DESIGN YOUR OWN COAT OF ARMS

This picture from the thirteenth-century wall paintings at All Saints Church Claverley, Shropshire, shows a knight who could be the emperor Charlemagne, carrying a shield with an eagle on it. This is a **heraldic** design.

WHAT IS HERALDRY?

Heraldry is the use of a design on a shield by which the person carrying it could be identified. Nobody else could use the design which would usually be passed on from father to son. When heraldry began, about the middle of the twelfth century, it was knights and noblemen who carried such **coats of arms**, but the idea spread. Women very quickly started to use heraldry and sometimes a **coat of arms** would be associated with a particular job rather than a person, so the bishop would have a **coat of arms** to identify him as the bishop of a particular area. Towns and colleges could also have a **coat of arms**. Your school may have one. Today one of the best-known **coats of arms** is the three lions of the England football team, a design which goes back to the three gold lions on a red background carried by medieval kings of England. Sometimes you will find a shield is divided in half, or into four quarters, or more. Each section might represent different members of a family, a marriage relationship, or different things about a person.

WHAT CAN BE ON A COAT OF ARMS?

Medieval coats of arms were often very simple, perhaps a background colour with a single shape (called an **'ordinary'**) or animal or object (called a **'charge'**) on it. Lions, eagles, flowers and weapons, such as a sword, were popular **charges**. Sometimes you find fantastic beasts like dragons and griffins or unicorns. Often there is also a motto below.

THE LANGUAGE OF HERALDRY

Heraldry today still uses certain words which are derived from medieval French. Only certain colours are used. The main colours used in heraldry are: *vert* (green); *azure* (blue); *gules* (red); *sable* (black); *purpure* (purple), the metals are *or* (gold, sometimes shown as yellow); *argent* (silver, often painted as white), and the furs *ermine* (drawn as black patterns on white) and *vair* (squirrel) a pattern of blue and white. Always put a colour on a metal or fur field, never on another colour. This makes the design more easily recognised at a distance or in battle.
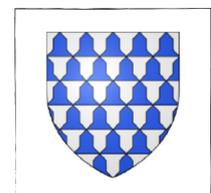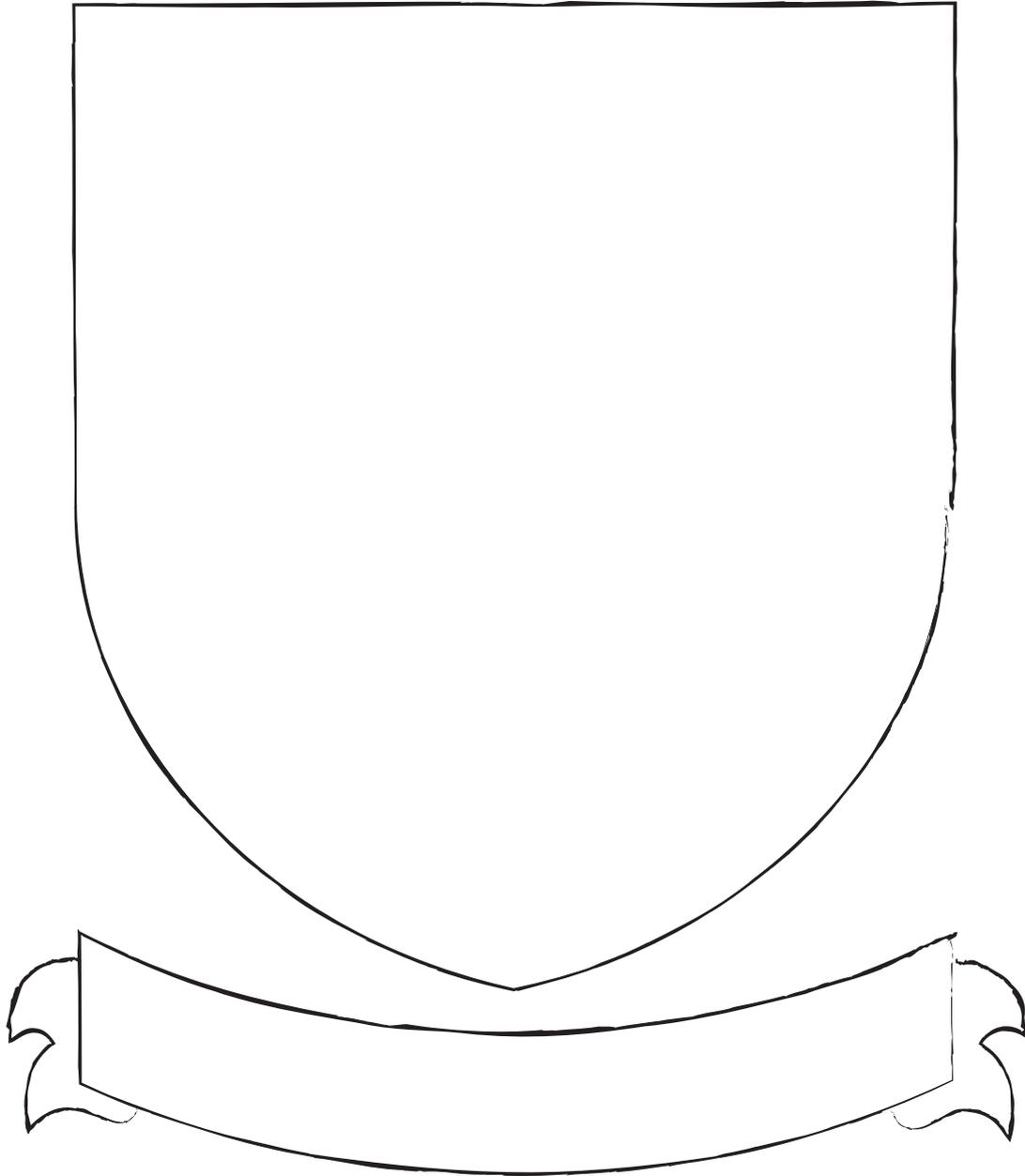
Vair pattern

For more information go to:
www.english-heritage.org.uk/easter/preparing-for-easter-adventure-quests/our-guide-to-heraldry/

Or the web-site of the heraldry society 'About Heraldry' and 'education' pages which include a beginners guide: theheraldrysociety.com/

CHARLEMAGNE
A European Icon

DESIGN YOUR OWN COAT OF ARMS

Think of 4 or 5 things that are important to you and try to include them. The design doesn't need to look realistic so you don't need to be great at drawing. Put a motto or your name in the scroll underneath.

You can divide your shield in many ways e.g: