't come up with them, mention objects, plants, stripes/ordinaries.*)

Heraldic Design – Colors

Now let's talk about colors. There were only seven different colors used in heraldry. **Can you guess what colors they were?** (*Let them take guesses until you get the 7 tinctures – white/silver,*

yellow/gold, black, red, green, blue, and purple. You might mention purple was extremely rare, if you wish).

Those were the only colors they used for heraldry. **Can you guess why?**

There's more than one answer. First, in the middle ages, if you wanted new clothes, somebody had to make them by hand. You couldn't go to a store and buy the clothes. Someone had to grown flax for linen or shear sheep to get wool. They would have to spin the fiber to get thread, weave it, and sew the clothes. And if you wanted a color other than the color of sheep, you had to make your own dye, too. Dye was made out of plants and sometimes other things, like minerals and insects. The trouble is, if you make your own dye, it might not turn out exactly the same every time. One time you might get a really dark blue and one time it might be lighter or greener blue. So you can't have heraldry that has to be a certain type of blue. You might not be able to get that exact type of blue every time.

Another reason they only used seven colors was so there wouldn't be any confusion on the fighting field. If one person used red and one used dark pink, you might not be sure right away which fighter you were looking at. So using few colors also prevented confusion.

In heraldry in the middle ages, they didn't try to draw animals or objects in their natural colors. **For example, what color is a lion?** That's its natural color. But in heraldry, a lion could be red, black, blue, or even checked!

Heraldic Design -- Contrast

People in the Middle Ages also used their colors in a certain way. Modern street signs use colors in the same way. So think for a minute about street signs. **What color is the background of a stop sign? (Red.) What color are the letters? (White.) What are some other road signs? (Speed limit, exit signs, yields signs, warning signs. After each sign that is mentioned, ask what colors are used for the background and for the words/images.)**

Does anybody notice what all those signs have in common? They all either have a dark background with light letters or a light background with dark letters. This is called contrast. It makes it easy to see what the sign says. Heraldry worked the same way. If someone has a blue lion on a black background, it would be hard to see what the picture is of, especially if it's cloudy or dark outside. If someone has a blue lion on a white background, it is easy to see what the picture is. So heraldry had good contrast between the picture and the background color.

Heraldic Design – Selection

Let's talk a little about how people in the middle ages picked what pictures to use for heraldry. **Can you guess how they picked them?**

One way they would pick their arms was to use arms similar to their family members. A man might use his father's arms but add one thing to it or make one change so that people could tell

them apart. *(If you have an older group and/or you have time, you could discuss how marshalling and cadency systems work, if you as a speaker are familiar with those.)*

Another way they might pick their arms is by using their name. **For example, how many people have heard of Shakespeare? Can you guess what Shakespeare had on his arms?** That's right, a spear! Using your name to make your arms is called "canting."

Do you think everybody in the Middle Ages had arms? *(Let them respond.)* Not everyone did. At first only knights were allowed to have arms. If the king decided to make a new person a knight, then the new knight would go to the heralds for help. They would want to make sure that they didn't use the same arms as someone else, because that would be confusing.

Spread of Heraldry

I have a question for you. **How many of you own a sports jersey that has a famous player's name on it?** *(Give them a moment to raise hands.)* **Why do you wear it?** *(Hopefully you'll get "because it's cool" or "because he's my hero/ I want to be like him" as an answer; if not, say that it's a possible answer.)*

At first, only knights had arms, because guys in armor needed arms to be identified. But other people thought knights were cool. The knights were interesting and had status. People wanted to be like them. So other people would ask the king if they could have arms, too. **What other types of people do you think wanted arms?**

Not only did individuals have arms, but sometimes groups had arms. A town, or guild could have arms, too. *(Explain what a guild is if there is time and interest.)*

Since those people didn't fight, they didn't need arms for their shield or to identify them in combat. **What kinds of things do you think they put their arms on instead?** *(Clothing, furniture, buildings, stained glass windows, and books are among correct answers. If someone says "servants," say you'll get back to that in a minute.)* Show samples of items with heraldry if possible.

Sometimes a person might also have something called a badge. Arms mean, "This is me." A badge means, "This is my stuff." Your servants would NEVER wear your arms. They would be claiming to be YOU, and they'd be in big trouble! They would either wear your badge, or maybe just your "livery" colors, which are usually two major colors from your arms.

Review

OK, let's review! Raise hands if you want to answer questions.

What was the original job of heralds in the middle ages?

Why did fighters in the middle ages use heraldry, also called arms?

What kinds of pictures were used on arms?

What colors were used on arms?

Why did people besides knights use arms?

What other things was heraldry used for?

Great job listening! Thanks for participating and I hope you enjoyed our talk!

Extention:

If you have older children, and/or you have the time, you might discuss with them places where heraldry is used today. They may note that colleges and some companies use something that looks like a device. Older boys especially might enjoy discussing heraldry used as car logos, such as the following:

Ferrari: Or, a horse rampant sable.

Lamborghini: Sable, a bull charging affronty head to sinister Or.

Porsche: Quarterly, one and four Or, in pale three antlers fess-wise sable, two and three barry of four sable and gules, and on an inescutcheon Or a horse salient and in chief the word Stuttgart within a bordure sable.

Cadillac: Quarterly, one and four Or, a fess sable, two and three quarterly, one and four gules, two and three argent a fess azure.

Activity:

If time and your facilities permit, you might give children paper, either blank or with empty shield shapes, and have them try to draw heraldry based on the information you have them about use of color and types of charges used in period.