What’s in a Face?

Project Overview
After reading folktales from around the world and learning about archetypes such as heroes and villains, students invented their own characters, using masks as a vehicle to bring them fully to life. In designing and creating their masks, students considered the ways that colors, patterns, and exaggerated features can offer insight into characters’ personality traits or special abilities.

Essential Question:
What do stories and art tell us about the people and cultures that create them?

Artistic Goals:
1. Students will learn that artists’ choices communicate specific information and ideas to their viewers.
2. Students will learn to develop/create individual characters through explorations based on real and imaginary traits.
3. Students will learn how to translate an idea from 2-dimensional to 3-dimensional media.
4. Students will learn how to incorporate techniques using papier-mâché, paint, and found materials in a single work of art.

Curricular Goals:
1. Students will learn what a character is and what a character trait is.
2. Students will learn that characters across cultures have similarities and differences.
3. Students will learn that characters and their attributes can communicate specific information.

National Content Standards Addressed:
Visual Arts K-4.1: Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- Students describe how different materials, techniques, and processes cause different responses.
- Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories.

Visual Arts K-4.3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas.
- Students select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning.

Visual Arts K-4.4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.
- Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures.
- Students demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art.

Visual Arts K-4.6: Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines.
- Students identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum.

Language Arts NL-ENG.K-12.2: Understanding the Human Experience
- Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.

Language Arts NL-ENG.K-12.9: Multicultural Understanding
- Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
Part 1: Character traits

How does a character’s appearance give clues about its personality traits?

Activity 1: Sketching Characters
Students learned about line drawing and sketched poses in their sketchbooks from Degas’s Dancers in Green and Yellow, before posing for each other. Afterwards, students engaged in a class discussion of what a character trait is. They looked at the clothing and gestures of the characters in the Degas painting to see what they could tell about the personalities of these characters.

Recommended Time: one 45-minute session
Inquiry Artworks: Edgar Degas, Dancers in Green and Yellow, 1903
Materials: sketchbooks, pencils

Activity 2: Personality Traits
Students looked at a variety of portraits together, and thought about the variety of ways in which artists can visually represent character traits. They discussed the difference between realistic traits and exaggerated ones that are used symbolically, and learned that artists can choose exaggerated traits to communicate a particular idea or emotion.

Next, they designed their own characters with exaggerated traits, thinking about what these physical attributes can communicate about the character’s personality or abilities, and painted their characters with watercolors.

Inquiry Artworks: Pablo Picasso, Woman with Yellow Hair, 1931; Hiroshi Sugimoto, Elizabeth I and Catherine of Aragon, 1999
Recommended time: two 45- minute sessions
Materials: watercolors, brushes, paper, pencils

Part 2: Exploring Characters From Around the World

How are characters from around the world similar and different?

Activity 3: Folktales
Students read folktales from China, Puerto Rico, and other countries around the world and in class discussions, and compared and contrasted the characters they read about. They learned that many stories contain a character archetype - a hero or a villain, for example. Next, based on their knowledge of folktales, students created a “recipe” for a hero. They discussed what personality traits a hero needs and began brainstorming ideas for their own character.

Recommended Time: two 45-minute sessions
Materials: pencils, flipchart paper, sketchbooks
Part 3: Designing our own Characters

How do artists design characters to express specific ideas?

Activity 4: Character Planning
Students thought about personality traits or special abilities they wanted their invented character to have. They considered the characters they studied in folktales and decided whether they wanted their own characters to share any similarities. Students also considered whether they wanted their characters to be archetypes, and how to use physical attributes to symbolize a hero or a villain. They documented their plans on worksheets and made preliminary drawings in their sketchbooks to prepare for building their masks.

Recommended Time: two 45-minute sessions
Materials: pencils, sketchbooks

Activity 5: Building Masks
Students translated their 2-D drawings of their characters into 3-D form. They referred to their sketches when building the armatures for their masks and learned techniques for working with papier-mâché to mold their character’s forms and features.

Recommended Time: two 45-minute sessions
Materials: paper mache, newspaper, sketchbooks

Activity 6: Painting and Finishing Touches
Students painted and embellished their masks by choosing one base coat color to symbolize the character’s personality and another color for adding patterns or other details. Students also had the option of adding other materials—fabric, beads, found objects—to their masks, but only if the materials conveyed something specific about the character’s personality. After students finished painting they shared their masks with the rest of the class, and experimented with playing the part of their invented character by wearing their masks and deciding how this person or creature would move and speak.

Recommended Time: three 45-minute sessions
Inquiry Artworks: student work
Materials: acrylic paint, brushes
Resource Materials

Masks
Photos of masks from around the world:
Chen, Yi-Ching. “Another Face: Masks around the world.” http://gallery.sjsu.edu/masks/menu.html


Mask-making—Papier-mache technique:


Curricular Resources
Folktales and Fables:


Name____________________________________

What’s in a Face?
Character Planning Worksheet

Part 1: Describe your character

What are your character’s personality traits? List a few words that could describe his/her particular qualities here:

__________________  ____________________  __________  __________

__________________  ____________________  __________  __________

Part 2: Plan your mask

In the left column, list one personality trait that you mentioned above in each of the boxes. Follow the instructions in the right columns to plan the ways that you can represent these traits in your mask.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality trait:</th>
<th>A color that could symbolize this trait in my mask is:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality trait #2</td>
<td>A pattern or texture that could symbolize this trait in my mask is:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality trait #3</td>
<td>A physical feature of my mask that could symbolize this trait is:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality trait #4:</td>
<td>A shape on my mask that could symbolize this is:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 3: Draw your ideas
Now that you’ve made a plan, use your sketchbook to draw all of these ideas together in a single mask design.

Sample Inquiry Plans

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Edgar Degas
*Dancers in Green and Yellow (Danseuses vertes et jaunes)*, ca. 1903.
Pastel on several pieces of paper, mounted on board, 38 7/8 x 28 1/8 inches

*Image also available at www.guggenheimcollection.org*

*Inquiry script:*
• What do you notice?
• What can you guess about the personalities of the people in this artwork?
• Try to stand in the same way as one of the girls in the picture. Now try to bring this person to life. What more can you guess about her personality by moving like her?
• The artist, Edgar Degas, was very interested in drawing people in motion. He believed that how people thought and felt could be captured through their physical expression. What did Degas do to help us understand these dancers through their physical expression?
Pablo Picasso
Woman with Yellow Hair (Femme aux cheveux jaunes), December 1931.

Image also available at www.guggenheimcollection.org

Inquiry Script:
• Take a few minutes to look at this painting. What do you notice?
• How is this similar to or different from other portraits you've seen?
• Sometimes artists simplify or exaggerate the features of their subjects in order to communicate a mood or feeling. This is a portrait of a woman named Marie-Therese, who was the subject of many of Picasso's portraits. In painting this, he wanted to create a representation of how he felt about her.
• How would you describe the mood of this painting? How do you think Picasso felt about Marie-Therese?
• What decisions did Picasso make in representing Marie-Therese that communicates these ideas?
Inquiry script:

- What do you notice?

- What can you guess about this person? On small Post-it notes, write some words that you think describe her personality traits. Stick each Post-it to the part of the image that made you choose that word. Share your thoughts with the class.

- This image is not exactly a portrait; it is a photograph of a wax figure of Catherine of Aragon. Does knowing this fact change anything about the way you see this work of art? Share your thoughts with the class.

- Why might the artist, Hiroshi Sugimoto, have been interested in making portraits this way?