

Mardi Gras Revelers

Megan Giampietro

At the Philadelphia Performing Arts Charter School, the arts team teachers collaborated on a fun-filled project that engaged all students in grades kindergarten through eight: a Mardi Gras Parade! The French majors coordinated with the ballet, vocal, instrumental, creative writing, and visual art students in grades six, seven, and eight to produce a festive Mardi Gras parade, and a celebration for students in grades kindergarten through five. The visual art majors provided their artistic skills to create masks and costumes for a colorful parade that wove through classrooms throughout the school.

The Traditions of Mardi Gras

In the Louisiana Mardi Gras celebration, the word “mask” is used as both

a noun and a verb. “To mask” really means to step outside one’s everyday ordinary life and to take on a different identity, even if it is just for one special day. Students work on the Mardi Gras masks theme for several weeks. First, they learn about the history of the Mardi Gras celebration, the city of New Orleans, the French Quarter, Fat Tuesday, the Carnival, the many Krewes, Revelers, and of course, the Mardi Gras parades.

We brainstormed possible themes, such as Day of the Dead, Venice, the sea, the circus, etc. After much enthusiastic discussion, we finally decided on masks from cultures throughout time and around the world. The possibilities with this theme were vast, and students were excited to begin.

Students conducted a Web quest and researched as many masks as they could find. They found inspiration from the masks of Afri-

can, Mayan, Inuit, Native American, Pre-Columbian, Asian, and many other cultures. These masks were printed in color and displayed around the artroom. Students began to sketch out their ideas, working together to make decisions about the size of the masks, materials that would be needed, and construction supplies and equipment.

Mask Criteria

The masks were to be large, three-dimensional, with handles and eye holes so that students could carry them in front of their faces. Each student was provided with a piece of 12 x 36" (30 x 91 cm) cardboard, and all the necessary supplies in the artroom came out: paints, feathers, yarn, hot glue guns, beads, glass baubles, shells, pipe cleaners, felt, burlap, straw, papers, sparkles, silk flowers, and so on.



Making Masks

Working from their sketches, students began to draw their ideas onto the large cardboard. Once the drawings were complete, students used scrap cardboard to build any three-dimensional parts, such as facial features and other elaborations. A hot glue gun worked perfectly to put the constructions together.

Once the cardboard constructions were completed, they were painted with an acrylic ground to prevent warping and to provide a durable working surface. Some of the masks had noses, eyes, and other features that were constructed to protrude out, and some had textured surfaces. All of the masks were painted in bright colors, with interesting patterns.

Students used hot glue guns (with supervision) to add embellishments. The handles were added last, and students were ready to strut.

The finished masks were displayed in the artroom until the day of the parade. We conducted a critique and discussed the construction, use of color, creativity, and use of materials. On the day of the parade, students dressed in black, ready to go reveling in the hallways and classrooms of the lower grades.

Celebration!

We entered each classroom, dancing and strutting, and passing out goodies to the waiting

children. They squealed with delight at the giant menagerie of masks entering their rooms. After the parade, the masks were put on display in the cafeteria, where they provided a glimpse of other cultures from around the world. 🌀

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

WEB LINK

people.howstuffworks.com/mardi-gras4.htm

Materials

- acrylic and tempera paints, painting ground
- feathers
- glass baubles
- shells
- yarn
- felt
- burlap
- silk leaves and flowers
- straw
- variety of colored and patterned papers
- hot glue gun
- sparkles

