

The Many Faces of the World

MASKS

What can they tell us about the people who made them?





Masks are a universal cultural link being found in most nations all over the world. Masks connect us through the commonality of the power of the human imagination. They form a silent language which is understood all over the world and which defines the essence of human expressions and emotions at various levels- spiritual, religious, and material.

While it is perfectly acceptable to enjoy masks from many cultures as rich colorful works of art, one can gain a deeper understanding by considering how masks are used in a particular culture and the meanings or traditions that wearing the masks brings.





Masks were used before recorded history. On a cave wall in southern France is the 15,000-year-old drawing of a masked dancer wearing animal horns. Ice age hunter probably wore this mask to communicate with the spirit world they believed in to help them find food.



In general, masks have several important social functions: (1) to conceal one's identity (as in masquerade party); (2) to frighten or amuse (as in Halloween); (3) for ritual (as in religious or magic ceremonies) or (4) for performances (as in actors and dancers). Most nations all over the world have a cultural past which includes masks.

There are three basic types of masks: the helmet mask, which covers the wearer's entire head; the face mask, which covers the face; and the headdress mask, which sits on top of the head





Although today masks are worn mostly for fun, some have serious uses. The surgeon wears a mask to protect her from getting germs, the soldier a gas mask to protect him from poisonous fumes; and a football or hockey player wears one to avoid injury to his face.

A mask may also be any 2-d or 3-d representation of a face, like an Egyptian mummy's face depicting the face of the deceased. One of the most famous is the death mask of the boy king, the Pharaoh Tutankhamen.





A mask can also be make-up that covers and disguises the face like that of a “mime” or and actor in Japanese kabuki theatre.

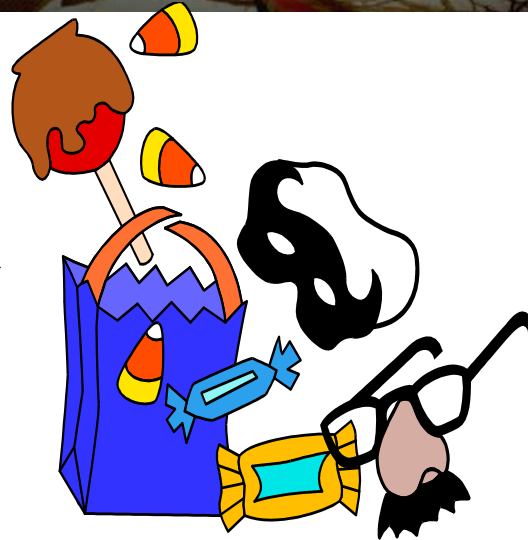
Here are some of the many masks used in different parts of the world and the reasons for wearing them.

United States of America



Native Americans have a rich history in mask making. They wore masks in many of their ceremonies.

Mardi Gras – French for Fat Tuesday, a celebration held annually in New Orleans, Louisiana. Parades, dances, and parties mark the occasion.



Halloween is celebrated in the USA like in many other countries. Masks are a big part of Halloween.

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AFRICA

African masks often represent the spirits of dead ancestors. Masked family members act out special rituals to pass on sacred teachings from one generation to the next.



Tribal gatherings, festivals and other ceremonies are also occasions for which masks are worn.

Italy



These masks and costumes can be traced back to the **commedia del arte** of the 16th century. It is a traveling show of musicians, acrobats, actors, and poets.

Sikkim

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This mask is from the Himilayan country of Sikkim. It represents the Lord of the Dead, Mahakala (ma-ha-kah-la), who is featured at the New Year's Festivals. As in other cultures that have such a character, Mahakala took the souls of the dead from the world of the living to the world of the dead. By acting out these myths each year, adults pass the story on to young people.

Greece



COMEDY & TRAGEDY

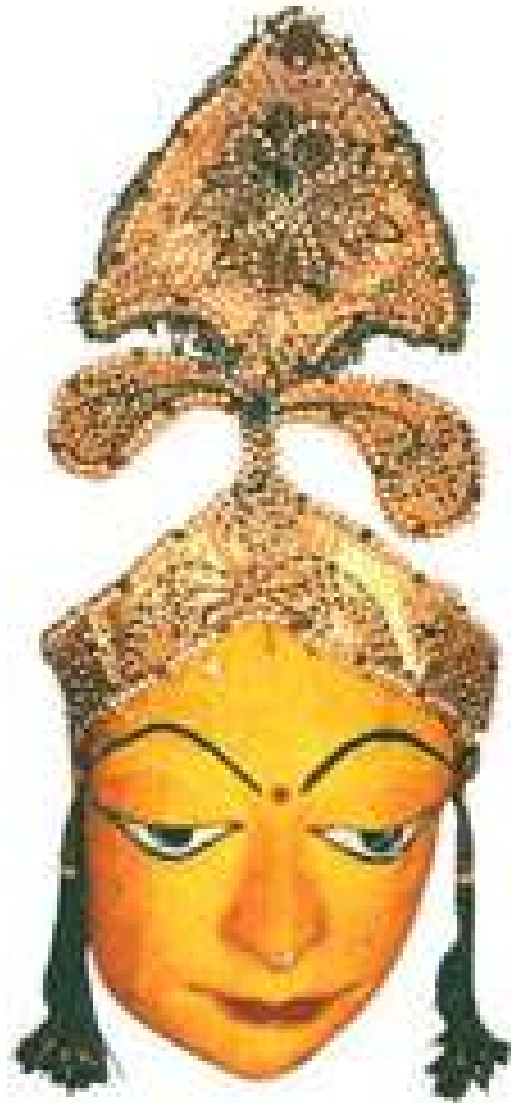
These are the masks of comedy and tragedy. They are used to symbolize the modern theatre but originated in the Greek islands, where theatre was a very important part of life thousands of years ago. All major seasonal festivals were occasions for masked performances. The Greeks used the masks for a simple reason: to enable the audience to see characters on stage more easily.

BALI

When a native of Bali,
a tiny island in the
South Pacific, is
performing a sacred
temple dance, it is
believed that the gods
being portrayed are
attending the
ceremony.



INDIA



In northeastern India there is a three day spring dance festival held in honor of the gods Shiva and Surya. Shiva represented by this mask, is the creator and the destroyer of the universe; Surya is the goddess of the sun. Stories about the gods are acted out in ballet like dance dramas.

JAPAN



The beautifully hand carved wooden masks of Japan's theatre were first used about 600 years ago in religious plays that were only seen by priests and nobility. Today anyone can attend the plays. Artists carve the delicate masks out of lightweight wood. Old people, gods, goddesses and goblins are among the characters in the theatre.

CANADA

This false face mask is an example of a kind of mask made by the Native Americans of what is now Canada and United States. It was used to chase away the evil spirits that were believed to have entered a person's body and made the person sick. The design of the mask was carved removed without killing the tree. It was thought that the spirit of the tree would enter the mask and make it more powerful. Horsehair hairs and animal teeth were sometimes added to the mask.



MEXICO

Throughout Mexico, The Day of the Dead (Dia de los Muertos), is celebrated on November 1st and 2nd each year.

Tibet



Figure Mask from Tibet:
Religious Icon

China

Chinese Opera Mask



Japan

Shikami is a decorative
mask from Japan
Used for acting



Indonesian Mask

Celuluk Mask
Ward off Evil
Doers



Europe

European
masks used
for carnivals
and parties.



Pre- Columbian Art Mask



Mask of Quetzalcoatl is a **funeral mask** from South America

Nomadic Masks



Ceremony mask
from the Northwest
Coast

African Masks

Kissing Zebra mask is a traditional [Wedding mask](#).



Three Design Characteristics

- **Abstraction**
- **Simplification**
- **Exaggeration**

Abstraction

- Features are recognizable but not realistically portrayed



Simplistic

- Features are realistic but **limited in detail**



Exaggeration

- Mask Features are **not** of **normal proportions**.



Other Design Features to consider

- Symmetry or formal composition
 - Pattern or repetition of design
 - Geometric shapes and lines
- Texture created by carving away or adding fibers, shells, etc.
 - Color

Mask Making Today

- As an art career, mask making continues as costume designers use various styles of masks to transform an actor into the desired character, much like the role of the mask in many African American societies.



The use of masks today still get our attention, even though the focus has gone from the performing arts and religious ceremonies to the handicrafts market.



However, whether it is made of wood or metal or fabric- the mask still continues to be a source of mystery and fascination – and gives us a way to escape from our busy everyday lives that are seeped in technology and automation.



Now Create!

- Create a mask that incorporates the following:
 - Symmetry
 - Geometric shapes
 - Exaggeration, simplification, and or abstraction
 - Pattern/ Repetition Color
 - Added texture

 - MUST BE INFLUENCED BY A CULTURE!!!