

Greek Theatre Masks

In ancient Greek drama, all the actors were men. They wore masks to indicate the character that they were playing (e.g. woman, old man) or the emotion that they were showing (e.g. anger, sadness, joy). As there were only three of them, the actors in Greek plays often played several different parts and would put on a different mask for each part that they played. The members of the chorus also wore masks but these would have been similar and they would have been completely different from those of the leading actors.

The masks had exaggerated features, particularly large eyes, large nose and mouth. This allowed the expressions on the faces to be seen by all the people in the theatre, even those sitting in the back rows of the large theatres. Some experts think that the masks helped to amplify the voice, with the mouth opening acting like a megaphone, so that it could be heard at the back of the open-air theatres.



This terracotta mask of the old man character from comedies shows him with a wide grin, furrowed brow and bald head. He also wears a wreath with ivy leaves and clusters of berries. The masks worn in tragedies were different and showed calm, serious or pained expressions.

It is thought that the masks were made of a lightweight material, stiffened and painted linen, leather, cork or carved wood. None have survived but we know what they looked like because models of actors and masks were made and they were shown in sculptures or on vases. To create the shape of the mask, the artist moulded the material around a marble or stone face (like papier-mâché). Human or animal hair was used for the hair. They were often brightly coloured, although white hair was used to show that the character was old and pale skin showed they were ill.

Drawing designs

- Stand in front of the mirror and try to make four different expressions on your face (for example, sad, happy, angry, scared - or more intense versions of these).
- Look carefully at your face and think about the shapes that your face is making, especially your eyes and mouth.
- Exaggerate your expression, so that it would be easy to work out what it is if you were looking at it from a distance.
- Draw these expressions in the four boxes and label the emotion expressed.
- Think about how you are going to create your mask. If you plan to use card, then your final design will not be the same as if you were to use papier-mâché on a balloon.
- Decide on a final design for your mask and draw this in the larger box.

Creating

- Make your mask!
- Tidy up after yourself!
- Thank anyone who has helped.
- Write instructions so someone else would be able to make a similar mask.
- Remember to include a list of materials.
- It would be great to see a picture of you and your mask 😊

Evaluating

- Evaluate your mask:
 - How well is the emotion shown?
 - What went well?
 - Is there anything you would change if you did it again? Why?

Emotion:	Emotion:
Emotion:	Emotion:

My final design

Emotion:

