

Rag & Bone Puppet Theatre



Masks

Mask and drama activities for students



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Materials (for 30 students)

- 30 pieces of *flexi-firm*, 8½"×11". (*Flexi-firm* is a quilting stabilizer, sold at *Fabricland*. Don't get the fusible kind.)
- 30 papers with eyeholes marked for rough copy (a pattern with eyes already marked is available on our website: go to: ragandbone.ca/PDFs/mask_eye_template.pdf),
- Scissors, pencils, pencil crayons, crayons, tape.
- 30 pieces of elastic, 15" long.
- Photos of masks from Peking Opera, West Coast First Nations, etc.
- Optional: sewing machine

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Set up: tables and chairs or desks

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Introduction

- Look at examples of masks.
- Discuss colour. Peking Opera colours represent very specific characters and personalities.
- What feelings do we associate with colour? What are your personal feelings about colour?
- Discuss design. Point out examples of strong, bold, choices that express personality. Highlight headdresses, symmetry and abstraction. How do they suggest characters that are fierce, soft, kind, loud, angry, sad, or happy?

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Method

ROUGH COPY

- Eyes: Cut out eyes from paper.
- Head: Use rest of paper to make a good shape for the outside of the mask. Be sure it's not too small. Fold the paper to make the shape symmetrical and interesting. Play with the leftovers to add horns, ears or headdresses. Tape these interesting leftovers onto the basic head shape.
- Colour design: Plan your colour design on this paper pattern. Think bold patterns – not too much detail.



FLEXI-FIRM

- Trace eyes and outline of head shape (with it's added-on horns, headdress etc.) onto flexi-firm.
- Cut out. To cut out eyes, you can gently fold the flexi-firm to make the first cut with the scissors.
- Re-draw the colours design onto the mask with pencil. Use pencil *lightly*.



COLOUR

Colour with pencil crayons or crayons. Crayons are better. Press hard, to lay down lots of colour.

ELASTICS

- Cut small holes or slits for elastics: on both sides, about ½" from the edge, a little lower than the eyeholes.
- Tie on elastics.
- Sew elastics in place on either side of the mask, just outside and a little lower than eyes.
- Sewing machine can also be used to add extra pieces (headdresses etc.) or to fix small cutting mistakes (zig-zag back and forth over mistaken cuts or make a small patch out of a scrap of flexi-firm).

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Suggestions for drama and literacy activities



DISCOVERING THE MASK

In a large, open space, have the students sit in a circle, facing out, and look at their masks. Talk through some questions for them to think about: is the mask an animal, bird, person, spirit? A child, adult, teenager, baby or senior? Fierce, angry, powerful? Soft, gentle, tender? Scared, nervous, wise, hungry, lonely?

FINDING MOVEMENTS THAT GO WITH THE MASK

Still facing out, have the students stand up and put on the mask. Now encourage them to think about the body that goes with it: the feet, legs, arms, neck and shoulders could all be long/short, fat/thin, and graceful/powerful. How does it move? Are the movements fast/slow, heavy/light, or smooth/jagged? Does it press, dab, jab or float?

FIND THE WALK

Walk slowly around the room, without looking at anyone else. Try slow motion. Does your character fly, walk, swim, strut, gallop, creep, slither or something else?

WORK WITH PARTNERS

Keep walking around the room, doing your special walk, and wave at other people in character. Find a partner and sit down with him or her. Take off the mask. Make a plan, with your partner, for both of you to come “on stage” using your characteristic way of moving, and facing the audience; see something (like a flower or a fire, for example), react to it, and exit.

Let each pair perform this activity. Then the rest of the group can guess what they saw.

WORK IN GROUPS (3–5 STUDENTS PER GROUP)



- With your group, plan an activity or action (e.g., playing hockey, taking a group of dogs for a walk). After you present your activity, the rest can guess what it was. Remember to keep your mask facing the audience as much as possible.
- Get back into groups and think of something that could happen while you are doing your activity (a fire, you lose a puppy, someone trips). Present that skit; let the groups guess what happened.
- Choose a title for your skit. Make a tableau of the title.
- Add a narrator and some sound effects. Voila! You've created a mask-skit!

CREATE A LEGEND

In groups of 3–5, imagine that your masked characters are creatures on an imaginary island. Make up a myth, legend or fable for your island. (Important or silly—a variety of stories will be more interesting when you put them all together.) You find something or something happens. Have the characters learn something from their experience. Show us the story. Use narration, dialogue, and sound effects. Make up a theme song. Add a title.

(This activity can be tailored to a specific theme or locale, such as anti-bullying issues or Native Canadian society.)



IDEAS FOR WRITING

- The students could do journal entries about the making of the masks, the process, and how they felt about the various steps.
- Each student could write their character's bio, or life story, focusing on the character's personality and how he or she became that way.

- In groups or individually, the students could write out the script for their plays. They could also write a poem or a short story based on the play.

ACTING OUT A POEM

You can also begin with a poem or other text, make the masks to suit the poem, and have students act out the poems with their masks. Wearing the masks, the students can use choral speaking, tableaux, narrators, sound effects and music to bring their poems to life in extremely effective mini-dramas.

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Language Curriculum links

Making a puppet play in groups is an excellent way to address these expectations from the Language Curriculum.

THE ORAL COMMUNICATION STRAND:

Students will:

Listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes;

Use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes;

Reflect on and identify their strengths as listeners and speakers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in oral communication situations.

THE WRITING STRAND:

Students will:

Generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience;

Draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience;

Use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively;

Reflect on and identify their strengths as writers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful at different stages in the writing process.

THE MEDIA LITERACY STRAND:

Students will:

Demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts; Identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning;

Create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques;

Reflect on and identify their strengths, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts.

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