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## Art Masterpiece: AFRICAN MASKS

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**Keywords:** Symmetry, Pattern, and Composition

**Grade:** 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Activity:** Mask Making

*We recommend utilizing the website:*

*[www.artyfactory.com/africanmasks](http://www.artyfactory.com/africanmasks).*

*You can navigate this site to project multiple images of African masks onto the projector screen in the classroom.*

*Art Print is available at IRC.*



### Meet the Artist:

The continent of Africa has many cultures, but one element is common to them all – MASKS.

The mask maker is a specially educated person who is respected and feared by his tribe for his understanding of the spirit world. Artists' training can last for many years through either an apprentice/mentor relationship or by skills that are passed down from father to son.

Every mask is made according to strict rules. They believe that the materials that they work with and every color and shape has power. This power directs the artists' work. Skilled craftsmanship, fine detail and quality of finish are of great importance to the artist.

African masks are used as ceremonial costumes. They are very symbolic (celebration, war, death) and many are expressions of inner feelings. Masks are used to help tell a story about the tribe's history. They come to life through music and dance.

Masks are made of bone, ivory, metal, fiber, and most often wood. They may look natural or abstract using bold, geometric shapes. They can represent qualities such as nobility, beauty, courage, humor, etc.

One thing that is common to all masks: They are expressions of inner feeling and not copies of nature.

Pablo Picasso was inspired by the bold abstract designs of African masks. He would collect them and use them to influence his own style. This brought a fresh look to European art.

### **Review KEYWORDS:**

**COMPOSITION:** Formal symmetrical arrangements of line, shape and form.

**TEXTURE:** Highly polished surface – suggest beauty.  
Rough, dirty surface - to show fear and evil.

**PATTERN:** Most patterns are geometrical & symmetrical. Pattern is often used as a form of coded information. Used to denote social status, religious powers, male or female.

**SYMMETRY:** Parts arranged the same way on both sides.

### **DISCUSSION: About the Painting:**

**Discussion time is to focus on studying various mask designs and how the artist used the elements of art to portray emotion and story.**

**Questions:** Masks have purpose. What masks are commonly used in America today? (Halloween, cosmetic, surgical, catcher's, ceremonies etc.)

What types of ceremonies would African masks be used for? (Spiritual worship, weddings, prior/post battle, Celebrations, Funerals, etc.)

## Display various mask designs from website on screen:

What emotion is shown by the expression of this mask design?

How did the artist show emotion? Which colors or shapes, lines were used to help reflect that emotion. (Triangular lines over eyes can make face appear angry or fierce, etc.)

Discuss **Symmetry** of the Design.

Discuss **Patterns** used. Illustrate pattern found on white-board.

## Activity: African Masks.

**Materials:** Mask Templates (options: cut from tag board or heavy cardstock or you can purchase mask templates). Tempura paints in brown, black, white, and red. Paint brushes, Q-tips, paper plates, cups with water, paper towel. Glue, staplers. Newsprint to protect desks.

**EXTRAS:** Raffia, Metallic paints, buttons, Yarn, feathers etc.

**TIME:** This project will take a full 45 minutes to produce a well-detailed design. After reviewing a couple mask designs from Internet site, proceed with project. You can continue to present other mask images as they listen and work on their own mask. African music can also be played as background music.

### Process:

1. Cover each desk with newsprint.
2. Student should determine what type of ceremony they are creating their mask for. What emotion should it convey? What colors, shapes and patterns will help portray this expression?
3. Dispense tempera paints onto each student's paper plate. Metallic paint goes a long ways... a little dab will do.
4. Suggest using q-tips or the wood tip of brush or pencil top to create circles. Suggest they implement pattern.
5. Encourage students to think balance and work for a symmetrical design. Tell the if they imagine a vertical line down the center of the mask each side of their design should look identical to the other side.
6. **OPTIONAL:** Once students are finished they can add raffia, buttons, sequins etc.

7. Yarn can be added to make ties on each side of mask. String also helps to hang for display.

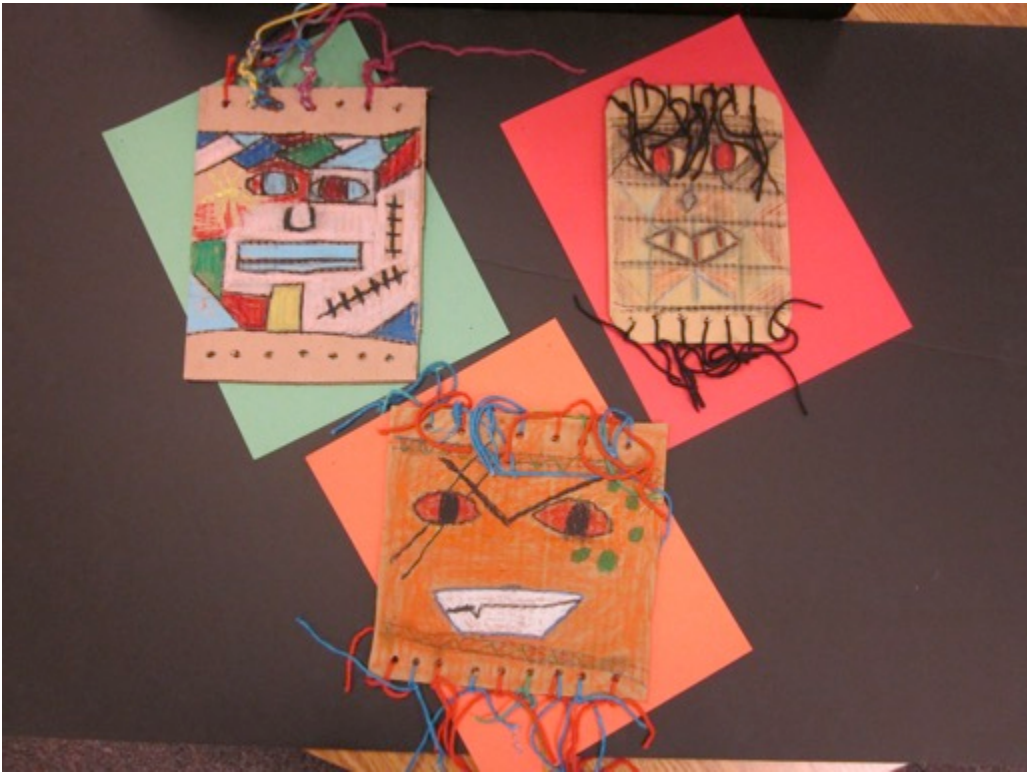
**Special Note:** Limiting the color pallet of the tempera paint to Brown, black, white paint, a metallic, and one primary color make for a unified collection of masks. We are looking for a finished product that resembles tribal masks not clown masks. Please limit the paint selection as directed.

**Examples of this project:**



Mask Die-cut style





Cardboard style



Chandler Unified School District Art Masterpiece

Brief info about the artist The continent of Africa has many cultures, but one element that is common to them all – MASKS.

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Brief info about the project: Today students created their own mask choosing colors and shapes to design a mask that shows symmetry and pattern in their composition.



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