There are few things more intrinsically appealing to a sixth-grader (and children of many ages) than a knight in shining armor. As part of a unit on the Middle Ages, my sixth-grade students designed suits of armor and accompanying medieval weaponry from 36-gauge craft foil. The result was an army of combatants worthy of the most daunting battle or most challenging tournament.

For inspiration and to gain some background knowledge about medieval knights, we started by watching the video The Knight (part of the "Life in the Middle Ages" series from Schlessinger Media), along with the tournament scene from the classic 1967 movie, Camelot.

Another good video is At the Met: The Tournament, which features the arms and armor collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. By the way, if you are close enough for a visit, the Met, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago all have impressive collections of arms and armor.

Our suits of armor were first planned in pencil on 12" x 18"
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will ...
- become familiar with the history and role of knights in the Middle Ages, and with the armor and weapons used by knights.
- design a suit of armor.
- execute their armor design on foil, using a variety of tooling techniques to render the armor in relief and add detail to it.
- give their armor a patina using black India ink.
- create accompanying weapons and/or shields for their knight, using foil colored with permanent markers.

MATERIALS

- 12" x 18" manila paper
- Pencils and erasers
- Scissors
- 30-gauge aluminum foil
- Foil modeling tools
- Black India ink and foam brushes
- Fine steel wool
- Permanent markers and metallic paint markers
- Hot glue-gun
- Feathers
- Masking tape

manila paper. After tracing a basic outline of the knight’s body from an oak-tag pattern*, the various sections of armor were sketched in: the helmet, the breastplate and skirt, the vambraces (arm coverings) and gauntlets (gloves), the cuisses and greave (leg coverings), and the other accoutrements and details of a suit of armor.

The classes had a wide variety of reference pictures available to use for inspiration. Students were encouraged to extend the elements of their suits of armor beyond the outline of the figure where appropriate. Some students chose to alter the pose of the original outline, such as bending the lower arm upward or inward across the body.

As each student completed a satisfactory drawing on paper, he or she cut it out and taped it onto a piece of 30-gauge aluminum foil. With a soft padding of newspaper underneath, the drawing was traced in pencil into the foil. The drawing was removed, and a variety of modeling tools were used to tool the foil in relief. Students were instructed on how to achieve a variety of relief effects: pressing into the back of the foil to make some areas “pop out” on the front, working on the front of the foil to make some areas recede, and using pointed tools to add and enhance fine details on the armor.

A variety of plastic and wood implements designed especially for tooling metal are available in most art catalogs, but found objects such as popsicle sticks, dowels (which can be sharpened in a pencil sharpener to make an effective pointed tool), paintbrush handles or tongue depressors can also be used. A chain-mail effect see KNIGHTS on page 41
was achieved by filling in the desired area with small, interlocking circles. Once the tooling was complete, the students cut out their knights, saving the remaining foil for making their weapons.

To emphasize their details and three-dimensional quality, as well as to give them an attractive patina, the suits of armor were painted with black India ink. When dry, fine steel wool was used to buff off some of the ink, exposing the shiny silver color on the raised areas of the armor and leaving the black ink in the recesses.

The weapons and shields were made in the same way as the suits of armor: students first drew them on manila paper, transferred them to the leftover foil from their knights, and used the modeling tools to make them three-dimensional. However, the weapons and shields were colored with permanent markers and metallic paint markers. The weapons and shields were hot-glued into position by the teacher; some students even folded the fingers of their foil knights around the handles of their weapons.

As a final flourish, colorful feathers were attached with masking tape to the back of the helmets, giving the knights a dapper finishing touch to help identify them in battle.

Arranged in formation on a bulletin board or wall, these knights in shining armor make an impressive display of brave and chivalrous warriors ready to defend the honor of any art room or hallway!

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* Note: I use patterns only occasionally, when they support the objective of the project at hand. In the case of this particular project, my objective was to have the students create a suit of armor, not to learn to draw the human figure. The project could certainly be made more challenging, or serve multiple objectives, if the students were required to draw the figure themselves.—M.C.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

VIDEOS/DVD

- All the Way: The Expansion of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Home Video Collection
- The Knights, Top in the Middle Ages
- Knights in the Middle Ages
- Camelot

BOOK

- Brian A.C. Knight and Armor: Evolution, Function, and Decoration
- Arthur, Alencon and the Middle Ages
- Arms and Armor: A History
- Art in the World: Dover Publications