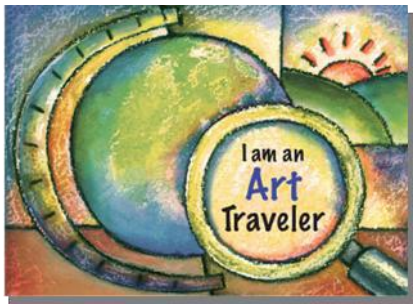
Hofstra University Museum
JPMorgan Chase Art Travelers through Time:
Literacy and History through Art



Tiger Mask
1950-1970
Michoacan, Mexico
Wood, paint
Gift of Cedric Marks
HU84.35

WHAT: Tiger Mask
WHERE: Michoacan, Mexico
WHEN: 1950-1970

WHY: Masks and mask making have long been part of Mexican tradition, from its native roots, through the Spanish conquest of Mexico in the 16th century and into the modern day. Every region in Mexico has its own style of mask making and through the use of masks and dance, people share their cultural experiences and their history. Today the history and cultural beliefs, a blend of indigenous and Christian traditions, are represented in dramatic performances during carnivals and celebrations.

The dramas may include stories of the Spanish conquest in which dancers wear masks that resemble conquistadors such as Hernando Cortez, religious stories that incorporate masks that resemble saints as well as the devil, or stories of the annual cycle such as planting and harvesting. In “El baile de los Tecuanes,” (“Dance of the Wild Beasts” or “Tiger Dance”) the dancers wear masks that resemble wild animals, particularly tigers and leopards. The Tiger Dance, a very old dance dating back to ancient times which the Museum’s mask be connected to, tells the story of a tiger damaging crops and being chased away by angry farmers. Since there are no tigers in Mexico, this dance probably originally featured jaguars or ocelots which are types of wildcats.

The serpent, depicted on the Museum’s *Tiger Mask*, is a recurring motif in the cultural history of Mexico and its people. It is represented in numerous Mexica/Aztec gods, including Quetzlacoatl, Coatlicue and others. The most notable incarnation of a snake is its presence in the Mexican coat of arms and national flag where it refers to the creation myth of the native people. According to this legend, Huitzilopochtli, the god of war told the wandering Mexica (pronounced “Me- shee-ka”) tribe (later known as Aztecs) that when they saw an eagle with a serpent in its talon perched on a cactus on an island they should begin to build their capital city at that spot. They supposedly did encounter this very event on an island in the middle of Lake Anáhuac, and built the empire of Tenochtitlan ("Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus") now known as México City.

Vocabulary

Serpent **Wildcat** **Authentic** **Empire**

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

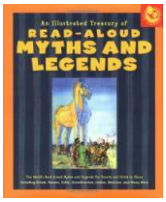
ELA Activity: Historically, masks have been used in many cultures, and they continue to have many uses. Write a story that involves a mask. Illustrate you story and share your finished project with family and schoolmates.

Social Studies Activity: The serpent or snake is a recurring theme or motif in many cultures. Compare and contrast the significance and role of this motif across different cultures and time. Consider ancient mythology of Egyptian, Greek, Native American, Asian, Indian and African cultures. Students may want to further investigate this symbol as it is used in modern medicine

Art Activity: Using a large poster board or sheet of art paper as the background, students can create a mural of masks. You could limit your mural project to include only original designs, or if you prefer, use patterns that represent historical masks. You might even visualize masks of the future. Your mural could stretch across history and show masks and how they have been used through the ages and/or in different cultures.

Resources

Related Children's Book



An Illustrated Treasury of Read-Aloud Myths and Legends edited by Joan C. Verniero M.S.Ed and Robin Fitzsimmons. More than 40 of the world's best-loved myths and legends are told in this book including Mexican, Greek, Roman, Celtic, Scandinavian, Indian, and more.

Lucha Libre: The Man in the Silver Mask by Xavier Garza
Carlitos is on his first trip to Mexico City to see a Mexican wrestling match ("lucha libre"). The adventure begins when Carlitos gets to choose a mask as a souvenir of the event; after careful consideration, he chooses that of the *Man in the Silver Mask*. Putting on the mask makes Carlitos feel powerful and excited as he learns about the good vs. evil aspects of lucha libre.

Web Link

Ceremonial Masks – African Masks and Mexican Masks – a brief look.

http://creativitybeat.com/articles-artistic-expression/ceremonial-masks-%E2%80%93-african-masks-and-mexican-masks-a-brief-look/

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