



San Antonio
Museum
of Art

Latin American Folk Art Masks

Grade Level: Middle School, High School

Subjects: Visual Arts, Social Studies, Theatre, Math

Media: Sculpture

Selected Artworks:



Black Male Mask, Artist unknown, Peru, Wood, paint, Purchased with funds provided by Friends of Folk Art, 89.19.2

Demon Mask, Artist unknown, Mexico, Wood, paint, deer antlers, Purchased with Epcot Funds, 88.47.3

El Patrón Mask, Artist unknown, Guatemala, Wood, paint, gesso, glass, Purchased with funds provided by Friends of Latin American Art, 93.68.1

Objectives:

- Learners will explore the uses of masks in the cultures of Mexico and Latin America.
- Learners will investigate the techniques of mask making through creating plaster masks built over a simple armature.
- Learners will paint and embellish masks with feathers, ribbons, sequins and other decorations.

About the Artwork:

The masks of Mexico and other Latin American cultures date back as far as 1000 B.C. In addition to death masks of gold, turquoise mosaic and semi-precious stones, there were masks used by warriors and priests that represented the faces of the gods and their sacrificial offerings. Masks used in ceremonial dances included old men (Patron), hunters and animals, such as jaguars, birds and monkeys. The old men, or viejos, were tied to the Aztec god of fire, Huehuetotl, also known as the “Old, Old Deity” or the “Lord of the Year.” His feast marked the end of the old year and the continuation of life. All fires were extinguished, and a new fire was lit on top of a hill to symbolize the Earth being saved for



another year. The elderly were revered both in life and in death as ancestors who watched over those they left behind. The selected masks from Latin America and represent a broad range of artistic expression.

When the Spanish missionaries arrived in the Americas, they observed this longstanding masking traditions and used them to introduce Biblical stories. The characters of Moors, Christians, St. James, Conquistadors, Pharisees, Romans, Diablos and Malinche appeared at the festival of Carnival, which coincided roughly with the beginning of the Aztec year.

Today, mask makers in Mexico use a wide range of materials, including wood, tin, clay, papier-mâché, fabric and wire mesh. Animals, men, women, children, clowns, fantastic creatures and historic characters are represented and serve to illustrate the tremendously rich variety of cultural experience in Latin America today.

Materials:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Recyclable materials for armature
- Masking tape
- Cardstock
- Gauze
- Scissors
- Ziploc baggies
- Acrylic paints
- Paint brushes
- Embellishments (feathers, ribbons, sequins, etc.)

Process:

1. Introduce examples of masks from Latin America that learners may draw inspiration from.
2. Have learners sketch their mask design on paper.
3. Build an armature for the mask using cardstock, tinfoil and other recyclable materials. Armatures should emphasize volume and dimension. Hold the materials together with generous amounts of masking tape.
4. Prepare the plaster gauze by cutting it into pieces, approximately 1.5 inches wide by 3-4 inches long. Students can store their cut gauze in labeled Ziploc baggies.
5. Layer the plaster gauze over the armature. Each piece of plaster gauze should be dipped in water and “squeegeed” between the fingers to remove excess water. Rub the gauze to smooth out the surface and to join the pieces together. The smoother the surface is, the easier it will be to paint. Turn the mask as you work, in order to make sure that you cover all areas.



6. Once the first layer of plaster gauze is completed over the armature, add a second layer for strength.
7. Paint a base coat on the mask with acrylic paints.
8. Paint the details on the mask.
9. Embellish the mask with sequins, feathers, ribbons, etc.

TEKS:

Social Studies:

113.6.1 History. The student understands the similarities and differences of Native-American groups in Texas and the Western Hemisphere before European exploration.

113.6.2 History. The student understands the causes and effects of European exploration and colonization of Texas and the Western Hemisphere.

Mathematics:

111.16.8 Geometry and spatial reasoning. The student identifies and describes attributes of geometric figures using formal geometric language.

Visual Art:

117.14.1 Perception. The student develops and organizes ideas from the environment.

117.14.2 Creative expression/performance. The student expresses ideas through original artworks, using a variety of media with appropriate skill.

117.14.3 Historical/cultural heritage. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture as records of human achievement.

117.14.4 Response/evaluation. The student makes informed judgments about personal artworks and the artworks of others.

Theatre:

117.40.1 Four basic strands--perception, creative expression/performance, historical and cultural heritage, and critical evaluation--provide broad, unifying structures for organizing knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire.

Through perceptual studies, students increase their understanding of self and others and develop clear ideas about the world. Through a variety of theatrical experiences, students communicate in a dramatic form, make artistic choices, solve problems, build positive self-concepts, and relate interpersonally.



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