

Community School of Music and Arts & Mercury News in Education present  
**A Celebration of African & African-American Art**

# A F R I C A N M A S K S

In Africa, masks are part of people's daily & spiritual life. They are worn for ceremonies & celebrations. Masks can help tell stories & histories to people who don't read. They can teach about nature, good & evil, life & death. At life passages like births, deaths & coming of age, masked ceremonies celebrate African life.

Before a hunt, African men might dance as wild masked warriors to make them feel ferocious. By changing how you look, masks can make you feel different. As a mouse you could run & hide easily, as a lion you could scare off anyone, as a cloud you could shelter a big space & as an eagle you could fly out of reach.

**How would you like to be different? What animal or creature might make you feel like that? Try making a mask to become something new.**

## CRAZY CREATURE MASK

Masks can cover the face, sit on the shoulders, or be worn as a helmet. They can stretch high into the air or may need several people to carry them.

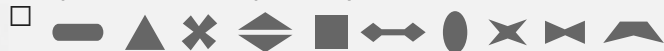
Masks can resemble animals (zoomorphic), look like people (anthropomorphic) or combine features from many creatures (composite). Make an unusual mask from things you find around the house.

- ◆ Collect leftover 'supplies' from around the house: cardboard tubes, ribbon bits, plastic lids, Styrofoam pellets, cereal boxes, magazines, colored papers & more. Gather scissors, hole punch, stapler, glue & tape.
- ◆ Turn a large cereal box or a big box inside out for a base. Tape it together.
- ◆ Choose a shape from your supplies to create a mouth. Attach it. Use a different 'leftover' to make eyes, ears & hair. Attach them. Try unusual combinations. Make unexpected choices. Let your mask emerge.
- ◆ Use colored papers, paint or markers to add color.

## LIGHT/DARK POWER MASK

Masks often show energy by using bold designs. Bright colors, strong lines, & large shapes make a mask come alive.

- ◆ Experiment with shapes for eyes, noses, & mouths:



- ◆ Give your mask a special power. It could be hilarious, secretive, sly, or clever. You decide. The moment you put on your mask, you might feel that power.
- ◆ Outline your mask & its special shapes with black paint.
- ◆ Pick a color for your mask. Mix light (add white) & dark (add black) values of your color to paint your mask.
- ◆ Tie raffia or yarn through holes at the mask's edges.
- ◆ Carefully cut holes for eyes & try out your mask!

Learn more about masks at this Smithsonian/National Museum of African Art website: <http://www.nmafa.si.edu/exhibits/playfull/index.html>

## GIANT MASK

Think of an animal, imaginary creature or powerful force that seems huge! Choose colors & shapes that capture this BIG energy in your mask.

- ◆ Use large tag board or cardboard (18" x 24" or bigger).
- ◆ Cut a simple outside mask shape.
- ◆ Paint designs using stripes, dots & geometric shapes.
- ◆ Decorate with raffia, yarn, string, shells & buttons.

### Look in the Mercury News

*Life Passages* - Traditional Africans use masks to celebrate life passages. Look in the news to find how our culture might celebrate births, deaths & marriages.

*Art Shows* - African masks & art are often displayed at galleries & museums. Search in the Arts & Entertainment section for art show listings. Choose one that you might like to visit.

## SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWSPAPER MASK

Skilled professionals make masks with age-old techniques using materials from daily life: wood, ceramics, textiles, leather & painted boards. Look to your daily newspaper to bring your mask alive!

- ◆ Make a mold using old newspapers. Crumple into a ball to make a base.
- ◆ Cover the base with plastic wrap or foil.
- ◆ Tear many newspaper strips (1"-2" wide & 5"-6" long).
- ◆ Cover the mold with papier mâché (glued paper strips). Dip the strips into adhesive (wallpaper paste, water-flour paste or liquid starch) to cover the mold up, down, & all around. Finish with a layer of paper towels & let dry.
- ◆ Cover with more strips, then paper towels; let dry.
- ◆ Decorate your mask. Paint the mask with tempera. Glue on yarn, feathers, colored paper, beads.

Yaka Mask,  
Democratic  
Republic of  
Zaire -  
Exaggerated  
face mask  
worn during  
male  
initiation  
rites.

Kuba Mask,  
Democratic  
Republic of  
Zaire -  
Elephant  
trunk shape  
represents  
kingly  
power.

Bobo  
Mask,  
Burkina Faso -  
Wooden mask carved  
by blacksmiths for  
funeral ceremonies.

Baule  
Mask,  
Cote d'Ivoire -  
Worn by dancers  
to represent  
female figures.

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