MASKS OF AFRICA

Written by Janice B. Ruttenberg
INTRODUCTION

Masks are known to have existed for 17,000 years, appearing in infinite variety and in widely scattered societies and cultures throughout the world. Evidence of the prehistoric use of masks has been found in both Europe and Africa, and masks survive from the ancient civilizations of Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. They have been fashioned out of both durable and ephemeral materials, including bone, terracotta, stone, ivory, metal, and wood, as well as leaves, twigs, feathers, cloth, and animal and vegetable material. Used for disguise, concealment, social control, spirit manipulation, physical protection, and entertainment, masks may be essential components of solemn religious observances or adjuncts to secular festivals.

In the West today, masquerades are found almost exclusively in performance and secular contexts. In many African societies, however, masking continues to play an essential role in the life of the community and provides an aesthetic means of addressing universal human issues such as: a concern for order; the nature of reality and the cosmos; relationships to others; and coming to terms with death. The masked dancer is accepted as an incarnation of an ancestor or spirit being whose appearance energizes the ritual, but the mask itself is only one element in an elaborate and complicated event. Body-concealing costume, dance, music, song, myth, and, often, dynamic interaction between masker and audience, are essential components of the masquerade. African masks were meant to be part of a total visual and auditory experience which is irrevocably altered once the mask has been removed from its original setting and displayed as an inert sculpture in a private collection or museum.

Nevertheless, the presence of these objects in a museum affords us the opportunity to begin to understand something of the genius of the African sculptor. The masks illustrated and discussed in this packet, all from the Art Institute collection, demonstrate the great variety of form, content, and medium which characterize mask production in Africa. These masks represent both humans and animals and exhibit the creators' technical mastery and conceptual creativity, especially in the approach to form. Rather than emphasizing likeness, the artists concentrate on the essence or the spirit of the subject. Thus, the depiction of a pair of antelopes in the Bamana Tyi Wara Headdresses [1] depends upon the supple arabesque shapes of the necks and manes to communicate the grace of the animal; the emphatic horizontal of the Bwa Butterfly Mask [4] suggests, rather than replicates, the wingspan of the insect in flight; and the Baule N'Dome Mask [8] relies upon hairstyle and facial scarification pattern to create the concept of the person portrayed.
It is the purpose of this manual to introduce teachers and students to these and other African masks, to the cultures which created them, and to the ideas they are meant to convey. The illustrations, didactic information, and curriculum suggestions may be used in the classroom to initiate discussions about geography, history, anthropology, and mythology as well as art and art production. A glossary has been included to assist teachers in defining terms used throughout the text. Words defined in the glossary are highlighted the first time they appear. Following the text is a bibliography which will help to guide you as you further explore the arts of Africa. Because slides can never take the place of actual objects, this manual should be used as an introduction and a guide for classroom preparation, but should not replace a visit to the Art Institute to view the masks.
A SELECTION OF AFRICAN MASKS FROM THE ART INSTITUTE

[1] Tyi Wara Dance Headdresses

Mali, Segou Region, Bamana People
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, brass tacks, metal, and quills, 38 3/4" and 31 1/4" high
1965.6, 1965.7

Bamana religious and social life is based upon fraternal age-groups and societies, each occupied with its own shrines and rituals. Nearly all Bamana sculpture is connected in some way to the practices, ceremonies, and performances of these groups.

One of these societies, Tyi-Wara, is responsible for the preservation and transmission of all knowledge and lore related to farming, essential to the survival and prosperity of this agricultural people. The term itself has other related meanings, referring to the mythological being, half-man and half-animal, who taught man to cultivate the earth, as well as to the headdresses carved to honor this legendary ancestor.

Tyi-warə dance headdresses embody in their form and content some of the virtues associated with success in farming, such as the grace and strength of the antelope. The pairing of the male and the female symbolizes that union which is so essential to fertility in both human and agricultural endeavors.

The Tyi-warə headdresses are used in a ceremonial dance just prior to the rainy season or the harvest. The performers, covered with long raffia costumes, accompany the farmers out to the fields and dance in time to a chantrine female chorus, imitating the movement and play of two graceful antelopes. This ritual is designed to propitiate those earth spirits who may have been disturbed by man's activity and to ensure the success of the harvest.
[2] *Initiation Mask of the N'Tomo Society*

Mali, Segou Region, Bamana People
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, string, and metal, 29" high
1961.555

The first of the six fraternal age-grade societies to which a Bamana male belongs is *N'tomo*, which serves to socialize and educate boys until the time of their circumcision. This society protects its members, settles disputes, and provides a repository for potentially harmful spiritual energy, or *wanzo*, until it can be directed into constructive channels.

Closely identified with the *N'tomo* society is the distinctive mask composed of a schematic oval *face* and *superstructure* of horns or spikes. The horns vary in number from four to ten and may refer to the primordial seeds sown by God in the creation of the universe.

Typically, the face consists of a convex forehead with overhanging brow, a flattened facial plane, and strongly protruding nose and mouth. The surface of the face may be incised with linear patterns and the superstructure is often embellished by the addition of human or animal figures. The origin of both of these design elements is not entirely clear to us. Earlier western observers believed that they were included simply to add aesthetic interest to the form of the sculpture, while more recent scholarship indicates that these motifs may have had an important *iconographical* significance which has been lost over time.

Burkina Faso, Mossi People
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood and kaolin, 65 1/4" high
1961.576

The Mossi kingdoms were founded in what is now the country of Burkina Faso during the 14th and 15th centuries by immigrants from northern Ghana. Their descendants came to exert considerable political and judicial control over the conquered territory, while the indigenous peoples, known as Nionyosi, retained religious authority over the land. It was probably in service to religious rites and practices that masks were created, and it is widely assumed that those now designated as Mossi were actually Nionyosi in origin.

Such masks are usually fashioned in great secrecy on the occasion of the death of a family head, and serve both as a memorial to the deceased and a resting place for his spirit. When the mask itself "dies," that is, deteriorates to the point that it is no longer useful, it, too, is ceremoniously buried. One scholar believes that the vertical pierced plank rising from the crown of the mask is an abstract allusion to the human figure, confirming its purpose as a "stand-in" for the deceased. The incorporation of graceful antelope horns refers to the animal widely regarded among the Mossi and other Western Sudanic groups as a totemic ancestor who is associated with the fertility of both the land and the people. The simplicity of the face, comprised of a concave oval bisected by a vertical serrated ridge, is consistent with the stylistic tendencies found elsewhere in this area of West Africa, where schematic faces support superstructures invested with the true spirit of the masks.
[4] *Butterfly Mask*

Burkina Faso, Bwa (or Nuna?) People  
Early 20th century  
Wood and pigment, 50 1/4" long  
1970.103

Large geometric constructions of wood are common in the masks of the Western Sudan, and are often painted with the red, black, and white pigments seen in this example. The masks of the Bwa people are usually round, oval, or triangular in shape and are often surmounted by towering superstructures; the distinctive horizontal form of this mask is rare in African masquerades.

It is not known precisely why the butterfly is the subject of a mask, and it may be the only insect represented among the great variety of West African mask types. There may be some connection to the profusion of butterflies which appear each spring in western Africa, since the butterfly is featured in an annual spring festival to encourage human and agricultural fertility. Members of the secret *Do* society wear these masks during a dance intended to imbue the soil with the potency necessary to support the crops which will sustain life for the coming year. The hook which protrudes from the center of the face has been identified both as the nose of the creature and as a device used to impale malevolent spirits which may be lurking in the village. The zig-zag pattern which frames the face probably has symbolic significance and may be a variant on the checkerboard, a common motif in Bwa sculpture, which alludes to the opposition of good and evil.

Côte d'Ivoire, Senufo People
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, 40 1/8" long
1963.842

This distinctive Senufo mask is a combination of the features of various animals: antelope, warthog, hornbill, chameleon, and hyena. The elements chosen and the way in which they have been fused into one sculptural unit produce a bold, dynamic form meant to inspire fear and awe. The mask is an ideogram, representing a mythical being who incorporates the powers of animals who were said to have first appeared at the time of creation, before order was brought out of chaos.

It was the function of these masks to protect the community from evil elements and to frighten and disperse antisocial spirits and forces during agricultural ceremonies or at funerals. The masks were worn at night by costumed members of the secret Lo society, who carried forked sticks holding glowing embers. When the masker blew upon the embers, a stream of sparks was produced, creating the illusion that fire was issuing from the mouth of the mask and presenting an awe-inspiring display of primordial force and potency.

Guinea, Baga People
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood and metal tacks, 47" high
1957.160

Among the Baga of Guinea, the Simo society developed powerful objects that profoundly affected the social and religious life of the community. The Nimba mask is perhaps the most striking of these carvings. The female figure, which serves as the basis for the design, has been simplified, abstracted, and enlarged to emphasize swelling lines and rounded volumes.

These stylized forms, which express the notions of fecundity and abundance, are carried by society members during rice harvest festivals. The Nimba has been said to represent the goddess of fertility and increase, the patroness of maternity, and protector of pregnant women.
[7] Elephant Mask

Côte d'Ivoire, Guro People
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, kaolin, and pigment, 19 3/4” high
1971.883

The Guro people of the Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) create masks for entertainment and for ritual use. Entertainment masks have no protective or religious function; they are commissioned and worn by young men who enjoy displaying their skill in festival dances. These masks, which reflect the latest fads and fashions, are closely associated with specific musical compositions, orchestras, dance steps, and costumes, and may become widely admired.

Religious masks, however, are regularly honored with sacrificial offerings and are brought out only for important festivals and funerals of esteemed elders. These masks may take animal or human form or combine the two. Large ensembles of animal masks, depicting elephants, antelopes, buffalo, hyenas, hippopotami, dogs and monkeys, appear in funerary celebrations in a forceful display of aggressive male power. In the past, these masks exerted considerable judicial and peace-keeping authority as well.

The Art Institute elephant mask is typical of the Guro penchant for creating delicately balanced forms and refined details. The carver has created ears, trunk, and tusks which clearly identify this creature without slavishly copying from nature. All of these features have been reduced in size to ensure a harmonious composition. The linear relief designs, extending from the forehead to the end of the trunk, rely upon the repetition of diamond shapes to create both surface interest and unity, a hallmark of the Guro sculptural style.
The Baule people of the central Côte d'Ivoire create human and animal masks for performances which satirize and comment upon daily life. Some of the masks, called N'doma, are portrait masks of specific individuals who have been so honored because of some greatly admired skill or quality.

Female portrait masks, such as the Art Institute example, usually depict women of great beauty or considerable dancing ability. Some informants suggest that a portrait mask is meant to be an identifiable likeness of its subject; others maintain that the resemblance is to be found in details of coiffure and scarification as well as in articles of clothing and jewelry worn by the masked dancer.

The subject accompanies the mask in danced performances, and continues to do so as long as she is physically able. When she dies, a worthy female descendant may be chosen to take her place, and the mask then takes the name of the successor and becomes her "double." In this way, the mask is handed down through generations of the same family, continuing a tradition of honor and distinction.
[9] Egungun Festival Headdress

Nigeria, Egba Area, Town of Abeokuta, Itoko Quarter,
Yoruba People
Carved by Ojerinde Adugbologe
C. 1880
Wood, 11 3/4" high
1969.240

The world of the Yoruba consists of the living, the dead, and the unborn, stressing the importance of family and continuity. The world of the living is inexorably tied to the world of the dead—the realm of the ancestors who may materially affect the well-being of their descendants. Hence, the annual or biennial festivals called Odun Egungun honor the "living dead" through masquerades. These celebrations are designed to reveal the presence and power of the ancestors and demonstrate the filial piety and devotion of family members still living.

The Egungun masquerade is characterized by lavish use of layers of sumptuous cloths in costumes and headdresses. However, some Egungun ensembles have carved headdresses like the Art Institute example. Called "Lajuwo," or "the hunter," this is one of the most distinctive of Egungun headdress types and wearing it is a special privilege of hunters and their lineages. The most striking feature of this sculpture is the tuft of hair extending down from the left side of the head. Representing the traditional hunter's braid, it covers incisions in the scalp into which protective medicines were placed to guard against the dangers of the forest.
The masked festivals of the Gelede society of the Yoruba people pay homage to elderly women, called "our mothers," who are considered to be repositories of potent spiritual energy. Pairs of Gelede maskers perform in elaborate masquerades, entertaining and enlightening the community while pleasing, placating, and encouraging the mothers to use their powers for the good of society.

Gelede masks typically display the idealized naturalism that is so characteristic of the Yoruba sculptural style. Rounded volumes describe the facial planes, with large, almost triangular eyes, a small, short nose, and full parallel lips. The swelling form of the head suggests the presence of the Yoruba concept of life force, ashe, which is thought to reside in the skull and exert outward pressure in proportion to its potency.

The sculptural imagery found on Gelede masks refers to all aspects of Yoruba life. Human figures depict male and female roles while animal forms may allude to proverbs or act as metaphors for human activity. The masks are often also commentaries on specific situations or individuals, praising the positive, while condemning or satirizing the negative. It is difficult to determine precisely the meaning of Gelede imagery once the mask has been removed from its context, but some masks offer internal iconographical evidence of original intent. The Art Institute mask, with its distinctive looped and crested coiffure, probably refers to the river goddess, Yemoja, whose devotees dress their hair in this way.
Beautiful young women are esteemed in Igbo society as sources of pride for their communities and **bride wealth** for their families. The maiden-spirit, or *Mmwo*, masks of the northern Igbo celebrate this ideal of female beauty, with their long, narrow noses, protruding mouths, intricate facial tattooing, and crested coiffures. While most of these masks correspond to a particular facial type, there is considerable variety in the rendering of the form of the coiffure, from simple median crests to the baroque complexity of the Art Institute example.

Just as the conformation of the features represents the outer beauty of the Igbo maiden, the emphatic white of the face symbolizes the inner virtues, such as purity, beneficence, wealth, coolness, and prestige. The color is also thought to evoke the notion of the **spirit world**, for these masks appear at funerals to comfort the family and friends of the deceased and are closely associated with the realm of the ancestors. *Mmwo* masks are also integral to the celebrations commemorating **initiations**, agricultural festivals, and other important community events.
White-Faced Mask

Gabon, Ogowe River Area, Punu People
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood and pigment, 10 1/4" high
1964.230

The Punu are one of a number of linguistically and culturally related ethnic groups inhabiting southern Gabon, all of whom create the elegant and mysterious "white-faced" mask. Commemorating both male and female ancestors, these masks were usually worn during funerary ceremonies by stilt dancers in body-concealing costumes, who performed acrobatic feats of stunning physicality throughout the village. The nature of the dance, as well as the attenuated appearance of the masker, emphasized the otherworldly nature of the visitor from the realm of the spirits.

Called Okuyi, Mukuyi, or Mukudji, the color of these masks is thought to symbolize peace and the spirits of the dead. The Art Institute example is characteristic of this type, with its heart-shaped face, double crested "bivalve" coiffure, scarification marks in a lozenge pattern on forehead and temples, slit "coffeebean" eyes, and delicate mouth and nose. All of these qualities combine to produce a distinctly Asian appearance, and early western collectors often compared them to Japanese Noh masks. However, there is no evidence of any direct artistic connection between Gabon and the Far East.

Democratic Republic of Zaire, Kasai Province, Mweka District,
Kuba People
Late 19th/mid 20th century
Wood, beads, cowrie shells, feathers, hair, fiber, skin, metal, pigment,
fabric, and seeds, 27 1/2", 12 1/4", and 15" high
1982.1504, 1505, 1506.

Much of the extraordinary art of the Kuba people of Zaire is produced to
satisfy the dynastic needs of a highly stratified aristocratic society. Among the
objects that serve such a purpose are the Mukyeem, Ngaang a cyeem, and
Bwoom masks, which illustrate Kuba creation myths while symbolizing and
legitimizing the continuation of the royal house.

The Mukyeem mask may represent Woot, the primeval ancestor, and
displays many symbols of power associated with the progenitor of the royal
line. The use of leopard and monkey fur, parrot feathers, and forms borrowed
from the chameleon and elephant serve as visual metaphors for the
properties and potency of these animals and, by extension, of the Kuba rulers.
The lavish use of cowrie shells to adorn the surface of the mask emphasizes
its material and spiritual importance.

In contrast to the exuberantly fantastic forms of the Mukyeem, the Ngaang a
cyeeem mask is more naturalistic. Possibly personifying the sister-wife of
Woot, this mask clearly illustrates the Kuba standards of dignity, beauty and
composure most closely associated with the eternal matriarch. Even the
abstract patterns painted across the face have clear connections to the ideal of
Kuba womanhood by approximating the designs of the textiles fashioned by
royal women.

The third mask, Bwoom, is the least elaborate, relying less upon surface
decoration than upon powerful sculptural form. Bwoom is variously
identified as a nature spirit, the hydrocephalic son of an ancient king, or one
of the pygmy people of the nearby forests. In a more general sense, however,
it represents the common people, introducing an element of tension into the
dance of courtship between Woot and his wife.

These masks are worn by dignitaries in processions and ceremonies
performed at initiations and burial rites. In this way, the Kuba myths of
creation and the founding of the dynasty are related to the populace,
providing both spectacle and the transmission of cultural values.
Bwami Society Mask

Democratic Republic of Zaire, Lega People
Late 19th/early 20th century
Raffia, wood, and pigment
1991.387

All Lega men and women are eligible to become members of the Bwami secret society, a graded hierarchical association which is instrumental in transmitting the lore and cultural values of the Lega people. Most, if not all, Lega art is produced in service to this society, including figures and masks which illustrate appropriate moral, social, political, and religious behavior.

Large and small, wood or ivory masks, called Lukwakongo or Lukungu, are owned by male members of one of the higher grades of the Bwami society and may be worn on the face, forehead, or another part of the body. They also may be attached to walls, fences or wooden frames, placed in baskets or on the ground, or carried in the hand. Because the symbolic meaning of each mask is governed by the circumstances under which it was created and used, its iconography is lost once it is removed from its original context. In a general sense, however, we know that masks such as these are links to the ancestors and provide metaphoric and visual continuity to all past and present members of the Bwami society.

Although deceptively simple, the formal means employed in the fabrication of Lega masks produce sculptures of great poignancy and harmony. The oval face contrasts with the heart-shaped form extending from the curving brows to the chin; convex and concave surfaces of forehead and facial plane provide balance and sculptural interest. The concise, yet eloquent, geometric features, including assymmetrical "coffee-bean" eyes, transcend the apparent austerity of execution to create a face of great expressiveness and emotion.
GLOSSARY

Age-group or age-grade: A group of people of approximately the same age who together undergo certain rituals, e.g., initiation, and who owe each other lifelong support. Typical age-groups are children, adolescents, young adults, mature adults, and elders.

Ancestor: A deceased person, either immediate or remote, from whom a family or clan traces its identity. Ancestors are believed to be concerned with the welfare of their descendants and can intercede on their behalf or punish them for improper behavior.

Bride wealth: The money or goods given to the family of a bride by the bridegroom or his family.

Cowrie shell: A shell of a mollusk found in tropical waters, highly prized in traditional Africa. It has often been used as money or to adorn sculptures and masks to indicate great value.

Culture: The full range of human activity, represented by objects, buildings, rituals, etc., including religious practices and beliefs and social organization.

Ethnic group: People who share durable ties of language, religion, kinship, clan, and chieftainship. This term is preferable to the outmoded word, "tribe."

Funeral: In Africa, a distinction is made between burial, which occurs shortly after death, and a funeral, which can take place years later. The funeral ceremonies transfer the soul of the deceased to the realm of the ancestors, and may mark the end of the period of mourning. Elaborate and costly preparations involving sacrifices, feasts, the gathering of relatives, and, often, performance of masked dancers accompany the funeral.

Iconography: The imagery or symbolism of a work of art.

Ideogram: A character or symbol representing an idea or thing without expressing a particular word or phrase for it.

Informant: A term used by social scientists and art historians to refer to a person who provides information about his culture, social organization, history, etc.

Initiation: The ceremonies and rites, often including circumcision, physical ordeals, professional training, and education, which mark the passage from childhood to adulthood.

Kaolin: A white clay used as a white pigment for many African art objects.
**Mask:** A physical object designed to cover the face or the head.

**Masquerade:** An important event involving masked dancers, musicians, and their audience.

**Myth:** A traditional story that serves to explain a practice, belief, natural phenomenon, or world view of a people.

**Raffia:** A strong, straw-like fiber made from the inner skin of the palm leaf, often used to adorn African costumes and masks.

**Scarification:** Ornamental scars intentionally made on the face or the body for cosmetic purposes, as well as for identification of members of clans, ethnic groups, or secret societies.

**Secret society:** A select group within a community with its own lore and magical objects. This group requires a special initiation ceremony and usually has an assigned ritual function. It is sometimes called a men's association or initiation society.

**Social control:** The maintenance of harmony and stability in a community through enforcement of laws, including judging disputes and punishing offenders. In many African cultures, masks and other art objects play important roles in achieving social harmony.

**Spirit world:** The unseen world which includes deities, dead culture heroes, ancestors, and malevolent and beneficent nature spirits which act upon the well-being of the living.

**Superstructure:** Any structure built upon something else. In African masks, the superstructure is that part of the sculpture which is supported by the face mask and extends vertically above it.

**Totem:** An animal, plant, or natural object serving traditional peoples as the emblem of a clan or family by virtue of an asserted ancestral relationship.

**Western Sudan:** The Sudan is a broad climatic zone just south of the Sahara and Libyan deserts, extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. The western area of the Sudan is composed of all or parts of several modern African nations, including Mali, Burkina Faso, and northern Côte d'Ivoire, and has come to designate a region whose inhabitants share many social, artistic, and cultural characteristics.
SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Why do people create masks?

Encourage your students to think of the different circumstances under which masks might be found in our society, and to give examples for each. For instance, we might use masks for:

--disguise (children at Halloween, guests at costume parties)
--protection (hockey goalie and baseball catcher's masks, ski masks, surgeon's masks, gas masks)
--entertainment (theater, carnival, or Mardi Gras)
--concealment (criminals)

Many societies of Africa, North and South America, and the South Pacific integrate masks more completely into the fabric of their daily lives and ritual observances. Some examples are:

--funerary rites (Mossi Mask [3], Igbo Mmwo Mask [11], and Punu White-Faced Mask [12])
--fertility rituals (Bamana Tyi Wara Headdresses [1], Bwa Butterfly Mask [4], and Baga Nimba Mask [6])
--spirit or ancestor incarnation and manipulation (Senufo Mask of a Mythic Protector [5], and Yoruba Egungun [9] and Gelede [10] masks).
--education (Kuba Masks of Mythic Ancestors [13], and Lega Bwami Society Mask [14])

Why are animals portrayed in masks?

It is widely believed that prehistoric hunters concealed themselves in animal hides in order to be able to approach their prey undetected. Over time, these disguises evolved into elaborate mask and costume ensembles used in village ceremonies and rituals. The animal continues to be a frequent subject and offers a means to recall the importance of certain creatures in the mythology of the people, comments obliquely and often satirically upon the human condition, and symbolically glorifies the desirable attributes of rulers and cultural heroes.

The Bamana Tyi Wara Headdresses [1] are not face masks; they are actually conceived as sculptures to be worn on the head. Do these animals look exactly as they do in nature? Why or why not? What aspects of the animals are emphasized by the carver?

The Mossi Mask [3] is extremely abstract, with only a simple oval shape describing the face. Yet we know it is meant to refer, at least in part, to an
animal. How? What animal is depicted? Does it relate in any way to the Tyi Wara Headdresses? (Locate the Bamana and Mossi peoples on the map of Africa. Taking into account their proximity to one another, what assumptions can we make about similarities in their material culture and environment?)

How does the Bwa Butterfly Mask [4] differ from the others in shape? While this, too, is a highly abstracted form, we immediately associate it with a flying creature. Why?

Can we identify the subject of the Guro Mask [7] by the trunk and tusk forms? How does the representation of this animal differ from the natural model? What qualities would you associate with it and why would it be an appropriate symbol of aggressive force and power?

The Senufo Mask of a Mythic Protector [5] and the Kuba Mukyeem Mask [13] both combine features of different animals to create powerful images. How do these composites illustrate ideas? How do the Senufo and Kuba artists differ in their means to accomplish this? What animals provide sources of inspiration for these masks and why are they chosen?

**How do African carvers depict human beings in masks?**

Masks with human features may be created for many different reasons: to honor the living for some exceptional quality or deed; to memorialize the dead and offer an abode for their spirits; to illustrate the myths of the group; and to personify the spirits of the ancestors who return to the world of the living. Masks of human beings are never meant to be exact replicas of the people they portray. It is the idea of the person, expressed via selected physical characteristics, clothing, or mannerisms, which governs the form that the mask will take.

The Igbo Mmwo [11] and Punu White-Faced [12] masks both refer to spirits of the dead. How are they similar in the use of color and facial structure? How are they different? What associations do we make with the color white, especially in connection with funerary rituals or the notion of the spirit world?

Compare the Bamana N’tomo [2], Yoruba Gelede [10], Baule N’doma [8], and Kuba Ngaang a Cyeem Masks [13]. They are all representations of women, but their carvers have approached the depiction of the female face in substantially different ways. How? Why are distinctive hairstyles, facial markings, and superstructures important aspects of these objects? How would they help in identifying the subjects or purposes of the works?
Both the Lega Bwami Society Mask [14] and the Kuba Bwoom [13] Masks function in educational contexts, yet they differ radically in the way they present the human face and head. How? Did the carvers attempt to create recognizable images in these masks? Note the use of materials such as beading, metal, shells, fabric, and raffia. Do these materials enhance the naturalism of these masks? Why or why not?
SUGGESTIONS FOR MASK-MAKING ACTIVITIES

I. African folk tales and myths can provide a wealth of opportunities for reading, geography, and social studies units. You may enhance your students' enjoyment and understanding of the literature by developing an activity in which they create masks and act out the stories. You may also suggest that they write and perform folk tales of their own.

II. Discuss the notion of animal metaphors with your class. Have each student select an animal which exemplifies some quality or characteristic which they find desirable, for example: lion-bravery; elephant-strength; monkey-cleverness; gazelle or antelope-grace; cat-agility; dog-fidelity. Which of these traits might people attribute to their rulers? To their ancestors? To soldiers or hunters? To mothers or fathers? Why?

With older children, more sophisticated ideas might be introduced. For instance, the leopard is associated with speed and ferocity, but it can also see at night. How does this ability separate it from other animals and from man? Why would this quality be important to people who don't have widespread access to artificial lighting?

Masks can also combine the features of several animals as in the Senufo Mask of a Mythic Protector [5] or the Kuba Mukyeem Mask [13]. How does the use of different creatures in one composition enable the artist to emphasize the concepts of power, strength, and aggression? Do the combinations make the images more or less effective in conveying these ideas? Why?

III. Satire is an honored feature of many African masquerades. Suggest that the students select a person, either an individual or a type (e.g., rock star, athlete, teacher, or parent), and create a caricature mask, emphasizing distinctive features and mannerisms. Is it necessary for the mask to present an exact likeness of the subject in order to be an accurate representation? What can be added to the mask to aid in the identification of the subject? How can the masker enhance the likeness by using gesture, movement, costume, and speech?
A. Human Face Masks

Materials:
- plain paper plates or poster board
- masking tape
- scissors
- string
- paints or markers
- glue
- small objects for decoration (buttons, dried pasta, beads, pebbles, beans, sequins, etc.)

Take a plain paper plate or cut a circle from the poster board large enough to cover the face (a). Draw a light horizontal line dividing the mask in half (b). Draw slits below the center line and cut them out (c). At the center bottom of the circle, cut out a triangle for the nose (d). Add a chin shape to the bottom of the circle with masking tape or glue (e). Punch holes along the edges and attach strings at the sides for tying it on (f). Add an additional piece of cardboard to the top of the circle to be used for the superstructure (g). Create a mask with paints or markers, adding applied decoration if so desired.
B. Animal Masks

Materials:
- posterboard strips
- construction paper
- tissue paper
- yarn
- crepe paper
- feathers
- fabric scraps
- foil
- scissors
- staplers
- glue
- tape

Loop a long piece of posterboard around your head (a). Mark where the ends overlap to fit snugly. Take the board off your head and staple it together (b). Be sure to staple so that the smooth side of the staple will be toward your head, and the sharp side facing away when you wear the mask. Staple a long piece of posterboard at a right angle to the headband (c). Loop it over and staple it on the other side of the headband (d). The strip of board will be too long. When you wear the mask, this long strip will hang down over your face, in front of your nose. You can trim it later if you wish. Add facial features, ears, horns, etc. to the mask base. (e). Attach them to the headband with staples, glue, or tape, and let them hang down over your face.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

General:


Teacher Resources:


