

THE SYMBOLISM OF MASKS

By Sarah Gudgeon



1. Read

Happy masks; sad masks; scary masks; funny masks. There are all kinds of masks, but why do people wear them?

In the past, some people wore masks to frighten their *enemies*. Sometimes people dress up and put on masks on special occasions, to celebrate their traditions.

In Ancient Egypt, family and friends put masks on the dead. They believed this would help the spirit to return to the right body, to rest in peace for eternity.

In modern day society, we often associate masks with superheroes or the theatre. Popular comic book heroes like Spiderman and Batman wear costumes and masks to hide their true identity. They are ordinary guys most of the time, but their costumes and masks help to make them invincible.

They work by day and save lives by night.

At the theatre, every actor assumes a new identity; they must become the character they *portray* on stage. Actors use costumes and masks to help them do this. Plays can be funny or tragic and the symbol you see in every theatre represents these emotions: one happy mask, one sad mask.

Masks give people the power to identify themselves or to transform themselves into someone or something else.

Glossary

enemies: nemici

portray: raffigurare

2. Answer true or false

- a. All people in the past wore masks.
- b. In Ancient Egypt they put masks on dead people.
- c. Superheroes never wear masks.
- d. Superheroes tell everyone they meet their real name.
- e. Actors wear costumes and masks.
- f. The symbolic theatre masks show one happy face and one sad face.

3. Who is your favourite superhero? Why? What mask do they wear? Talk to a partner.

My favourite superhero is...

I like him/her because...

His/her mask is...

Teacher's Notes

2. a. false b. true c. false d. false e. true f. true

3. Get the students talking about different superheroes, their costumes and their powers before putting them into pairs.

Sample answer:

My favourite superhero is Spiderman.

I like him because he is just a normal kid, with normal problems, when suddenly, he has the power to do amazing things.

His mask is red with a black/grey spider's web on it.