

Art  
ToGo

The Cleveland  
Museum of Art

Masks: Let's Face It

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## **Also in Your Folder**

### **a. Presentation Evaluation**

Please fill out and return to the museum after the presentation. Thank you!

### **b. Fax Sheet**

Use this form for shorter questions or concerns relating to the Art To Go visit.

Cover: Female Mask, wood, brass, and pigment, ca. 1900, Sabarikuro of Quazuman, African, Senufo, Ivory Coast. H. 31.1 in. John L. Severance Fund 1989.48.

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## Introduction

For many thousands of years, people have been making masks for rituals, entertainment, and protection. Though these masks represent many different religious and cultural beliefs, styles, and sizes, there are similarities in their functions. The *Masks: Let's Face It* suitcase contains eight masks, created at different times by cultures from around the world. The Art To Go presentation examines these objects in terms of their original purpose and the meanings they held for the cultures that created them. During this presentation, students will learn how the masks were made, but more importantly, *why* they were made. Students will also explore how our society uses masks today and how, if at all, these uses resemble those of the suitcase masks.

## At a Glance

The earliest images of people wearing masks come from the cave paintings of western Europe, dated approximately 13,000 BCE. Masks vary greatly throughout the world, but in general their subjects include human faces, animals, and imaginary or supernatural beings. Sometimes these subjects are combined in the same mask. No matter what the subject, when created, or for what purpose, masks change the identity of the wearer. When we study these masks, it is important to ask ourselves “Why was this made?” and “How was it used?” Also, “What did the mask maker intend?” and “How was the mask wearer affected?”

Historically, people have worn masks for several purposes, and chief among them are ritual and entertainment. Ritual masks can include those used as disguises for hunting, for the first masks used by early humans were probably animal masks made from the remains of real animals. Many ritual masks were meant to transform the wearer in some way. In some cultures masks were used in ceremonies of ancestor worship to seek advice from ancestors or other spirits. Masks were worn by shamans to personify spirits or intercede with them on behalf of a community, perhaps hoping to cure disease or guarantee a good harvest. Masks could be used to teach family histories or societal information.

On a practical level, where oral traditions were maintained instead of written histories, educational events such as family and community histories were passed down from one generation to the next in masked ceremonies. Some masks were used to mark transitions in people's lives; secret societies and initiation rites often employed masks in rituals welcoming young men or women into maturity. Important events in people's lives have always been marked by celebrations and masks often played a large role on the occasions of birth, marriage, and death.

Masks used for entertainment include examples from theater, dance, and drama performances around the world. Mask wearing is also just for fun! Many masks used today fall into this category—for example, Halloween masks, costume parties, and Mardi Gras celebrations.

As this presentation seeks to describe the different functions of the masks and their original cultural contexts, it is important to remind the students that masks can have more than one function or purpose.

The presentation focuses on the main function of each mask and how masks play an essential role in the lives of many cultures and communities of the world, both past and present.

## Questions and Answers

### **What is a mask?**

A mask is any device used to conceal or transform the wearer's identity, or simply to protect the face. Some masks, such as the Tlingit Bear mask, may cover the face completely, but some do not. The Hannya mask, for example, is small and covers only part of the face. Some masks are designed to sit on top of the head, like the antelope/bird mask, while the face is hidden by some other covering. Masks are often part of a larger costume that is worn to hide the true identity of the wearer.

### **How were these masks made?**

Most of the masks in this lesson were made from wood. Other materials have been added to the wood to decorate the masks. Most of them were originally painted, but the paint on some of them has worn away. Shiny metal pieces were sometimes added, as well as feathers, beads, leather, cloth, bone, plant material, and shells.

### **What were occasions for wearing masks?**

A majority of the masks in the presentation were used in rituals of many types. In African societies in general, masks are worn during religious celebrations and those marking rites of passages, such as coming of age, marriage, and death. They can be used to petition the spirits to provide good harvests

and victory in war, and to cure the sick. They can help open lines of communication with the spirits of ancestors and channel divine powers for the good of the community. In the Pacific Northwest, indigenous people wore masks for educational purposes—to teach family history to children. In Japan, theater performances involve masks that represent specific characters, like the Hannya mask from a Noh play. In Indonesia, masked dramas are part of a larger body of theater performances based on religious Hindu tales. Wherever masks are part of rituals and celebrations, their use draws members of the community together by strengthening its beliefs and customs.

### **How were they used?**

The person wearing the mask is almost always meant to acquire the personality or the powers of the subject it represents. Priests, doctors, and shamans often wore masks, believing that they possessed a power the wearer could release. With this power they could cure illness, communicate with ancestors, or petition the gods for favorable weather for crops. This is particularly true of many masks created by African societies in which the priest was the only person who was allowed to wear a mask and costume. Some masks were considered too dangerous for anyone else to handle, and those of the Tlingit were frequently kept in a hollow tree at the edge of the village because they were thought to be so powerful they could not be stored inside a home.

Masks could be part of celebrations honoring ancestors and the telling of the family history through song and dance. In many cultures, this is the main way that history is learned. Music and dancing are often involved in these ceremonies.

## **Yes, but are they art?**

In the African galleries at the museum the masks are displayed as sculpture, but in the African cultures that created them they were used, and not displayed as art. The Tlingit Bear mask also might have been placed in a tree for safekeeping while it was not worn. So, why does the museum treat masks as art objects? Art can be defined as the result of human creativity, skill and craftsmanship. As art, these masks demonstrate a form, an idea, and a function.

## **Presentation Outline**

The Noh mask in the presentation represents Hannya, a female demon. The designs of Noh masks were established hundreds of years ago, and new masks are copies. The oldest original masks are considered national treasures in Japan. With roots in Shinto dances and Buddhist traditions the Noh theater is purely Japanese and has enjoyed regular performances since the 1300s CE. Only males are allowed to perform, and can begin training as young as six or seven years of age. Young performers often start with masks less frightening and intense than those worn by adults. In addition to masks, the performers usually wear lavish robes and wigs that obscure much of their bodies.

The plays are quite long and the action moves at a very slow pace, with very little talk or movement; the effort required to bring life to the wooden masks and create believable emotions is very strenuous for the actors. The stories in the Noh theater are serious and sad. Most of the characters in Noh plays are gods, dead warriors, ghosts, and demons.

The Devil mask from Guatemala shows the influence of European cultures blended with ancient belief systems of indigenous people. During the 16th century, in order to maintain some of their own beliefs as Spanish missionaries sought to convert them to Christianity, indigenous people combined traditional celebrations with Christian holidays. For example, the Christian ceremonies marking All Souls and All Saints days (November 1-2) coincided with the indigenous festivals honoring ancestors. Devil masks depicted men with horns, painted red. The Diablado was a performance of masked dancers in which Lucifer and his band of devils try to conquer the earth, only to be driven back underground by the power of Christianity. Beating a devil in a ritual battle would be symbolic of defeating death, and of bringing an end to hardship. Even today, devil mask-making contests continue this artistic tradition in Mexico.

The Art To Go presentation includes a Garuda mask from Indonesia, where theater was greatly influenced by contact with India and Hinduism. Many of the country's dance dramas illustrate stories from the Hindu epics, such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayama. Indonesian dance is performed at a slow, rhythmic pace with little jumping. Dancers include women as well as men. Birds are traditionally a frequent symbol in Indonesian art and Garuda became the most important, associated with the sun and with the idea of deliverance. (Garuda has been adopted as the official emblem of the modern Indonesian State, and the name of the national airline.)

The antelope/bird mask is a product of the Mossi, the largest tribe in Burkino Faso, Africa (formerly Upper Volta), numbering more than two million.

They are recognized for their painted masks, which are guarded in secrecy and used for funeral and crop ceremonies. The masks are thought to be based on styles belonging to an indigenous population that predates the Mossi invasions in the 15th century. Today, the Mossi and others living in this region of Africa are farmers and cattle ranchers.

People of the Yoruba culture occupy a region of Nigeria and the Popular Republic of Benin, and speak their own language. They are prolific artists and Gelede masks can take a variety of forms. The Gelede society of the Yoruba use masks during festivals that are held to honor the power of elderly women, referred to as “our mothers, the witches.” The masks are based on the human face, but may be surmounted by elaborate coiffures or carvings of contemporary Yoruba life. Yoruba men fear the power of the tribe’s women and perform these festivals wearing masks and dancing to music to please the women and maintain an amicable community.

The bear mask was probably worn by a shaman during a potlatch, a traditional feast of the Pacific Northwest at which the guests honored their host by acknowledging his name or position in society. (The guests were paid for this tribute.) These feasts were often held at times of transition such as births, marriages, and deaths. Among the Tlingit in Alaska, potlatches were held on the occasions of funerals, memorials to the dead, and ear-piercing ceremonies. Shamans, powerful people who could be either man or woman, were also responsible for healing the sick, and used various ritual objects such as amulets, rattles, and crowns during their work. Their masks and ritual objects were considered very powerful in their own right and were not brought into

houses. Shamans often wore masks of animals to represent their own personal “spirit helper,” such as the bear mask shown in the presentation. The head of a family could also wear a mask representing the family crest animal. Wearing masks and dancing served to teach family history, as well as tribal myths and legends. Because the Tlingit believed that all things had spirits and that rituals kept the spirits appeased, wearing animal masks could make their own lives better. Why animals? Because animals provided food, shelter, and tools, and had keen instincts and excellent physical gifts, they were considered superior to humans.

The Baule mask in the presentation was made for a ceremony honoring a guest to the village. African art is not usually thought of as being “art for art’s sake” but Baule art may come the closest. The Baule are one of the most important tribes living in the Ivory Coast area of West Africa. Historically, the name comes from the story of Queen Aba Pokou who led her people to the area in the 18th century. To ensure the safe crossing of a river she was required to sacrifice her son to the river god, so the people were called *Bauli*, meaning “The son is dead.”

The feathered mask was worn at Mardi Gras, a festival brought to North America by the French who began to settle in New Orleans in the 1600s. In European countries masks have been worn for thousands of years, but in modern cultures they are almost always used for disguise, rather than for religious observance or membership in a secret society. The tradition of wearing masks on Mardi Gras is very old and probably comes from the fact that, in disguise, people could behave in ways they ordinarily wouldn’t.

## Things to Think About

You may want to prepare your students with a few questions about masks. Here are some that may pique their interest.

- What kind of masks have you worn? Think back to when you were a young child. Have you been in a play? Have you been trick-or-treating?
- How does wearing a mask make you feel? What changes happen to your voice? Your posture? Your attitude?
- Would a mask give you power you wouldn't have without it?
- Why is it important that a mask cover the face?
- How does your culture revere or respect its ancestors?
- How do you feel when you see the mask of an evil person or creature?
- Would you feel uncomfortable if you didn't know who was behind a mask?
- Can you think of ways that we use masks today? For ritual (religious plays), or for entertainment (Halloween, wrestling, theater).

## List of Objects

The suitcase contents may vary, depending on the condition of the objects.

- Hannya, a female demon, Noh Mask, Japan
- Devil mask, Guatemala, Central America
- Garuda mask, Indonesia
- Antelope/bird mask, Burkino Faso, Africa
- Gelede mask, Yoruba people, Nigeria, Africa
- Bear mask, Tlingit society, Alaska
- Mask, Baule tribe, Ivory Coast, Africa
- Mardi Gras mask, imported from China

## Resources

### Getting Ready for the Visit

#### General Information

The Art To Go presentation will be about 40 minutes long.

- Anyone who wishes to handle the objects must wear gloves, which will be provided by the Art To Go staff.
- We respectfully request that a homeroom teacher or events coordinator be present and attentive during the presentation.

#### Classroom Set-up

- Please have a small table or desk available at the front of the room.
- If possible, arrange the students in a semicircle facing the presentation. This allows the Art To Go staff to pass works of art among the students.
- Please provide student identification so that the Art To Go teachers may call on students by name.

## Lesson Plan

### Focus

Students will be introduced to the worldwide tradition of masks through an exploration of items from the Art To Go collection. The lesson will be appropriate for an elementary grade audience, but can be adapted to older audiences as well.

### Purpose

To foster an appreciation of different cultural perspectives and a greater sensitivity to other cultures from around the world—their beliefs and practices.

### Motivation

Students will be motivated through a direct, hands-on experience. Students may be further motivated through classroom discussion, follow-up questioning, or a hands-on art project.

### Objectives

- Students will learn different functions of masks and how function relates to appearance.
- Students will learn how and why masks were created.
- Students will learn how the masks were used in their original cultural settings.
- Students will explore their own modern society and discover how masks are used today.

### Participation

The students will answer questions from simple to complex. They will be asked to “problem-solve” by identifying what they see.

### Comprehension Check

The students will be asked questions as the lesson is taught. The homeroom teacher may follow the presentation with curriculum ideas in this packet or sources listed in the bibliography. Teachers may also incorporate ideas from the lesson in an art project.

### Closure

The students will reinforce what they have learned during the lesson by visiting the permanent collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art. They will be asked to make connections between the museum’s galleries and the Art To Go lesson.

## Vocabulary

Ancestors	Gelede	Noh
Ancestor worship	Hindu	Ritual
Baule	Indigenous people	Shaman
Burkina Faso	Initiation rites	Tlingit
Diablado	Mardi Gras	Yourba
Garuda	Mossi	

### Suggestions for Further Reading

#### ESPECIALLY FOR CHILDREN

Ayo, Yvonne. *Eyewitness Books: Africa*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995. This book is full of excellent pictures of African art objects, both finished and in progress. It is a general guide to the work of the entire continent.

Congdon-Martin, Douglas L., and Jim Pieper. *Masks of the World*. Atglen: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1999. Divided by country, this book covers all of the masks and cultures presented in this suitcase. It also includes very modern photos of masks being made and worn.

Gates, Frieda. *North American Indian Masks—Crafts and Legend*. New York: Walker Publishing Company, 1982. An introduction to the subject for elementary students.

Gelber, Carol. *Masks Tell Stories*. Connecticut: The Millbrook Press, 1993. Very good text, up to date, chapters on masks for various functions in society. For older children and teachers.

Mirpuri, Gouri. *Cultures of the World: Indonesia*. New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1990. A clear, concise book that will appeal to older children and adults. Full of recent color photos covering every aspect of life in Indonesia.

Price, Christine. *The Mystery of Masks*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978. A good book for children that is multicultural in scope with strong storytelling aspects. Author draws similarities between cultures from all over the world.

Shelley, Rex. *Cultures of the World: Japan*. New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1990. A clear, concise book that will appeal to older children and adults. Full of recent color photos covering many aspects of life in Japan.

Stelzig, Christine, and Fiona Elliot. *Can you Spot the Leopard? African Masks, Adventures in Art*. Munich and New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1997. Lively and fun, this book will interest readers of many ages.

Wood, Marion. *The World of Native Americans*. New York: Bedrick Books, 1997. An informative guide for the introduction of this subject to students.

#### ESPECIALLY FOR TEACHERS

Appleton, Le Roy H. *American Indian Design and Decoration*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971.

Bacquart, Jean-Baptiste. *The Tribal Arts of Africa*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998. A very recent publication, with up-to-date information about African countries, color plates and many examples of African art. Divided by African culture, with a bibliography at the end of each section.

Hahner-Herzog, Iris, and Maria Kecskesi and Laszlo Vajda. *African Masks from the Barbier-Mueller Collection, Geneva*. Munich-New York: Prestel, 1998. A beautifully illustrated work that presents the subject thoroughly.

Holt, Claire. *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1967. This work is particularly helpful in research on Garuda, including a secondary story of the rescue of his mother from the serpent.

Keene, Donald. *No: The Classical Theatre of Japan*. Palo Alto: Kodansha International Ltd., 1966. Large format, easy to read, with many color photographs of actors and masks.

Lommel, Andreas. *Masks: Their Meaning and Function*. London: Paul Elek Books, 1972. Essays on many world cultures and their mask-making and wearing traditions, including many examples from 20th-century Europe.

Mack, John, ed. *Masks and the Art of Expression*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994. A well illustrated and carefully written exploration of the subject.

McCarty, Cara, et al. *Masks: Faces of Culture*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999. The latest scholarship is thoughtfully presented in this new book.

Nakamura, Yasuo. *Noh: The Classical Theater*. New York: Walker/Weatherhill, 1971. A thorough account of Noh, including an introduction by an American visitor to Japan, who experienced Noh theater for the first time in 1945.

Sorell, Walter. *The Other Face: The Mask in the Arts*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.

Woodhead, Henry, series ed. *The American Indians: The Spirit World*. Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1992. Divided by theme, this series of books explores Native American cultures in depth with modern photographs.

#### WEBSITE

[www.clevelandart.org](http://www.clevelandart.org)  
We encourage teachers and students alike to visit the museum in person. We also encourage teachers and students to visit the museum's website, where information about the museum's permanent collection and educational programs can be found.

## “Webbing”

### Masks

Suggestions for making art the center of student learning

#### Reading

Read a story from one of the cultures featured in this presentation. Try to find a story that mentions ceremonies, rituals, plays, or masks.

#### Science

Can you think of masks used by scientists in our world today? (Think of applications in medicine, the space program, in the computer industry, in manufacturing.)

#### Social studies

Locate each country represented by a mask in the presentation on a map or globe. On which continents do they belong? Find out more about the cultures that have been discussed. How are they different or similar to yours?

### How masks connect to other disciplines

#### Biology

Many of the masks in this presentation are based on animals. Can you name them? Sometimes, the mask maker combines real animals with imaginary ones. Can you spot the imaginary animals?

#### Art

Observe the decoration on a mask. Talk about what it represents. Make a papier mâché mask or construct a paper mask and decorate it. What medium will you use to decorate your mask? What media were used to decorate the masks in the suitcase?

#### Writing/ Language Arts

Many masks were used to tell the history of an event to a family or a community. Write about a family event that you would like to record for history, and describe how you could use masks to tell the story.

# Masks: Let's Face It

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The Art To Go pilot program  
is sponsored by Eaton  
Corporation. Additional  
support is provided by the  
National Endowment for  
the Arts, a federal agency,  
and Toshiba International  
Foundation.

