

**Pre- and Post-Visit Activities:
African Masks and Masquerades****Overview:**

These activities, which support the Staten Island Museum's lesson "African Masks and Masquerades", introduce students to masks and masquerades in West African cultures.

Background Information for Educators:

Ritual and ceremonial masks are an essential feature of the traditional culture and art of the peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa. While the specific implications of ritual masks widely vary, some traits are common to most African cultures. For instance, masks usually have a spiritual and religious meaning and they are used in ritual dances and social and religious events. A special status is attributed to the artists that create masks and to those that wear them in ceremonies. In most cases, mask making is an art that is passed on from father to son, along with the knowledge of the symbolic meanings conveyed by such masks. The materials that are used to make the masks also have significance.

In most traditional African cultures, the person who wears a ritual mask conceptually loses his or her human identity and turns into the spirit represented by the mask itself. This transformation of the mask wearer into a spirit usually relies on other practices, such as specific types of music and dance, or ritual costumes that contribute to conceal the mask-wearer's human identity. The mask wearer thus becomes a sort of medium that allows for a dialogue between the community and the spirits, either the spirits of ancestors or nature spirits. Masked dances are a part of most traditional African ceremonies related to weddings, funerals, initiation rites, and other milestones in life. Since every mask has a specific spiritual meaning, most traditions comprise several different traditional masks.

Vocabulary words:

- Adze: a cutting tool used for shaping wood
- Ancestor: one of the people from whom a person is descended
- Bamana: an agricultural society living in the West African country of Mali
- Collection: an accumulation of objects gathered for study, observation, or exhibition
- Cowrie shell: thought to be the oldest form of money in the world; in West African culture represents symbols of fertility and long life and representative of the spirit in all things
- Curator: the keeper or custodian of a museum collection
- Initiation ceremony: where one symbolically moves from childhood to adulthood
- Investigate: to study by close observation
- Masquerade: using masks that have a spiritual or religious meaning in ritual dances and social or religious ceremonies
- Ritual: a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to social customs
- Savanna: a grassy plain with small bushes and some trees

African Masks

- Society: People living together in organized communities with shared laws, traditions, and values

Before Your Visit:

1. Create a mind map or word web with your students to understand their background knowledge about Africa.
2. Can you find Africa on the map?

After Your Visit:

1. Keep your clay mask on the paper plate until it dries.
2. Once dry, you can display your clay mask on the paper plate. You can also remove it carefully, or cut away the edges of the paper plate, to display it.

African Masks

Name: _____

Date: _____



Pre Visit Thoughts	Post Visit Thoughts
What is this?	What is this?
Who made this?	Who made this?
Why?	Why?
What does it mean to you?	What does it mean to you?