

THINKING ABOUT FORM AND FUNCTION IN RENAISSANCE ARMOR

Armor is about protection, not prevention. It was designed to allow wearers to take a hit in battles or tournaments and survive. In addition, armor needed to let a knight move as freely as possible. This is as true about today's armor, using composite materials and high-tech innovations, as it was true in the Renaissance. This lesson entices students to think critically about the decisions that lie behind the construction of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century armor, including 21st Century Critical Thinking Skills of making judgments and decisions and using systems thinking.



Armor for use on horseback in the field, c. 1505
Made by the armorer Matthes Deutsch, German
Etched and partially blued and gilded steel; leather; textile
Weight: 58.5 lb. (26.53 kg)
Gift of Athena and Nicholas Karabots and The Karabots Foundation, 2009
2009-117-2

Grade Level

For grades 9–12

Common Core Academic Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RST.6-8.5](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.2](#)

PA Academic Standards for Art

- 9.1.J: Technology in the Arts
- 9.2.D: Historical and Cultural Perspectives

Art Images Required

Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art website. Images that are available in the ARTstor Digital Library are indicated by an ID number or search phrase. Entering that number or phrase into the ARTstor search bar will direct you to the corresponding image in that database.

- [Armor for use on horseback in the field](#), c. 1505, by armorer Matthes Deutsch
ARTstor search: (although not the same image or object) Walters, 51.581
- [Cuirassier Armor](#), 1612, Northern Italy or France
ARTstor search: 1977-167-36
- [Armor, for use in the free Tournay](#), c. 1575, Germany
ARTstor search: (although not the same image or object) 1977-167-4

Lesson Process

1. Display and examine *Armor for use on horseback in the field* and *Cuirassier Armor*. Take some time to read and discuss the Teacher Resources for each object. Now focus on the helmets: What purpose is served by the ridge that comes over the helmet from back to front? What sort of injury would this ridge prevent, and how? Discuss the effect of curved surfaces in deflecting force.
2. Where else on these armors do you see surfaces designed to deflect the force of a blow (most likely from a sword)?
3. Armor must do more than simply protect—it also must allow the wearer to maneuver. Look for areas in these examples where the armor was modified to allow mobility. How has the armorer (the craftsman who designed and made the armor) accomplished this? What was sacrificed to provide this flexibility? What areas were not covered in plate armor? Why would these areas be difficult to protect with plates of steel? (Note: Though not displayed with these armors, knights wore suits of padded clothing with sections of mail, a more flexible form of armor, attached to areas that could not be covered in plate, such as the groin, armpits and inside the elbows and behind the knees.)
4. Examine *Armor, for use in the free Tourney*. This armor was designed for a joust, a type of tournament fighting where knights would charge each other holding long lances tucked under their right arms. In the rules for a joust, the only place on a knight that the lance was allowed to strike was on the left upper chest. Compare this armor and the *Cuirassier Armor*. What adjustments in mobility, protection, and deflection are made in the tournament armor for its particular use?

Assessment

1. Find another image of a suit of armor and discuss the decisions that went into providing maximum protection for the wearer. Use a presentation tool that allows you to select close-up views for your slides.
2. Imagine you are a famous armorer from the late 1500s. You are writing directions for your young apprentice as he begins to construct his first suit of armor. Give a detailed narrative on how to construct an effective battle helmet.

Enrichment

1. Research Renaissance armor on the Internet, and print an image of a suit of armor that identifies each piece by name. Create a display of these terms and provide descriptions that explain the reasons for the shapes of these pieces.
2. Mail was another common form of armor. Research the history of mail and explore the reasons why it was so effective.