

Venetian Volto Mask (art + social studies)

Masks have been a central feature of the Carnival of Venice since the thirteenth century. Social classes disappeared behind the masks, and people could pretend to be whatever they wanted to be. The Italian word “volto” translates as “face” in English. In centuries past, a Volto was known as a “citizen’s mask” because it was usually worn by the common people. Contemporary versions are often gilded and highly decorated; they are the most popular style of mask worn during Carnival. A Volto mask is usually accompanied by a cloak, veil or hat to further conceal the wearer’s identity.

To make a Volto mask worthy of the Carnival of Venice, students will drape acrylic felt over a plastic face form (which can then be used again and again). Rice paste (a gluten-free maché alternative) provides just the right amount of stiffness. Students will then decorate the masks with metallic paint, glitter glue and rhinestones... anything to make them amazing!

Grade Levels 3-12

Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. View images and examples of Carnival and Mardi Gras masks.
2. Mix the rice paste in a plastic container with a fitted lid. The paste needs to be thick, like paint (not liquid or drippy). A ratio of one part rice paste mix to four parts cold water will create a good consistency. Stir the mixture, then put the lid on the container tightly and shake it thoroughly. The paste will thicken as it sits and will keep for one week.
3. Gather pieces of cardboard to work on, so that the masks may be moved and the workspace stays tidy. Cover the cardboard with waxed paper to keep the masks from sticking.



Materials

Felt Swatches, 9" x 12", assorted colors (63201-); two sheets per mask

Plastic Face Mask, female (61152-1004); one per student

Amaco® Rice Paste Powder, 8-oz jar (34125-1008); share one among class

Snippy® Scissors, pointed (57040-2005); one pair per student

OPTIONS FOR EMBELLISHMENT

Creativity Street® Glitter Glue, assorted colors (23864-)

Sequin Mix, 4-oz (60718-1004)

Sargent® Metallic Acrylics, assorted colors (00730-)

Acrylic Gems, 1-lb bag (60722-0001)

Hygloss™ Ribbon Rainbow (61498-1009)

Crafty's Plumage Feathers, 1/2-oz rainbow assortment (60909-1003)

Disposable Gloves, package of 100 small (04982-1020)



Process

1. Dip acrylic felt in water and drape it over the face form. Trim the felt around the edges of the form at the top, bottom and sides. Overlap the felt at the cuts for a snug fit.
2. Brush the rice paste generously over the felt and smooth it with your fingers. Some wrinkling will likely occur and may be used as an expressive feature. Excess felt at the corners may be trimmed away or left to be used as part of the design.
4. Allow the paste to set overnight. Dry time may be decreased by placing the mask in front of a fan or using a hair dryer on a low setting. Remove the mask from the form. If it sticks, use a craft stick or other blunt instrument to pry it gently away.
5. Cut more felt into pieces. Any shape is usable, and a variety of sizes will be most useful.
6. Place the mask back on the face form for support. Working on your waxed paper-covered cardboard, dip felt pieces into the paste and use your fingers to fully saturate them, making sure to remove any excess paste. Apply the felt pieces to the mask, allowing them to drape, fold, curl and bend onto the wax paper surrounding it. Continue until the design is complete, then set the mask aside to dry.

NOTE: Due to the nature of the paste, some areas may dry cloudy or look shiny against the felt, especially when darker colors are used. These may be covered with decoration in the next step.

7. Once the mask is dry, cut out eyeholes with a pair of scissors and decorate the mask with glitter glue, metallic paint, sequins, acrylic gems and other eye-catching materials. Glue pieces of ribbon to either side of the mask's interior if it is to be worn, or to the top of the mask if it will be hung.

Options

1. Playbox™ Wheat Paste (24007-1003) may be substituted for rice paste.



Step 1: Wet the acrylic felt and drape it over the face form. Coat it with paste using a foam brush. Smooth it with your fingers.



Step 2: Trim and remove the mask from the form once it is dry. Place it back on the form for support.



Step 3: Dip pieces of felt in the paste and work off the excess with your fingers. Apply the pieces to the mask, creating dimension.



Step 4: Finish the mask with metallic acrylic paint, glitter glue, sequins and gems.



National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes.

K-4 Students use different media, techniques and processes to communicate ideas, experiences and stories.

5-8 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

9-12 Students apply media, techniques and processes with sufficient skill, confidence and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

Content Standard #4 Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

K-4 Students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times and places.

5-8 Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts.

9-12 Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times and places.