

## **Masks as Social History by Balika Haakanson**

Discipline: Language Arts and Social Studies

Topic: Visual and Literary Analysis

Target Grade Level: Upper elementary and Middle School

Resources and Materials: This lesson contains all necessary resources except a map, which teachers should obtain or project in order to show Pinart's route of travel from France to Alaska.

Lesson Summary: Students will analyze a famous piece of artwork and discuss how it represents a piece of social history. After learning about Alphonse Pinart and his journey, students will then view two Alutiiq masks which Alphonse Pinart collected and discuss how they are pieces of social history as well. For an assessment activity, students will draw their own mask, title it and create a song, which will represent THEIR social history.

Standards Addressed: English A1, 2, 4-6, B1-3, C1-3, D1-2, 4, E1 & 4. Geography A1, 5 & 6, B4-8, D1 & 2, 4 & 5,. History A1-9, B1-5. D1, 2, 6. Arts A 1-6. B1-8, C1-5, D1-7.

Learning Objectives: Students will understand that art work represents a personal view of social history and is as important as the dates and stories written in history books. Students will learn to look at a piece of art and 'read it' like a book.

Assessment: Students will create their own mask, title it and write a song, to represent their own social history.

Instructional Activities:

Introductory Activity:

1. Hand out the notetaking worksheet to students then project an image of the painting Washington Crossing the Delaware onto the board ([http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/gw/el\\_gw.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/gw/el_gw.htm)) and ask students to spend 2-3 minutes silently observing the painting and taking notes about their thoughts/ beliefs about this work of art on the worksheet. You can tell them the basic facts about this work. "This painting describes the

historic moment when General George Washington led the American revolutionary troops across the Delaware River in order to surprise the English and Hessian troops in the Battle of Trenton the day after Christmas in 1776." Let them know that the opinion worksheet won't be graded for content but MAY be graded for completeness- it is mostly to allow them to get their thoughts on paper and to practice looking at art.

2. Ask students to share their thoughts on the meaning of this piece with a partner or small group for a few minutes and ask them to back up their opinions with 'proof' that they see in the art work.

3. When students are done lead them in a discussion towards the main idea that art is a means of telling a story that IS history and is perhaps a more authentic means of telling history than reading dates in a history book because art discusses an individual's interpretation of events and history. For example, we all know that George Washington led America through the Revolutionary war but this painting allows us to see his strength and leadership and view him as a person. The link above also has some more information on this work of art that may help your class discussion. Some sample questions you may want to ask students:

-What do you think? What did you like, dislike? How did the painter tell a story with this work of art? What is the main idea that you think that the author is trying to tell? How do colors, shadows, positioning of figures, etc add to the piece and help tell a story? Ask students to share their thoughts and ideas about the piece. Accept all answers as all art is subjective and depends on the viewer's interpretation. Tell them this so that they work on the next part of the lesson without inhibition.

4. Read students a short history of Pinart (Pinart's Masks). You can tell them the story while showing them a map of France and perhaps a map of the world to chart his course. Alternately, you can have them read the history alone or together and show them the map afterwards.

5. Project an image of the Unnuyayuk, Night Traveler, mask for students. Don't tell students what the song is yet. Ask students to do the same thing for this mask as they did for the previous artwork (make predictions about its meaning, write down their opinions about its meaning etc) and give them a few minutes to work and think quietly.

6. When done, have students share their thoughts with the class if they wish. Accept all answers. Then, reveal them the translation and give them the song that went with the mask. Background information to share with the class: The concept of the levels of the universe and the helper in

Alutiiq society is complex. Alutiiq traditional beliefs depended on the idea that there were three levels to the universe- the earth, the heavens and beyond the heavens. The helper is the spirit who lives beyond the heavens who helps the hunter find food, but the hunter must also give some of that food to their helper spirit. Lead a class discussion for a while to discuss possible meanings of the song and the mask. A few points that you should make:

-Knowing the song and having a title are very important to understanding the mask. We have Pinart to thank for this.

-Concept of Duality in the mask- could it be about feelings AND also about our world and the underworld, day and night?

7. Now, show the class the Cumugiyak mask and this time don't give them the translated title. Have them do the same thing for this mask as well. After they've made predictions for a few minutes, take comments and thoughts from the class, making sure that students talk about the differences in the two masks.

-Why do they think that the mask shape, eye shape, mouth shape may be different? What about colors?

-Title predictions?

8. Show students the title and the song and discuss the mask meaning for a few minutes.

9. Ready for the assessment activity- Let students know that for their assessment they will have some choices about what to do but that everyone will be working on putting their own spin on a mask. Students will have the choice of taking one of the masks that we discussed today and changing the title and the song OR sketching their own mask that deals with an issue or event that is important to their lives. Work with the class to come up with a few ideas (a sad text message, a fight with a parent, their first hunting trip, etc). Pass out the assessment activity and make any accommodations deemed necessary.

Modifications: The element of choice in this activity should accommodate diverse learning needs in the classroom. The reading activity could be done in a small group or independently, the assessment activity could be done with an existing mask or could be with a new one, and the lesson activities could be graded or not. The assessment could be altered so that students get extra credit for creating a dance or completing a poster.

Technology: Using a smart board or computer projector for this lesson is preferable, as teachers can show worksheets and navigate to maps along with students.

### **Pinart's Masks**

Alphonse Pinart, born in 1852, was born into very rich French nobility in the area near Bologne- Sur- Mer, in the north of France. He could have stayed in France living the easy life of French nobility but he was full of questions about life and the world so he set out from his home on his own at 18 years old. Primarily, he was interested in researching the peopling of the Americas.

He took a steam ship to San Francisco (the journey would have taken weeks) and eventually to Alaska's coast. He made it to Unalaska and explored the Bering Sea. When he returned to Unalaska he hired some Aleut men to guide him by kayak along the coast towards Kodiak. Pinart wrote in his journal about this 3 month trip to Kodiak, kayaking the dangerous seas off of the Aleutians. When he made it to Kodiak he acquired a large number (86) of masks in 1872 before going back to France to much interest and acclaim.

The amazing thing about his time in Kodiak was that he took the time to write down the Alutiiq songs that went with the masks, as well as the names of the masks. Why is this amazing? Traditionally, Alutiiq masks would have been burned after they were danced. Also, the church looked down on the making of masks because it linked Kodiak's native peoples to the beliefs that they held before they converted to Russian Orthodoxy. Consequently, very few masks remain from this time period and little is known about the

uses how Kodiak masks would have been used. Pinart was very interested in writing about the Alutiiq worldview since Alaska had just been purchased by America in 1867 and the native people's future was far from known.

Basically, Pinart came at the perfect time. The other amazing thing? Pinart took these masks home with him donated them to the museum near his family's home, the Château Musée in Boulogne Sur Mer, where they have been care for over 130 years before people in Kodiak rediscovered them and realized that they could re-learn from them. Thanks to Alphonse Pinart, Kodiak people have many records of what their traditional Kodiak masks looked like, and also the songs that would have gone with them.

The twist to this story? Pinart was gone from his home country of France long enough for a war (The Franco-Prussian war of 1870) to unseat the nobility from their position of power and make his name in France, not for who is family was but what he did. When Pinart returned he had used all his inheritance and had to find work. When he passed away in 1911 his name went unknown for over 70 years and now, thanks to what he documented and collected, Pinart will not be forgotten. In a way Pinart was an Indiana Jones for France, but one who documented what he collected.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Note Taking Worksheet

Use this sheet to take notes on the artwork shown in class. It does NOT need to be in complete sentence but work should show thought.

Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, American, 1816–1868  
George Washington Crossing the Delaware, 1851

Unnuyayuk, Night Traveler,  
1872, Eagle Harbor, Kodiak



Cumugiyak, First One  
1872, Eagle Harbor, Kodiak



## **Mask Names and Songs**

(to be shown AFTER previewing masks)

### **Unnuyayuk, Night Traveler**

Song:

Why is it my helper spirit, why is it you are apprehensive of me?

On the seal rocks I will bring you game to be caught.

I went through the inside of the universe, my helper, that one made me afraid.

I went down where they are motioning.

### **Cumugiyak, First One**

Song:

My house up there, in the Universe up there you don't know it.

Is it behind the sun, it is behind the one up above? (Behind that one up there the suns up there) -pik'um up there behind.

My helper, I am approaching you from up above, I keep trying to come.

My helper, that one's lands doesn't need performers.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Masks as Social History Culminating Activity**

Masks are a form of social history and reflect the beliefs of the time in which they are made. Now it is your turn. Please design a mask that represents something that has happened in your life (or something that could happen, or that you would like to have happen). Draw the mask below, filling up the entire page. Don't forget to title your mask. Use the following sheet to write a song that goes with your mask (should be between 5-15 lines, does not have to rhyme, but should summarize what is happening in the mask. Be sure to use correct grammar, punctuation and TELL a story).

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Mask Drawing below:

Mask Song:

How does your mask represent an object of social history, ie 100 years from now, how could your mask help archaeologists understand today's youth?