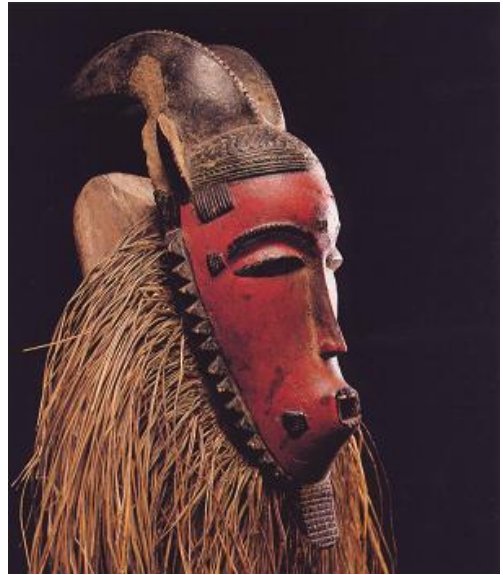


Resource 2 – History of Mask Fact Cards

African Masked Performance



Many African societies see masks as communicators between the living world and the supernatural world of the dead, ancestors and other entities. Masks became and still become the accessory to a dressed up dancer to give it life at the time of ceremonies.

African masks are almost always made from wood and then painted with pigments such as charcoal (to give a black colour), powders made from vegetable matter or trees (for ochre/earth tones) or mineral powders like clay (to give a white colour).

African peoples often symbolize death by the colour white rather than black; at the same time, many African cultures see white as the colour that links them to their ancestors, and it can therefore have a positive meaning. The colours on the mask will almost always be symbolic of the ceremony it was created for.

Resource 2 – History of Mask Fact Cards

Chinese Masked Performance

Bian Lian meaning ‘Face Changing’ is an ancient Chinese dramatic art that is part of the more general Chinese Opera. Performers wear brightly colored costumes and move to quick, dramatic music. They also wear vividly colored masks, typically depicting well known characters from the opera, which they change from one face to another almost instantaneously with the swipe of a fan, a movement of the head, or wave of the hand.



Four Ways of Face-changing

Blowing Dust (simplified Chinese: 吹脸)

The actor blows black dust hidden in his palm or close to his eyes, nose or mouth, so that it obscures his face.

Beard Manipulation (simplified Chinese: 髯口功夫)

Beard colors can be changed while the beard is being manipulated, from black to gray and finally to white, expressing anger or excitement.

Pulling-downing Masks (simplified Chinese: 扯脸)

The actor can pull down a mask which has previously been hidden on top of his head, changing his face to red, green, blue or black to express happiness, hate, anger or sadness, respectively.

Face-dragging (simplified Chinese: 抹脸)

The actor drags greasepaint hidden in his sideburns or eyebrows across his face to change his appearance.

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Greek Masked Performance



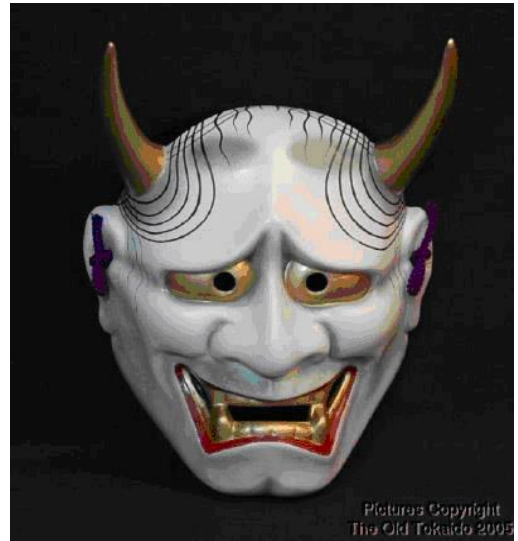
In Ancient Greece, the theatres were outside and plays were performed in huge amphitheatres which could seat up to 40,000 people at a time. Due to the size of the theatres, actors would wear huge masks so that the members of the audience at the back could see what was happening on stage.

Moreover, the use of masks allowed the actor to impersonate a number of different characters during the play simply by changing masks and costumes.

The conical shape of the mouthpiece also acted like a simple microphone, amplifying the voice.

Resource 2 – History of Mask Fact Cards

Masked Performance in the Middle Ages



In the Middle Ages, masks were used in the mystery plays of the 12th to the 16th Centuries

The plays of this time usually dramatized portions of the bible including grotesque representations of devils, demons, dragons, and personifications of the seven deadly sins which were brought to stage life by the use of masks.

Resource 2 – History of Mask Fact
Cards

Commedia Dell'Arte

(pronounced Comm – ed – e – a -
Dell – Art – ey)



The 15th-century Renaissance in Italy witnessed the rise of a theatre and this spread rapidly to France, to Germany, and to England where it maintained its popularity into the 18th century.

Commedia Dell Arte (meaning comedy of the arts) was a comedy that was improvised from scenarios based upon the plots of famous plays, but it also took the mickey out of them.

The players (actors) of the Commedia were usually masked and this showed specific features of the character, e.g. a mask with a big nose would be used to portray a nosey character, a character with a love heart on their mask would represent a lover or romantic character.