

African Mask Activity

Grades K-2

Time: 45 minutes

Objectives

Students will use various materials (e.g., paper, glue, markers) and motor skills (e.g., cutting, stapling, collage) to create animal masks. Students will describe African masks and their uses. Students will create movements that correlate with their masks and selected music.

Instructional Materials

Images of African animal masks

Photographs of African animals

[Recording of African music](#)

(Recommended: African Playground by Putumayo)

Art Materials

Construction paper or heavier paper, cut in strips to form headbands (approx. approx. 3-4" wide and 2' long)

Colorful paper scraps

Small paper plates

Markers or crayons

Seeds, feathers, raffia, small beads, string, etc.

Scissors, stapler, glue



Chokwe Peoples, Angola and North-western Zambia, Ngondo Mask, mid-20th century. Mixed media: barkcloth, pigment, string, sticks, gourds and cloth. Crocker Art Museum, gift of Dr. and Mrs. Daniel J. Crowley.

Procedure

Introduction

Discuss with students the use of masks in African culture. All over the African continent, masks are one of the most prominent forms of art, and ceremonies that use them are an important part of many African cultures. Animals are frequently represented in masks, often chosen for the characteristics they represent. Here are some common examples:

Elephant – strength, royalty, patience, wisdom, longevity, happiness, luck

Lion – royalty, strength, courage, pride

Leopard – ferocity, aggression, courage

Antelope – farming, agriculture, speed

Buffalo – power, chiefs, heroes

Crocodile – strength, evil (masks are sometimes used to ward them off)

Lizard – life



Tortoise – old age

Birds – messengers between earth and the world of spirits

Object-based Instruction

Show the students several images of African animal masks, including some in the headdress style.

Ask questions like the following:

Describe: What animal is represented? What colors and materials do you see?

Analyze Does this animal make noise? How does it move?

Interpret: Does this look like a friendly animal, or a fierce one?

Judge: What do you like most about this artwork? Is there anything you don't like about it? Does looking at this piece help you know more about people from Africa? Why?

Connect: Do people use masks in the United States? What are they used for? How do you think the American use of masks is the same or different from mask-wearers in African countries?

Show the students the animal photographs and examples of African animal masks. Discuss with the students some prominent physical traits of each animal, as well as some of its other characteristics. For example, the elephant has a trunk and very large ears, and it is also very strong.

Procedure

Lead students in an activity to make their own animal masks and dance in a ceremony. Rather than making masks that cover the face, they will make masks in a headdress style. Demonstrate the steps of the project, including suggested ways to attach the collage materials to the paper plates. You may wish to list the steps on the board with words and/or pictures.

Before the activity, decide how to organize the materials. If the students sit in groups, you may want to put some materials at each table. Or you may set them out on one table and have a few students at a time select what they need.

1. Have each student select an animal to depict. If possible, make the animal photographs
2. available to the students for reference while they work. Show students the materials they can use in their creations.
3. Using pencils, have the students sketch animal faces on their plates. They can then decide which features to add with the crayons/markers and which to add with the collage materials.
4. As they create their masks, circulate to help the students with the headbands and to discuss
5. their work with them.

Conclude the activity with a celebration. Have the students gather in a circle wearing their masks. If possible, provide time for them to talk about what they've created. Explain that African masks are used in various ceremonies and other events. Play a recording of some African music and invite the students to dance, encouraging them to incorporate movements suggested by their chosen animals.



Assessment

Use a "+/-" to assess each of the following:

- The student demonstrates developmentally appropriate skill in the use of art materials and processes.
- The student engages appropriately in the discussions about African masks and about the creation of his/her own mask, as well as in the movement activity.
- The student demonstrates thoughtful and careful work.

Adapting and Extending

Consider adding these elements to the activity above, or using them in subsequent lessons.

- Read a picture book featuring African animals. There are several African animal alphabet books available; other good choices are *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* (Aardema/Vidal), *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears* (Aardema/Dillon), and *We All Went on Safari* (Krebs/Cairns). You probably have favorites as well.
- Point out some animal symbolism used in the United States, for comparison and connection. For example, the eagle is featured on money and on the national seal, and the California state flag features a bear. Discuss the reasons for these symbols.
- Show a video of an African ceremony featuring masquerade. YouTube is a good source - search for "African mask dance".
- Modify the procedure so students can make face masks out of paper plates, attached with string or held with popsicle sticks.