

COMMON WEAL COMMUNITY ARTS

Artful Isolation Activities

Week Eighteen: Mask Theatre



Tell a story using non-verbal communication such as gesture, movement, and body language.

What is Mask Theatre? Masks have been worn in performance since ancient times. Mask Theatre is a style of visual, physical performance in which stories are told without the use of voice. Though a script is “spoken” in their heads, mask performers rely on physicality—gesture, movement, and body language—to let the audience know what is happening.

Why Mask Theatre? Communications and Development Coordinator Nena Hawkes has been studying Mask Theatre since she was a young theatre student. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic she began development on a Mask show and workshop series. Over the years, she has recognized the potential to use Mask techniques in performance and outside of the theatre as a way to connect with her inner self. In her own words: “In a way we all wear a mask every day and it affects how we interact with others. Non-verbal communication plays an important role in our relationships, and honing these skills can help teach empathy and trust, paving the way for powerful connections between people.” In this activity, you will be using Mask Theatre to create a short scene that tells a story without words.

Suitable For: Ages 5+ (note that simple adaptations should be made to keep young children engaged).

What You’ll Need: Your body and a willingness to step outside of your comfort zone. You will also need a mask of some sort. Large paper bags like those provided at grocery stores work especially well, but you could use a Halloween mask, paper plate, or even create something more elaborate using paper mache or plaster. If you’d like to share your performance with others, a camera or phone that can record videos will come in handy.

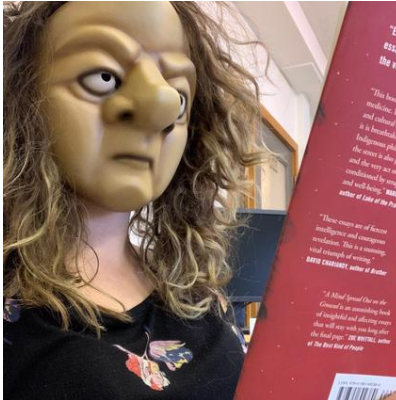


PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NENA HAWKES

ACTIVITY SHEET CREATED BY COMMON WEAL COMMUNITY ARTS IN SASKATCHEWAN
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Getting Ready:

- Watch some clips of Mask theatre in action. You can watch [this video](#) for more insight on working with masks. You can also watch a clip of Nena's work [here](#), or check out some of her favourite examples [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).
- Find somewhere to work with space to move around.
- Start to build your story. First, decide on the important things. Who are you? Where are you? What task are you trying to complete? This is a great opportunity to reflect on your own experience during isolation or you might try to embody someone else real or imagined.
- Make a list of the different emotions your character would feel while completing their task. Beside each one, write down some thoughts your character would have and how you might express these without using words. Remember, subtle, focused movements are often the most powerful.
- Gather any props or objects you'll need for your scene. Mask is NOT the same as Mime. It is important to use real objects, even if you use them in unexpected ways.



Activity:

- Now is the time to put on your mask. You'll want to make sure that the expression makes sense for your character. One "rule" of Mask is to always put the mask on out of the view of other people, so be sure to turn around if you're performing for others.
- Take a few deep breaths. Mask techniques can feel awkward the first time you try them.
- Let your character "sink into" your body. Experiment with different ways of standing or moving on the spot. How does your character hold themselves that is different from the way you do? Does your character have any nervous habits? How might this come across physically?
- Start to work through the list you created and experiment with the movements you've written down. You'll want to "speak" the thoughts in your head as you work through the task. Don't use a mirror! Instead, focus inward during this process.
- Play with the order of your actions and thoughts until a story starts to emerge. Experiment with your props until they add to your story and there is a clear beginning, middle, and end. Once your story emerges, practice it a few times until you feel comfortable.
- Music can add a lot emotionally. You may want to find a piece of music to help you tell your story. Then, play it as you run your scene again and make any adjustments you'd like. You now have a finished scene.

Reflection:

- Did any surprising emotions or thoughts come up? What did this exercise teach you about how you show your emotions? Is there an emotion you want to explore further, whether through art, journaling, or another medium?
- Take a video of your scene. You may want to share this with a trusted friend or family member.
- If you are showing your work to another person you might ask them:
 - Did you understand what was going on?
 - Did you understand what my character was saying, thinking or feeling?
 - Did my story make sense?
 - Did you connect with my character?
- Take the feedback you received and consider what you might have done differently.
- If you're interested in learning more about Mask Theatre, check out Blue Cardigan Theatre Company on [Instagram](#).
- Share photographs of your creative process or a video of your scene with us on Facebook or Instagram, tagging [@skcommonweal](#) and using the hashtags [#cwmask](#) and [#cwneighbours](#).