

BACKGROUND READING FOR PRESENTERS

Mexican Masks

Throughout history masks have been worn for many different reasons. Some of these reasons are for Halloween, Masquerade parties, or parades. But masks were used in very meaningful Indian tribal and primitive tribal ceremonies long ago--as Ceremonial Masks.

They are still used today in many tribal ceremonies.

These occasions include birth, death, hunting, ceremonies to heal the sick, or to honor the dying, marriage, even ceremonies believed to make the corn grow, or to bring rain. They even wore some frightening ones when in battle or war because it was believed that the masks, or "spirits" would scare the enemy. Other masks were worn by Indians because it was believed it would frighten away evil spirits that would bring disease and misfortune to their tribes.

These masks were made by ordinary people, not special "mask makers". They used wood, pottery, glass, brass, and even mud sand and water mixtures to make these masks. Each one was designed differently. They represent emotion. The appearance often times showed the makers feelings of that certain ceremony.

These masks are from Western and Southwestern Mexico. They were used in the rain dance festivals of late summer and harvest festivals of the fall. Some were worn by the user and others were carried in the hands. Many have elaborate hair, fibers, and painted designs.

The Mexican Indians have been making these masks for over 200 years, but most of them available today are not more than sixty years old. The older ones have been destroyed due to weather and bugs.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for
Wooden Mexican Masks--Grade Two

1. Why do you suppose someone makes a mask?
2. What makes a mask funny? Scary? Sad?
3. Can looking at a mask make you feel a certain way when you see it?
4. Look at these two Mexican Masks. How do they make you feel?
5. What is it about them that makes you feel that way?
6. How do you think they were made?
7. What materials are used in them?
8. What do you like best about them?
9. What don't you like?
10. These masks were made by ordinary people, not special mask-makers. Each one is a little different from the other. Compare them to other masks that you have seen, like at Halloween. How are they different from those?
11. If you were making a mask, what materials, colors, size would it be? How would you fasten it to your head. Where would you get your materials?

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES TO ACCOMPANY

Mexican Masks Grade Two

1. Brown paper masks

Materials: brown sack paper, markers/crayons, feathers (BCA), thin elastic, raffia (natural), glue, or stapler

There is a sample mask in the red bag. Collect brown paper. Grocery store bags work great. Trace around the sample. A suggestion would be to cut out the mask ahead of time for second graders. I even cut out the eyes ahead of time. It depends on your class and their ability to cut. Have the students decorate their mask. Give each one several feathers to staple or glue on, along with the thin pieces of natural colored raffia. The last thing to be done is to staple the elastic piece (according to the size of the student's head) This could be done by the presenter/teacher.

2. The second activity is very similar. However, for this one, a white paper plate may be used for the mask. There is a sample of this one in the bag, as well. Students can probably do their own cutting for this.