Why did a knight need to have a coat of arms? ❧

In the 12th century, knights began wearing helmets that completely concealed their faces except for two narrow slits for the eyes. It made a knight unrecognizable to both his friends and his enemies. Symbols such as lions or other beasts were painted on the knights' shields and banners to aid in recognition during a battle. As time went on these decorations were repeated on the surcoat (a sleeveless garment that was worn over armor)—therefore the name, coat of arms. By the 15th century, as the designs became more complex, it developed into a complicated science called heraldry—a system of personal symbols by which a knight could be recognized.

Create Your Own Coat of Arms

There are very specific rules for designing a coat of arms.

1. Partition the background with lines. You may use any of the designs pictured in the margins or create a design of your own.

2. Choose a combination of the following colors: black, green, red, purple, gold or silver to color in your background.

3. Draw a fanciful animal as part of your design.

4. Complete your coat of arms with any personal or family symbols.