



MASKS

Pacific Northwest
Coast & Eastern
Woodlands

WHAT ARE MASKS?

A mask is an object normally worn on the face, typically for protection, disguise, performance, or entertainment.

Masks have been used since antiquity for both ceremonial and practical purposes.

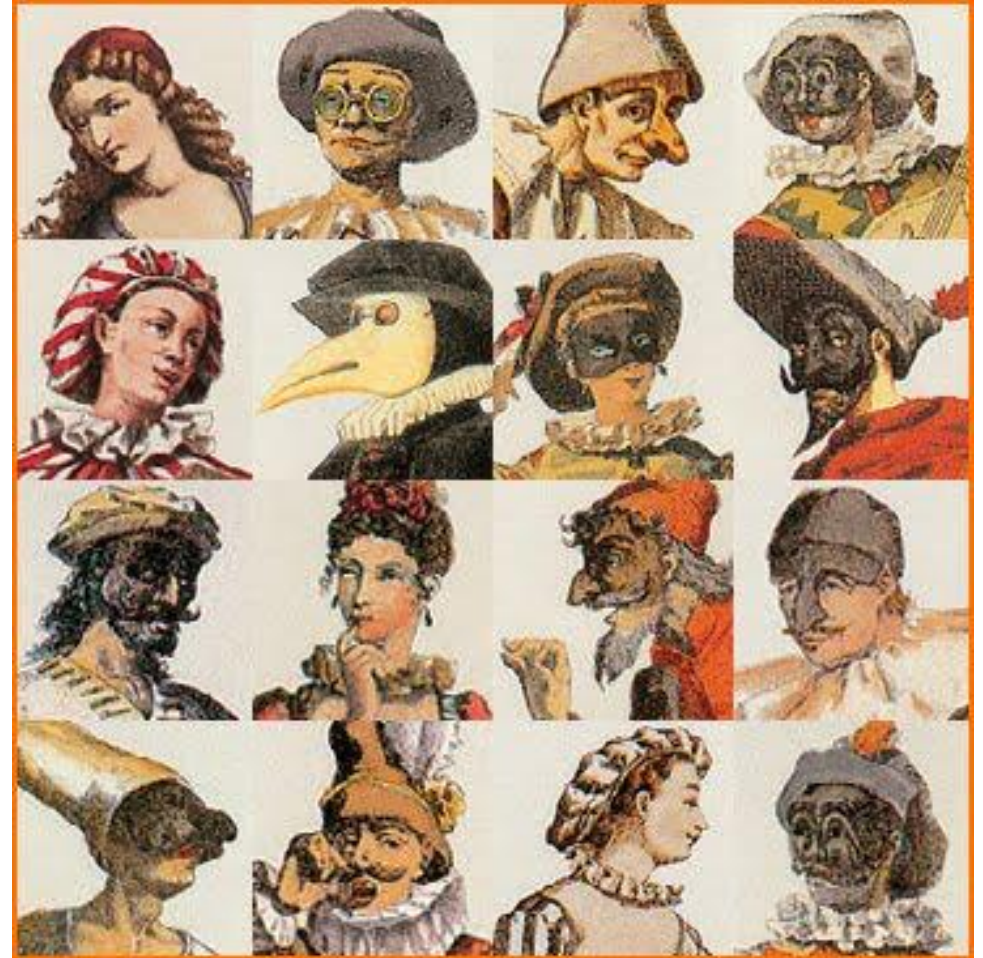


MASKS FOR PERFORMANCE

In ancient Greece drama included singing, dancing and forms of narration. Characters came to be represented by masks.

In Italy in the 16th century, a new style of theatre emerged called Commedia dell'Art. Characters wore masks and costumes, and actors improvised scripts.

In the west, masks have become more of a disguise worn to hide faces or add excitement to carnivals and events like Halloween.



MASKS FOR RITUALS

Masks have been used for thousands of years and by many cultures.

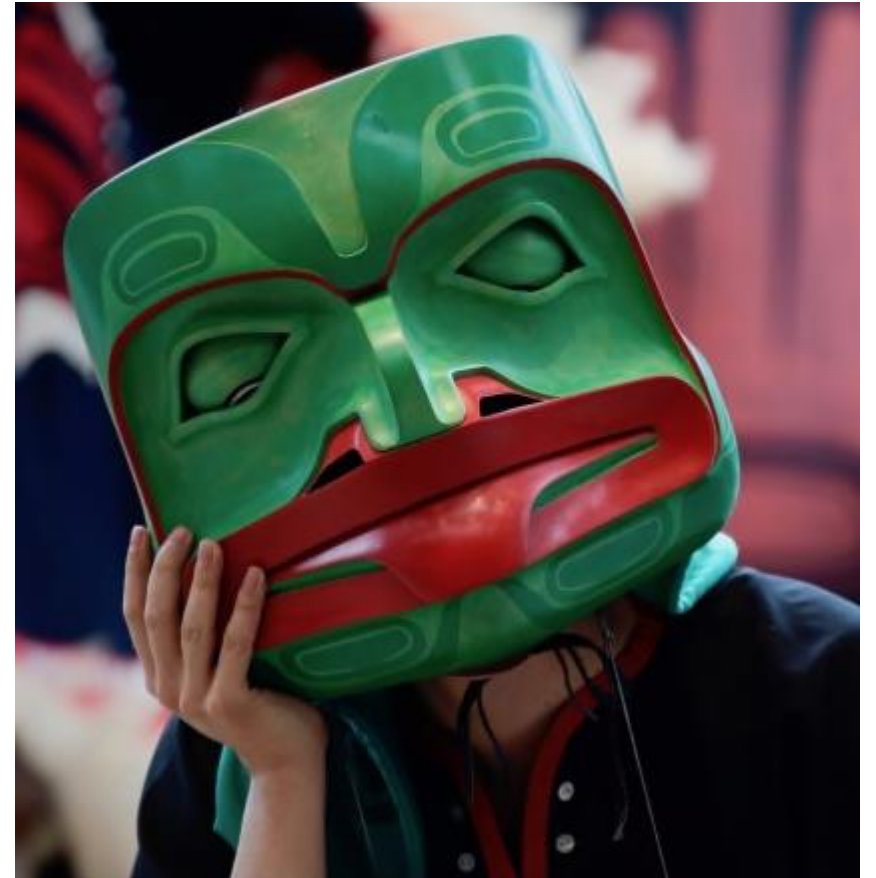
In France, cave paintings show hunters wearing masks to give them courage and get into the spirit of animals being hunted. This is still done in modern times by hunters in Africa and Alaska.

In ancient Egypt, animal masks represented spirits of the dead. People believe spirits of the dead are important and can be called upon to help. Masks were used in ancient Egyptian tombs to protect the dead from demons in the afterlife. Death masks were also used in ancient civilizations of China, Mexico and Peru.



MASKS FOR STORYTELLING

Among First Peoples, oral tradition is extremely important and may consist of told stories, songs, and/or other types of wisdom or information, often incorporating dance or various forms of visual representation such as carvings or masks.



NORTHWEST COAST NATIVES

Ceremonial masks play an important role in defining and preserving stories and values.

The majority of the masks are worn during dances during storytelling.

These enact the stories that helped preserve family traditions.

Masks were also worn during magic and healing rituals performed by shamans.



WOODLAND NATIVES

In more recent times, in the Woodlands region surrounding the Great Lakes in North America, Iroquois had secret societies whose select members used false-face masks in sacred ceremonies and rituals.



WOODLAND NATIVES, CONT'D

In this culture there is a society known as the False Face Society.

They wear masks carved from the trunks of living trees.

The masks have a strong nose and protruding lips, and the face is framed with a cascade of horse hair.

Before setting to work, carvers burn offerings of tobacco to the spirits, and request they be granted with healing powers.



FALSE FACE SOCIETY

If someone had a nightmare and saw a flying head (common motif), they would go to the False Face Society and ask for help.

To chase the flying head spirit away, the dreamer would be told to prepare a mask from a living tree.

The masks created by the wood carvers always had twisted features and looked scary.

Once the mask was ready, the dreamer and his or her family clan hosted a feast.

They were responsible for the preparation of all the food.

During the feast, with the help of chants and rattles, the members of the False Face Society, invited a good spirit to take the place of the bad one.



FALSE FACE SOCIETY, CONT'D

The mask was treasured and honored.

It was now the home of a good spirit that had to be protected by the dreamer and the clan.

Most of the ailments that were brought to them were easy fixes. If someone came to them with a headache, the ceremony would be performed in the longhouse for everyone to enjoy.

The society would put on their masks, and dance, and blow ashes in the sufferer's face.

In minutes, they were done, and the person was suppose to be better.

Their reward was some tobacco and some corn mush given to them by the grateful family, who was sure that the sufferer was now cured.



FALSE FACE SOCIETY, CONT'D

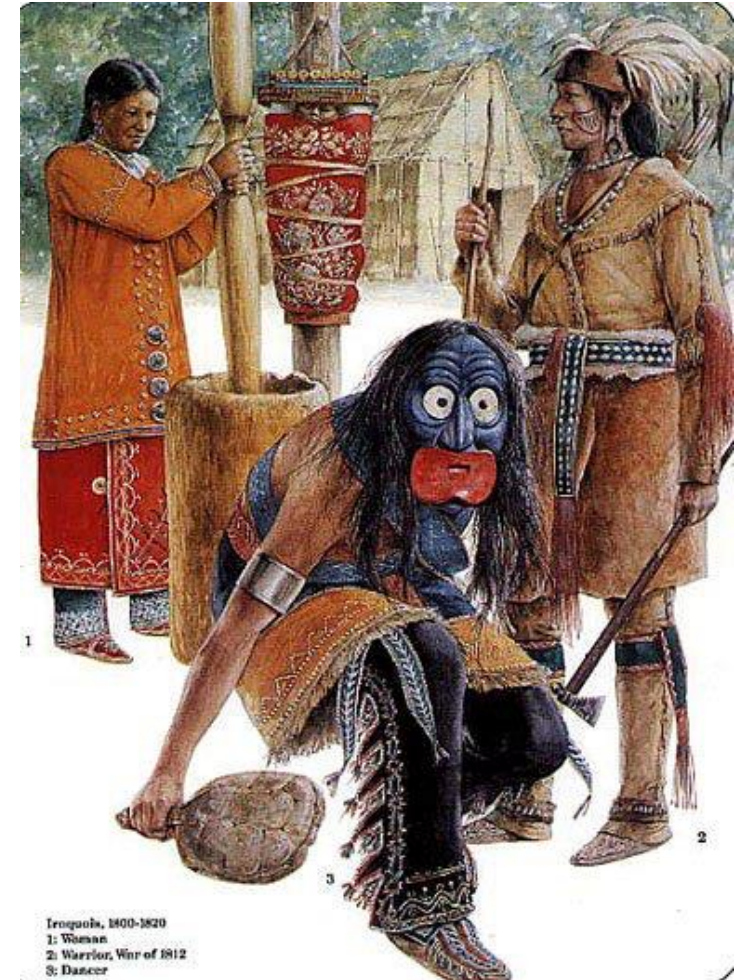
The person they cured automatically became a member of the society.

If you were helped, it was important that you go on to help others. That was the Iroquois way.

Each spring and fall, members of the False Face Society each wore a mask and went from home to home, chanting and shaking rattles, and making as much noise as they could.

This was the twice-annual evil spirit house cleaning festival.

The noise they made was designed to scare away any little evil spirits that they might have overlooked during the previous months.



Iroquois, 1800-1820
1: Woman
2: Warrior, War of 1812
3: Dancer

ANIMALS & MASKS



The storyteller who wears the mask, "became the spirit of what the mask represented, whether that's an ancestor, a bear, raven, or eagle."

Many animals depicted by masks are themselves representative of particular traits or myths.

The raven, for instance, can be a teacher or trickster, while the eagle mask is used to make a fresh path for dancers.



SUPERNATURAL & MASKS

The close relationships with animals, spirits and supernatural beings are well represented in many First Nations Cultures, by stories that are passed down through generations.

Many Northwest Coast First Nation families have their own distinct stories, that they present at potlatches on very special occasions.

These stories are often told through masked dancers and songs.



TASK: MAKE YOUR OWN MASK

1. Complete the Mask Proposal handout and get teacher approval.
2. Gather all necessary materials.
3. Begin building up the features of your mask with newspaper and tape onto your balloon. Get approval.
4. Plaster your mask, let dry.
5. Trim up your edges and paint. Add on any additional material as specified in your proposal.
6. Complete Formal Critique handout

