



**SKUTT**  
CERAMIC PRODUCTS

## **LESSON PLANS:**

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### **CREATING SACRED AND RITUAL MASKS WITHIN THE HIGH SCHOOL POTTERY CLASSROOM**

A UNIT MEETING THE NEEDS OF A VARIETY OF LEARNERS WITH VARIOUS NEEDS AND DIFFERING SKILL ABILITIES.

#### **LESSON GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:**

Students will research and study the culture of a chosen mask region in the world.

Students will create a sacred or ritual mask in the style of their chosen region, incorporating the elements and principals of design within their creation using stoneware clay as the sculptural medium.

The masks may be historical or contemporary in nature.

Students will incorporate their own ideas reflecting individual creativity. (i.e. not copying directly)

each student will prepare a five-ten minute visual and oral presentation about his/her mask. This presentation will be given to the class as a whole.

Students will display their masks in the high school and masks will be taken to the annual Wyoming State High School art symposium in may.

Notes:

I allowed five 90-minute periods for research prior to starting any work with clay. I worked closely with our high school Media specialist preparing books, videos, web sites, magazines, articles and lecture materials on masks and mask regions. This preparation allowed students to utilize the media center to its maximum potential.

During each phase of the mask unit, I prepared a lesson objective for the students. On the objective/criteria sheets, I stated the expectations for each particular phase. Each student had a space to keep his/her materials.

The mask unit was started near the end of the semester after the students had a sound working knowledge of clay and clay properties and after the students had weeks of successful hand building, wheel lessons, and numerous projects.

### **BACKGROUND PREPARATION:**

#1. Our high school librarian and I spent two-three weeks collecting materials for the mask unit. This involved purchasing a special video and several new masks books for our media center. I also went to our local Jr. College and borrowed 25 books on “masks from around the world”. This collection of books was very important during the research phase of the mask unit

#2. I spent three weeks researching special web sites for the students. I compiled the web sites on a master sheet for the students and I printed the material found on the web sites for my students. I then put, all the printed material in a folder with the cultural region it represented on the outside. In the end, I had made about 65 folders.

#3. Since this was a huge project for the students, I had to make a lot of clay. I spent two weeks making extra clay in the pug mill and storing it in large air- tight containers.

#4. I organized all materials (i.e. map of the world, globe) that the students would need several weeks before the lesson. I also wrote and printed all criteria sheets that the students would need during the mask unit.

### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

#1. I broke the pottery class into small groups of three-five students. I gave each group an 18x24 sheet of tag board and colored markers. I asked each group to brainstorm their myths and misconceptions about masks, and to list their thoughts and ideas on the tag board. This was really an eye opener for me!

After this was complete:

#2. I showed the video entitled “ masks from many cultures” 1993 crystal productions. This gave a wonderful overview of masks to the students.

#3. After the mask video was finished, each small group gave a short presentation on what they had listed in “myths and misconceptions”.

#4. When the students came into pottery the next day I had small pieces of paper on a table with the names of about 50 mask regions from around the world. Each student chose one piece of paper.

We left for the media center

## **Research!**

The librarian and I had been preparing for this day for many weeks. In our media center, I had over 75 books on masks, mask regions, cultures, and countries reserved. I had researched excellent web sites for the students and these were listed at the main desk for all to use. There were many magazine articles available, also at the main desk.

The students had 5 ninety-minute periods (an entire week of class) reserved in the media center for research. The librarian, her aide and myself were also available for “hands on” help during this week. The students had a detailed criteria sheet to follow for guidance while researching. (This really helped the students who had no experience researching a subject.) The students kept all their materials in a folder that was collected at the end of each class. Each slip of paper that the students chose in the pottery room had books, websites, and articles to accompany the student in their research.

Notes: several students were uneasy about research, and I had several who refused to research stating, “I took pottery for fun not to do work”! I said ok, and restated the objective, research. Eventually every student complied and the class began a fantastic journey. Soon students were sharing information and speaking with excitement about the information they were discovering.

#5 after the students had compiled their research on the various mask regions I had each student draw a detailed picture of how their mask would look. I also asked the students to incorporate the elements and principles of design into their pieces, following our state and school district standards. This proved to be a vital piece of the entire lesson as the students referred back time and time again to their drawings and ideas.

## **Clay days!**

#6. As I previously stated the students had a strong background in clay and were experienced hand builders. The students each selected a bat that fit the size of mask they chose to create. Wedging began in earnest and masks started to form. These were particularly exciting days for all as the students had a road map to follow and they felt secure creating.

In the days and weeks (2) that followed, there was intense concentration and the room was remarkably quiet as each student devoted the entire 90 minute period to designing a mask from their region. At the start of each day, the students would peruse the room looking over and conversing about what their peers had created. During the creation stage, I was only asked to help on several occasions, and that was for technical assistance. Needless to say, I was a very proud teacher! I handed out several more criteria sheets during this time frame. The sheets restated criteria such as wedging, coiling methods, slab techniques, score, slip, and clay blending methods, thickness of clay, and all the usual housekeeping items involved with hand building. I also included the criteria for the elements and principles of design.

#7. During this phase I also put out a sheet for the students to write what decorative materials, they would need to finish their masks. I then went to the store and purchased what was on the list.

#8. After the masks were created out of clay, the students put them in my drying cabinets so they would dry slowly. This is necessary as many of the masks had some wild features that need to dry slowly to inhibit cracking.

#9. Firing day arrived and the students and I loaded “lucky” our Skutt kiln. After the successful firings, (it took four to fire all masks) the class was ready for the decorative process.

#10. This stage was truly exciting for all the students. Each student’s mask came from a different region of a country or region of the world leaving each artist to create a truly unique work of art. Some students emulated carved wooden masks, others, masks of gold or silver, some were heavily textured or covered with feathers, beads, stones, and horsehair and raffia. Everyone painted his or her masks before any decoration. Several students chose to use only paint as decoration and this was fine with me. As i stated earlier the students had their drawings to use as guide and this was important in this, the final phase.

I allowed one week for decoration. This is important as the students had a huge investment in their work.

### **Presentations**

#10. On presentation day, I gave each of the students a critique sheet to fill out on their peers presentation of information that they had researched on the particular mask region studied. I assigned each student a number before presentations so no names would be on the critique sheets. I gave the students a list of items they were to look for during the presentations; as an example, 1.did the artist know the subject matter they researched. 2. Did the artist know exactly where their mask region was on the map and which continent and country their mask region was located? 3.did the artist incorporate the elements and principles of design into their piece? 4.was this a direct copy? The students were very honest in their evaluations of each other.

I also asked the students to evaluate whether or not the artist could communicate what his mask is used for, what ceremonies, and rituals etc. I invited our high school principal and several colleagues of mine to come for the presentations. Everyone was impressed with the high quality research involved and with the final product. The students commented repeatedly that they learned so much from the presentations about the various masks, rituals, regions, and indigenous peoples that created the various masks. I had several exchange students in the class from Europe and from south East Asia and they stated that they learned so much about various cultures from around the world. All the students had direct ownership of not just their final piece of artwork but also of their research and presentations. This gave the entire class great pride and I feel it also gave them direct responsibility for their learning.

## **SUPPLIES:**

Books, videos, Internet, magazine articles

Drawing paper, pens, pencils, colored pencils, folders, sobo glue, newspaper, sponges, clay hand tools, canvas used to cover pottery tables, water,

Stoneware clay, porcelain clay or low fire clays, slip.

Decorative items: acrylic/oil paints, raffia, beads, feathers, horsehair, animal fur, leather, beans, rope, felt, sequins, ribbon, wire and nails for hanging

## **OPTIONAL SUPPLIES:**

Celucel, (Duncan under glaze, clear glaze, if you choose to glaze the pieces rather than paint) and,

Any decorative items that your students may choose to incorporate into the artwork.

## **EQUIPMENT:**

Pug mill, large tubs to hold huge amounts of clay, television, VCR, video of masks, a range of large to small bats, rolling pens, Skutt kiln, shelves, posts, stilts,

## **ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS:**

1. This is a wonderful project for students that have a low motivational level for learning. At the start of the lesson, I had several students that refused to participate and said they did not think they should have to research anything. I believe this was out of fear because they had never researched anything before. Soon after the librarian and I taught the students how to research and investigate their mask region those few students calmed down and enjoyed discovering something new. I could see a lot of pride in faces as discoveries were made and ideas started to flow. Some students needed additional time for research because there was so much information available. I allowed for this also by reserving before school, lunchtime and after school with the media center. Many students used this extra time for research.

2. I encouraged each student artist to create his/her mask in the size that they chose, as some students wanted to create very large masks with many features. All the masks were at least a size that would fit on human's face.

3. Each student needs to figure out how his/her mask will be displayed. This may include incorporating holes in the design while creating so the mask can be hung on a wall or it may include putting straps on the mask, or a hole in the back for a nail. Since many of these masks are very heavy, the hanging device is an important part of the design.

4. Many indigenous masks are carved from wood. The students must create textures that resemble woods. For this the students used a sponging technique of dabbing on the paints to get a wooden texture.

5. The students used a strong glue such as sobo glue and wood glue during the decorative phase. I recommend this as some of the decorations were heavy and needed to bond well. Allow extra time for the glue to dry and bond well.

6. I also allowed time and space for drying the masks as they need to dry slowly. You will also need to have several bisque firings, as not all the masks will fit in the kiln all at once.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS:**

\***mask:** a covering for the face or part of the face to conceal or disguise.

\***ritual-** a set form or system of rites, religious or otherwise.

\***culture-**the ideas customs skills arts of a given people in a given period /civilization.

\***research-**an investigation in some field of knowledge undertaken to discover facts or principles.

### \***elements and principles of design:**

Line, shape, color, texture, form, space, value,

Pattern rhythm, unity, movement, contrast, emphasis, balance

\***sculpture-**the art of carving stone, wood, chiseling stone, casting or welding metal, modeling clay or wax etc.

\* **stoneware-** a coarse, dense, glazed or unglazed pottery containing much silica or sand and flint.

\***decoration-**to add something to make it more attractive; adorn; ornament.

## **FOLLOW UP:**

I entered ten of the sacred and ritual masks in the annual Wyoming state high school art symposium 2002 held in Casper, Wyoming. There are approximately four thousand pieces of student work on display and in competition for blue ribbon awards. Several of masks received a blue ribbon award at the art symposium.

The masks were also on display at our high school in a glass case for two months.

I also have made several presentations to a graduate class and another school district on the mask unit