

African Ceremonial Mask

(art + social studies)

Studying the rich history of maskmaking in Africa is a perfect way for students to experience the relationship between the process of creating a piece of art, and appreciating the significance it carries. An African artist would design and prepare a mask with great consideration to its purpose and its place in history.

This project mimics a face mask that may have been used to represent the spirit of a tribal ancestor in a village ceremony. The features are exaggerated by the use of color. The use of raffia create movement and sound intended add to heighten the ghostly appearance. Adding feathers or shells may have been ways of imparting power or wealth. The finished mask would be held in front of the face during the ceremony.

The use of Plaster Cloth allows students to create textures and abstract features in a sculptural way. The finished masks are rigid and very durable, suitable for hanging or wearing.

Grade Levels 5-8

Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Objectives

- Students will develop an awareness of the social significance of cultural artifacts such as masks
- Students will explore using a mask for the purpose of communicating history and culture, evoking emotion or storytelling
- Students will study African traditions and beliefs and translate their knowledge into an art form

Process

1. Coat the mask form with petroleum jelly. Cut 20 strips from the Plaster Cloth roll, approximately 1-1/2" wide. Dip strips in warm water and apply to face form, overlapping and blending edges with fingers. Apply second layer. Leave holes for eyes and mouth. Allow to dry several hours and remove from face form.



Materials

Blick Plaster Cloth (33506-1004), share 4" x 180" roll between 5 students

Plastic Face Mask Form, (61152-1003), need one per student (reusable)

Blick Matte Acrylic, Brown (00727-8003), Beige (00727-8143), Red Deep (00727-3723) and Yellow-Orange Deep (00727-4853)

Raffia (60908-1372), natural, share 12-oz bag between ten students

Bucket O' Shells (61451-1016), share one bucket across classroom

Blick All-Use Masking Tape, (23006-1002) 2" wide, share three rolls across classroom

Natural Feather Assortment (61432-1005), share two .5-oz bag across classroom

Swingline® 747 Stapler (57231-2050), share two across classroom

Petroleum jelly

Acme® Titanium Scissors (57059-1007)

Bowl of warm water

Process, continued

2. Take a small handful of Raffia and cut into 6"-8" pieces. Lay out in a flat row on tabletop, place a strip of masking tape at the top near the cut edge. Turn over and place a matching piece of masking tape on that side, fold edges, trim excess Raffia over the tape and wrap a final piece of tape on top (A). Repeat until you have several sets of Raffia to make a full beard.
3. Coat the entire mask with Brown Craft Paint. Using sponges, lightly stipple Red, Yellow-Orange and Beige. You may use other colors, if you'd like, but these colors were selected to match traditional African earth-pigments.
4. Staple Raffia sets to side of face so that taped edge follows the back edge of the mask and Raffia extends forward in front of the face. Bend Raffia back away to form a full beard. Finish by gluing on feathers and shells.



National Standards

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

- **K-4** Students use different media, techniques and processes to communicate ideas, experiences and stories

- **5-8** Students select media, techniques and processes; analyze what makes them effective or not effective in communicating ideas; and reflect upon the effectiveness of their choices

Content Standard #6 — Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

- **K-4** Students understand and use similarities and differences between characteristics of the visual arts and other arts disciplines

- **5-8** Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts