

*“We all wear masks, metaphorically speaking.”*

--Dr. Newman in *The Mask*

# Plaster Masks

## Objective

Students will investigate the function of masks in a variety of past and present cultures.

Student will create a plaster **Life Mask** – a cast of the face of a living person.

## Elements

**Form:** object with three dimensions (3-D) having length (height), width and depth, can be **geometric** or **organic**.

**Texture:** surface quality; how things feel, or look as they might feel if touched.

## Principles

**Unity:** all parts work together to achieve a quality of wholeness or oneness.

**Pattern:** decorative surface design using repetition of elements.

## Vocabulary

**Modeling:** soft, pliable material is built up and shaped

**Additive Process:** material is added to a form

**Subtractive Process:** material is carved or cut away

## California Visual Arts Standards – 9-12 Proficient

### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

*Skills, Processes, Materials, and Tools*

2.1 Solve a visual arts problem that involves the effective use of the elements of art and the principles of design.

### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

*Role and Development of the Visual Arts*

3.1 Identify similarities and differences in the purposes of art created in selected cultures.

## California Visual Arts Standards – 9-12 Advanced

### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

*Analyze Art Elements and Principles of Design*

1.6 Describe the use of the elements of art to express mood in one or more of their works of art.

### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

*Diversity of the Visual Arts*

3.3 Investigate and discuss universal concepts expressed in works of art from diverse cultures.

## National Core Art Standards

### CREATING

*Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work*

VA:Cr1.2.HSII Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan works of art and design.

*Organize and develop artistic ideas and work*

VA:Cr2.1.HSII Through experimentation, practice and persistence, demonstrate acquisition of skills and knowledge in a chosen art form.

### CONNECTING

*Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.*

Cn10.1.HSIII Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical and personal life with art-making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design

*Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding*

VA:Cn11.1.HSII Compare uses of art in a variety of societal, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.

## **Materials**

Plaster gauze strips cut into assorted sizes  
Shower cap  
Cover-up  
Vaseline (petroleum jelly)  
White glue  
Hot Pot and water container  
Paper towels

Scissors  
Mirror  
Paint and brushes  
Hole punch, raffia and ribbons  
Markers  
Gloss Medium (optional)  
Plastic face form (optional)

## **Anticipatory Set**

Show clip from *The Mask* (1994) as Dr. Newman says, "We all wear masks, metaphorically speaking." Students discuss/write meaning. *What kinds of "masks" do the students wear to school?* Share out.

Introduce mask making functions (and materials) in past and present cultures: PowerPoint, prints, videos, etc. Students discuss/write what could be considered "masks" in contemporary culture (tattoos, makeup, sunglasses, protection gear, etc.) Share out.

Introduce vocabulary.

Stress safety.

Never leave model unattended.

Never put plaster down drain.

Demonstrate on model.

## **Step-by-Step Procedure**

1. Students are in groups of 2-3. Decide who will be the model (who gets first choice in taking mask home).
2. Cut plaster gauze strips into assorted sizes, approximately:
  - Large 15-20
  - Medium 15-20
  - Small 10-15
3. Cover table with newspaper.
4. Cover model's hair with shower cap – tuck in stray strands, and cover-up for clothes.
5. Give model a mirror and pencil and paper to write notes.
6. Apply petroleum jelly *generously* onto face, especially on facial hair (eyebrows, eyelashes, mustache, sideburns, et al).
7. Fill water container with cool water. Add hot water from *Hot Pot* until very warm.
8. Dip a strip of plaster gauze into the warm water and squeegee excess water with fingers.
9. Begin with the models' forehead and work downward.
  - Do not get into your models eyes!
  - Do not cover nostrils!
10. Continue to apply plaster gauze strips, overlapping slightly.
11. Smooth the strips with fingers to fill air holes.
12. Strengthen the sides of the mask where it will be lifted off.
13. Allow to dry (15-20 minutes). Do not leave your model and check frequently that your model is comfortable.
14. When mask has hardened, model leans forward and wiggles face to loosen. Hooking thumbs into each side of mask, model gently pulls away from face. (Have scissors handy to cut any hair caught in plaster.)
15. Wipe the model's face clean of plaster debris with wet paper towel, pulling away from eyes.
16. Allow model to wash face with soap and water.
17. While mask is still moist, (optional) exaggerate features by adding more plaster gauze strips to eyebrows, nose, cheekbones, etc.
18. Strengthen mask where weak by adding more plaster gauze strips mixed with white glue.
19. Never wash plaster down the drain. Empty water outside. Clean inside of water container with paper towels.
20. Trim sides, eye and nose holes (if necessary).
21. Hole punch sides for raffia or ribbon.
22. Write name inside *in pencil*.
23. When finished, lay mask on newspaper or pin to display board to dry completely.
24. Paint with acrylic paint. Add pattern with paint markers. Tie on raffia or ribbons.
25. OPTIONAL: if no model is available, a plastic face form may be used, however no shower cap or petroleum jelly (release agent) is necessary. Warm water is still recommended for comfort of artist and activating plaster.

### **Extension**

Use the life mask as a “mold” to cast a mask from the *inside* of the life mask to capture every detail of the model’s face. Strengthen the “mold” with plaster gauze strips mixed with white glue. When dry, mark inside with pencil marks so that you know where you’ve applied casting material. Apply gloss medium with a brush to waterproof. Apply petroleum jelly inside and on edges of mask mold. Apply plaster gauze strips. When dry, remove from mold.

### **Closure**

Display life masks on display board next to photo of model.

Students rank groups of life masks, e.g. most realistic to most stylized, funniest to scariest, etc.

A group of models stand at front of room holding a mask that’s not their own. Student volunteers “match” life mask with model.

Students create story how their life mask might function in a different culture.

### **Assessment**

Collaboration

Craftsmanship

Design

Effort/Difficulty

