
Art Masterpiece: AFRICAN MASKS

Keywords: Shape, Pattern, Texture, Composition

Grade 5 **Grade** – Ideal for Feb. African Heritage Month

Activity: Mask Making

Print: We have the one to the right, as well as a powerpoint file on the Art Masterpiece CD. You can also utilize this website: www.artfactory.com/africanmasks. You can navigate this site to project multiple images of African masks onto the projector screen in the classroom.

MASQUES D'AFRIQUE / AFRICAN MASKS



Meet the Artist:

The continent of Africa has many cultures, but one element is common to them all – MASKS.

The mask maker is a specially educated person who is respected and feared by his tribe for his understanding of the spirit world. Artists' training can last for many years through either an apprentice/mentor relationship or by skills that are passed down from father to son.

Every mask is made according to strict rules. They believe that the materials that they work with and every color and shape has power. This power directs the artists' work.

African masks are used as ceremonial costumes. They are very symbolic (celebration, war, death) and of inner feelings. Masks are used to help tell a story about the tribe's history. They come to life through music and dance. Not all masks are intended to be worn in public.

Masks are made of bone, ivory, metal, fiber, and most often wood. They may look natural or abstract using bold, geometric shapes. They can represent qualities such as nobility, beauty, courage, humor, etc.

One thing that is common to all masks: They are expressions of inner feeling and not copies of nature.

Pablo Picasso was inspired by the bold abstract designs of African masks. He would collect them and use them to influence his own style. This brought a fresh look to European art.

DISCUSSION:

About the Painting: Discussion time is to focus on studying various mask designs and how the artist used the elements of art to portray emotion and story.

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KEYWORDS:

COMPOSITION: Formal symmetrical arrangements of line, shape and form.

TEXTURE: Highly polished surface – suggest beauty.
Rough, dirty surface - fear and evil.
*Skilled craftsmanship, fine detail and quality of finish are of great importance to the artist.

SHAPE: African masks take on many forms. They can be oval, circular, rectangular, elongated or animal, human or a combination.

PATTERN: Most patterns are geometrical & symmetrical. Pattern is often used as a form of coded information. Used to denote social status, religious powers, male or female.

Possible Questions:

- Masks have purpose.
- What masks are commonly used in America today? (Halloween, cosmetic, surgical, catcher's etc.)
- What types of ceremonies would African masks be used for? (Spiritual worship, weddings, prior/post battle, Celebrations, Funerals, etc.)

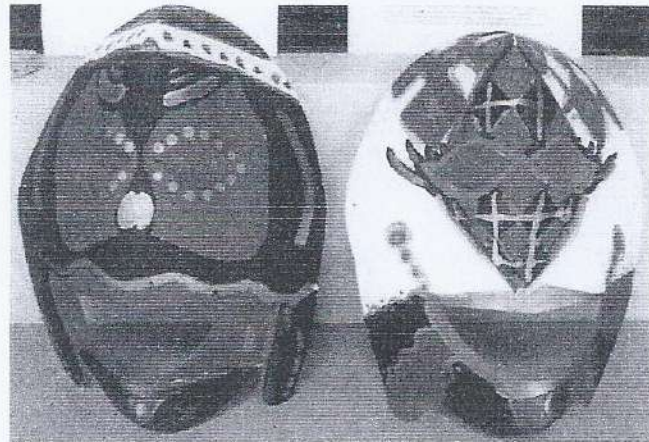
Display various mask designs from website on screen:

- What emotion is shown by the expression of this mask design?
- How did the artist show this? Which colors or shapes, lines were used to help reflect that emotion. (Triangular lines over eyes can make face appear angry or fierce.Etc.)
- Discuss Symmetry of the Design.
- Discuss Patterns used. Illustrate on white-board.

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Activity #1: Cardstock African Masks

Materials: Mask Templates (cut from tagboard or heavy cardstock). Tempura paints, paint brushes, q-tips, paper plates, cups with water, paper towel. Raffia, Metallic paint, buttons etc. Yarn. Glue. Newspaper to cover work surface.



TIME: This project will take a full 45 minutes to produce a well-detailed design. After reviewing a couple mask designs from internet site, proceed with project. You can continue to present other mask images as they listen and work on their own mask. African music can also be played as background music.

Process:

1. Cover each desk with newsprint.
2. Student should determine what type of ceremony they are creating their mask for. What emotion should it convey? What colors, shapes and patterns will help portray this expression?
3. Dispense tempura paints onto each student's paper plate. Metallic paint goes a long ways... a little dab will do.
4. Suggest using q-tips or the wood tip of brush or pencil top to create circles. Suggest they implement the often used checkerboard pattern.
5. Encourage students to think balance and work for a symmetrical design.
6. **OPTIONAL:** Once students are finished they can add raffia, buttons, sequins etc.
7. Yarn can be added to make ties on each side of mask. String also helps to hang for display.

Suggestion: Consider limiting the color pallet of the tempura paint. Brown, black, white paint and one primary color makes a nice finished product.

Instead of mask template (activity #1), consider cutting cardboard rectangles (6x9) for them to create their masks (activity #2). There will be many boxes from the beginning of the year stored in art masterpiece for this purpose. See samples.

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Activity #2: Cardboard African Masks

Supplies: cardboard, pencils, glue, markers, paint

Process:

1. Discuss possibilities for masks (scary, beautiful, animals, robots, clowns and so on). Stress that students should make their masks original, or different, from any others.
2. Draw a simple face shape on some corrugated cardboard and cut it out. Bend it into a curve. Have students write their name and room number on the back.
3. Draw two dots about halfway down. Carefully push a sharp pencil through the cardboard to make eyeholes.
4. From more cardboard, cut out eyes, nose, mouth, and any other adornments. You can peel the top layer off some of the cardboard before cutting out shapes for a bumpy effect. (see sample)
5. Glue shapes to mask and decorate with markers and/or paint.
6. If desired, make holes at the top or bottom (or both) using a pencil. Tie raffia through the holes and knot it.



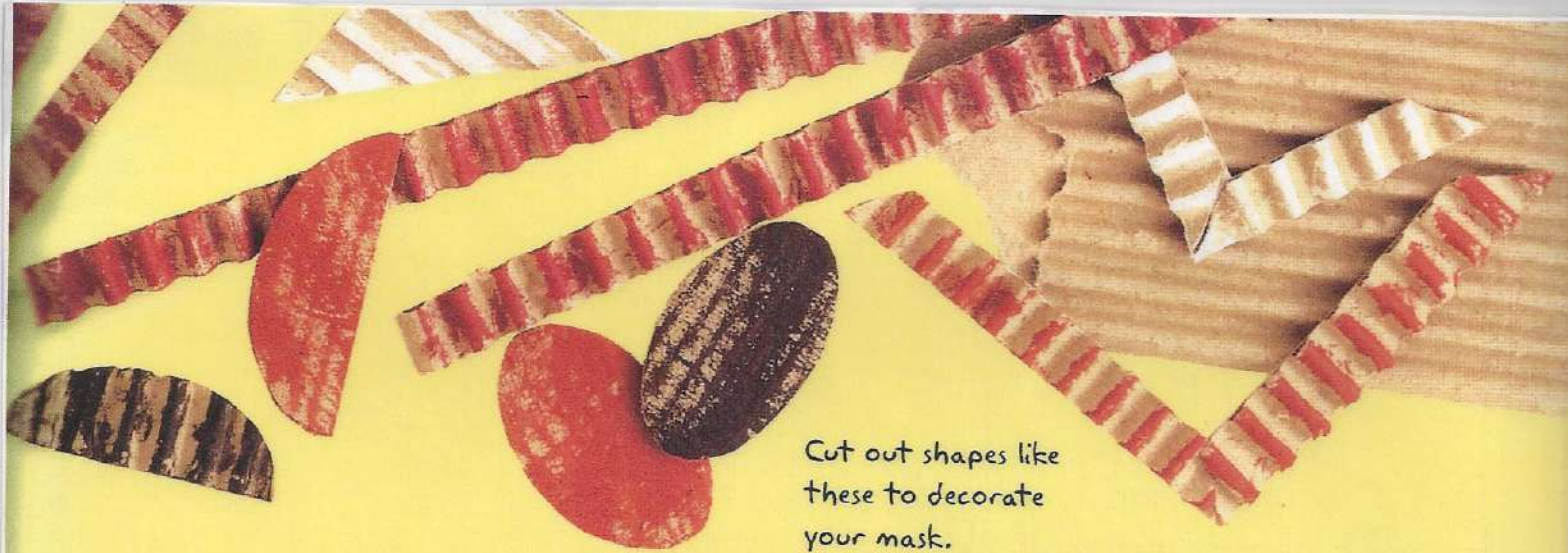
For more mask ideas, show PowerPoint presentation during mask activity.

Cardboard mask

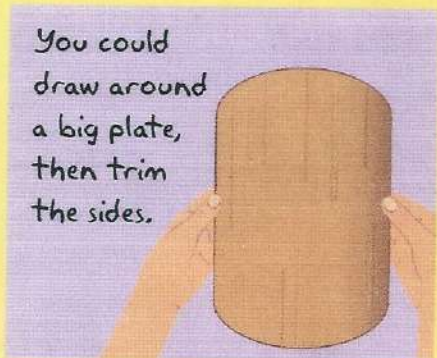
African masks are carved in wood and carefully decorated. This project shows you how to make your own mask by cutting and decorating thick, corrugated cardboard from a box.



You can buy raffia from arts and craft stores, florists or garden centers.

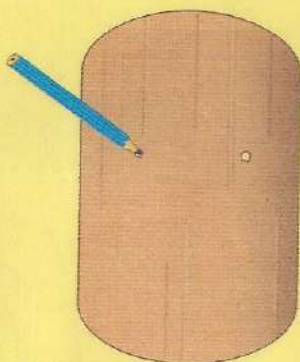


Cut out shapes like these to decorate your mask.

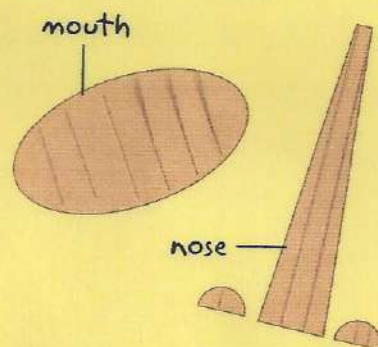


You could draw around a big plate, then trim the sides.

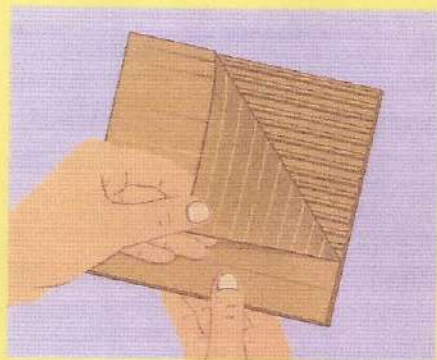
1. Draw a simple face shape on some corrugated cardboard and cut it out. Bend it into a curve.



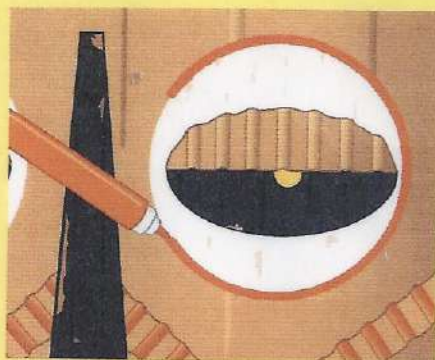
2. Draw two dots about halfway down. Carefully push a sharp pencil through the card to make eyeholes.



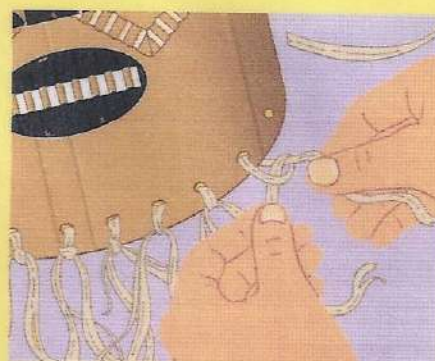
3. From more cardboard, cut a long triangle and two half-circles for a nose, and an oval for a mouth.



4. Peel the top layer off some more cardboard. Cut out two half-ovals for eyes, from the bumpy part.



5. Cut out more shapes. Glue all the shapes onto the mask and decorate it with paint or felt-tip pens.



6. Make holes around the chin. Poke short pieces of raffia or string through the holes and knot them on.