

Essential Question:

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How are masks an expression of culture and ubiquitous throughout the human diaspora?

AIM: How can we create a mask that is representative of our lived experiences?

Do Now: Examine the following mask and complete the See/Think/Wonder chart. Be thorough in your observations.



SEE	THINK	WONDER
- Closed eyes - Some sort of pattern on the forehead	- I think it's a person showing happiness because the lips seem to be upturned	- What does the pattern symbolize? - I wonder if it has a religious meaning

Read the following article from

### The West African Mask

Culture, Mythos 26 August 2019

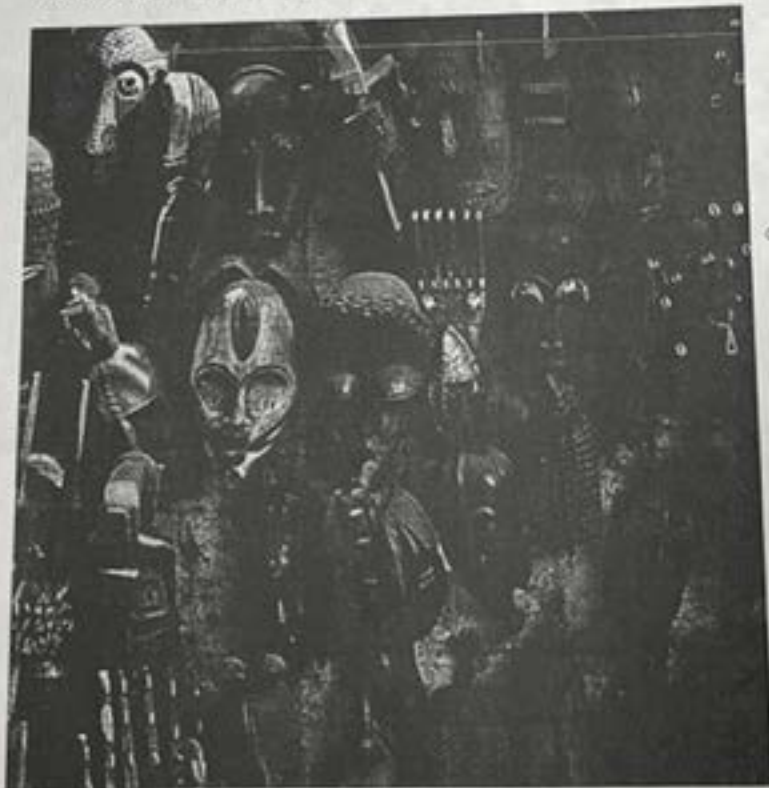
"When fully activated, masks become 'spirits made tangible'."

— West African masquerader turned curator, artist, and art historian, Chika Okeke-Agula<sup>1</sup>

As sculptural idea or beauty aesthetic and museum-worthy that the mask may be, it cannot, and was never meant to, stand on its own, at least in traditional West Africa. It is but an agent, a medium for the ancestral powers that animate all things, and can only be understood in the context in which it was conceived, through the creative process that brings it into being, and by the dynamic interplay of the rhythm, color, texture, and movement that brings it, ultimately, to life.

↑ the masks are meant to be worn

"Masks of Mali" by photographer Anthony Pappone



← NOT AN OBJECT

## 'Behind the Mask' in West Africa

Whether of wood, copper, ivory, or leather, whether semi-abstract, anthropomorphic, or architectonic in form, whether simple or superstructural, the West African mask is less of a covering than an interstice, an opening through which to glimpse the spirit world.

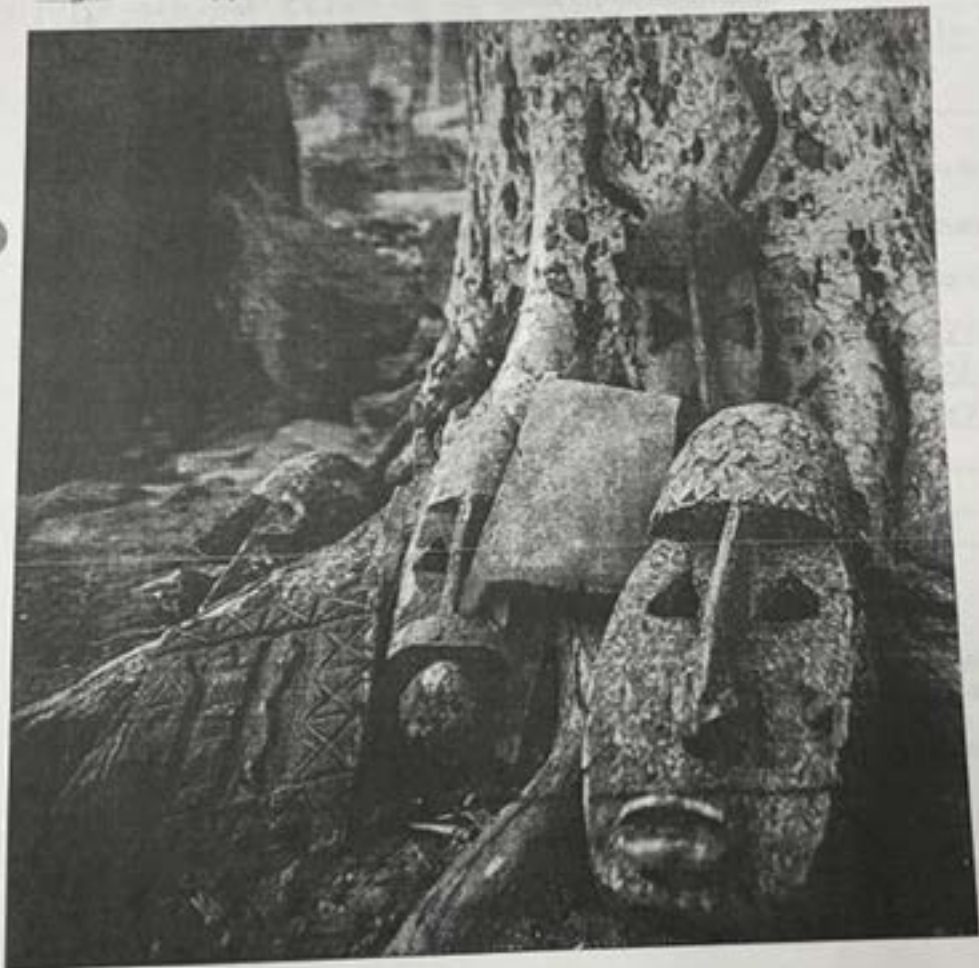
The 'spirit' of the mask, ritually transferred from the natural materials out of which it is carved by its blacksmith/sculptor, then protectively shrouded while not in use, emerges in full force through the traditional masked dance, performed to channel the divine, summon ancestral wisdom, escort the departed, accompany initiates, reaffirm societal values, venerate the living, and to mark the natural cycles of existence, from birth to death, season to season.<sup>2</sup>

half animal half human

↑ An entrance into the spirit world

↑ after life

"Dogon Masks" by photographer Anthony Pappone.



"There is a particular kind of art in Africa, which is unique to the continent and can be found nowhere else in the world. It is an art, which is especially exemplified by the mask, and the masquerade in which the mask is used." — D. Duerdon . . .

To the rhythm of drums, the mask emerges. Its bearer surrenders to its power. As the tempo accelerates, the ground pulsates, colors swirl, the dust kicks up, and whatever divide exists between the corporeal and the incorporeal, the spiritual and the mundane, the temporal and the intemporal dissolves.

"The African understanding of space and time underscores the important position of the masquerade tradition in this universe. In this understanding, [there is an] irreversible gradation between the physical and the spiritual [...]. This is the world of the living and that of the ancestors. The masquerade's appearance is then an intervention process between the two worlds. It provides a link for the needed continuum between them. This is done in order to vitalise, regenerate and value the essence of living and the issues of survival"<sup>2</sup> — J. Obaseki

*↑ earth and not earth*  
*to cause anger or resentment*  
*to intensify*

Students will watch the following video on the Funeral Ceremony of the Dogon Elders

<https://www.culturesofwestafrica.com/the-dama-masked-dance-of-the-dogon/>

Students will take notes of their observations and understandings and then think/pair/share.

- The masks are very colorful
- In order to be a man you have to have a feminine side
- The dance is an alternative to man hood

### MASK MAKING ACTIVITY

You will not make a mask that represents who you are, your lived experiences, culture, hopes, dreams, aspirations, etc. Use all of the materials provided and be as creative as possible — HAVE FUN ☺

Every mask must have the following:

1. An UBUNTU medallion to demonstrate that we are collective and accountable to each other.
2. At least two colors that are symbolic to you.
3. At least one symbol that is meaningful to you.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.culturesofwestafrica.com/west-african-mask/>

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Please answer the following questions.

1. What is important to you in life?

What is important to me in life is to be happy and healthy.

2. What are your favorite colors or colors that are significant to you?

My favorite color is red along with blue because I feel a certain connection to the colors.

3. What are symbols that are important to you?

A symbol that is important to me is the Dominican Republic flag because I am Dominican.