

Masks





Masks may be worn during important ceremonies.

Masks Through Time

For thousands of years, people around the world have used masks. Masks have often been used in important ceremonies. For example, if ancient people did a dance to ask the gods to help a sick person, they might wear masks to honor forces that they believed could help the person get well.

Today, in some ceremonies, people dance to tell stories. Wearing masks helps dancers play the parts of people in the stories and honor them.

Some masks only cover a person's face, while others cover the head and shoulders. Masks have been made of animal skins, wood, metal, and clay. Some masks are simple, while others take months to make.

Key Notes:

Why do some dancers wear masks?



King Tut's death mask
is more than 3,000
years old.

Egyptian Death Masks

Many groups of people have made masks for their dead. Artists in ancient Egypt made death masks for their kings. After the king died, the artist made a wax mold of the king's face. From the wax mold, the artist then made the mask. If a king was very important, his mask might be covered with gold and gems. Ancient Egyptians believed that the king's death mask would help the king make his way to the afterlife.

The most famous death mask from Egypt was made for King Tut more than 3,000 years ago. The smooth, golden face of the dead king is known to people around the world.

Key Notes:

How were ancient Egyptian death masks made for kings?



These African masks are made from wood.

African Masks

Masks have long been an important part of life in many parts of Africa. Some African people make spirit masks based on powerful animals, such as hawks. These masks are used in ceremonies in which people honor these spirits and ask them for help. Other people honor their ancestors by making masks of their faces and using the masks in dances. These dances ask the ancestors for their help.

Among some people, the look of the masks has stayed the same for centuries, even though new masks have been made through the years. Many people think that if the mask looks different, the spirit won't know it is being called.

Key Notes:

Why might people make masks of powerful animals?



Theater Masks

Masks have been used since theater began. Actors in the theaters of ancient Greece and Rome wore masks. The faces on the masks showed the feelings of their character: sad, happy, or angry. Only men were actors, so to play a woman's part, men wore masks with women's faces.

Today, masks are used in some kinds of theater. In some well-known shows, like *The Lion King*, many actors wear masks. The show's main roles are played by actors who wear huge animal masks that make them look like lions, zebras, and other animals. The masks allow the actors to look like animals even as they talk and act like human beings.

Key Notes:

What did the theater masks of ancient Greece and Rome show?

These actors are wearing masks like those of ancient Greece.

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