Pennsylvania Dutch Hex Signs

Take a drive through Pennsylvania Dutch country and you just might see a lot of colorful, circular signs hanging on the sides of homes and barns. What are they? They're hex signs, a fascinating folk art that your child can explore in this easy craft.

What You Need:

- Piece of white cardboard or strong poster board (the back of a circular heavy duty white paper plate will also work)
- Scissors
- Pencil
- Markers or poster paint, especially in green, blue, yellow, red and black
- Scissors

What You Do:

1. First, explore the history of this particular type of folk art. Explain to your child that many German and Dutch immigrants settled in Pennsylvania in the 1800s. They began to paint circular symbols, called "hex signs," to hang on their barns. The word "hex" comes from the German word "hexe," meaning "witch." It is believed that the signs, with their positive symbols of flowers, stars and birds were meant to ward off evil spirits and bring good fortune to their homes and farms.
2. Have your child prepare a round circle by cutting a circular shape from the white cardboard or white poster board, or use the back of a white paper plate.
3. Talk to your child about the symbols that are typically used in a Pennsylvania Hex: birds, flowers (especially tulips and roses), leaves, trees, stars, circles, diamonds and hearts are the most common images in a hex sign. Have your child sketch some of these images in pencil on her round circle hex. Traditionally the hexes had symmetrical designs, but your child can create her own design if she wishes.
4. When she has finished with the pencil design, she can go over pencil lines with markers or poster paint.Encourage her to use the most popular colors used in hex signs: green, blue, yellow, red, and black.
5. She may want to hang the hex on your front door or on her bedroom door for good luck!