

PAPIER MÂCHÉ MASKS

Introduction

This is a really fun, but really messy way to create a variety of masks. Various things can be used as the base of the mask depending upon the final product you want and the time you have available. You could make this mask almost entirely out of recycled materials, so it can be a very inexpensive project if you have access to your local recycling center. Often mismatched or mis-mixed paint can be found for a very minimal cost from paint stores. As it takes time for the papier mâché to dry, this is a project that will take multiple days.

You have at least two options for the base layer of the mask: milk jugs or the plastic full-face or half-masks found at craft stores. While the former are an easy and inexpensive base for papier mâché, the latter will create a more human-like face shape. If you decide to use the milk jug approach, you would cut the milk jug in half (from top to bottom) creating two 'faces'. Either side can be used depending upon the preference of the student. The handle can become the nose and give a predetermined shape to the face. The other side can be built up to resemble any face shape, although some jugs have two large circles on that side, that seem to resemble large eyes—making it perfect for a bug mask.

Materials

A large bowl (disposable is easiest)

Plastic table cloth or drop cloth (disposable)

Flour

Water

Glue

Strips of newspaper

Strips of brown paper towels

Sand paper (optional)

Brown shoe polish (optional)

Paint and paint brushes—if painting masks

Scissors

Materials to decorate and embellish—felt, construction paper, tissue paper, glitter, feathers, buttons, pipe cleaners, cookie cutters, leaves, flowers etc.

Shredded paper (which can be painted and used for hair)

Procedure

1. Tear or cut a large quantity of newspapers into strips to be dunked in the paste mixture. The second layer can be done in brown paper towels to give a smoother appearance than the newspaper, but either will work. If using the paper towels, tear or cut those into strips as well. The strips should be approximately 1 inch wide.
2. Prepare the paste mixture: In a large plastic bowl pour about a 1/3 of a 5 lb. bag of flour (or about 1.5 pounds). Pour enough water (warm is best) to mix the flour so that it dissolves and is more liquid than paste like. Mix well, getting rid of as many clumps as possible, although you will still have some. Then, add one bottle of glue (7.6 oz) to the mixture and stir well.

3. Cover the work space with a plastic table cloth or drop cloth. Some of the mixture will likely get on the floor as you work, so either work on tile or place some sort of protective covering on the floor space.
4. Dip one strip of newspaper at a time into the paste mixture. Hold the strip at the top with your thumb and index finger of one hand, while you slide your index and middle fingers of your other hand down the strip to remove the excess paste mixture. Then place this strip onto the base of your mask. Pick a direction—either horizontally or vertically to place the strips. Press the strip down gently to make sure it is adhered and to create as smooth a finished surface as possible. Continue doing this until the entire base is covered. You can do just the front or the front and the back, that is up to you. Allow the mask to dry at least over night. Depending upon the climate it may take longer. If time allows, complete a second layer of papier mâché after the first layer is dry. Here is where you may want to use brown paper towels instead of newspaper. Alternate the direction you place the strips for the second layer—for example, if you placed the strips vertically the first time, place them horizontally across the mask for the second layer. If students want to add extensions—horns or ears for example. These can be built up with aluminum foil taped on and then covered with papier mâché. Allow the mask to dry completely, 24 to 48 hours.
5. If time allows and students want a smooth look, they can gently sand down their mask with sand paper.
6. Finish the mask with paint (tempera or acrylic works well), construction paper, tissue paper, etc. Decoupage with tissue paper can be an effective finishing technique. If the mask is painted with tempera paint, they can be rubbed down with brown shoe polish and buffed to provide a patina look. Acrylic glaze can also be used with any of the finish techniques as a final treatment.
7. Embellish the mask with any additional materials—like feathers, glitter, beads, sequins, leaves, flowers, yarn or painted shredded paper (which works great for hair).

Examples of Papier Mâché Masks



Image taken from http://summwrites.blogspot.com/2010/11/african-masks_22.html



Image taken from <http://madalene-everythingart.blogspot.com/2011/04/milk-jug-mask.html>



Image taken from <http://www.designboom.com/weblog/cat/10/view/6992/vincent-hall-masks-made-of-plastic-milk-jugs.html>



Image taken from <http://www.cutoutandkeep.net/projects/paper-mache-mask-3>.