

**Visual Arts in Society:
We Wear the Mask –Visual Arts and Literacy Project**

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Abstract

This unit draws from both visual art and literature to allow students to explore masks as metaphors to better understand culture and identity. It is intended for middle grade students (grades 6th-8th) and revolves around an essential question, “Who Am I?” This essential question allows both students and teachers to research and analyze the past and then set goals for future. The first part of the unit involves researching and analyzing visual art in general and masks in particular. The unit employs masks found in museums, internet sites and text books such as Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Elements of Literature. Students learn to analyze masks as metaphors in literature, in particular using Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem, “We Wear the Mask.” Then students design and draw their own masks, while concurrently producing an anthology of poetry on the theme of masks. The unit provides strategies and tools for moving students’ work from the “*Page to the Stage*” with a live performance, show casing students’ final mask drawings and recitation of poetry exploring the themes “We Wear the Mask” and “Who Am I?”