

Greek Theatre Masks

In ancient Greek drama, all the actors were men. They wore masks to indicate the character that they were playing (e.g. woman, old man) or the emotion that they were showing (e.g. anger, sadness, joy). Actors in Greek plays often played several different parts and would put on a different mask for each part that they played. The members of the chorus wore masks that were usually similar to each other, but completely different from those of the leading actors. The masks were often brightly coloured with exaggerated features e.g. large eyes, large nose and mouth. This allowed the faces to be seen by all the people in the theatre, even those sitting in the back rows. Usually the masks were made of a lightweight material: e.g. linen, leather, cork or carved wood. To create the shape of the mask, the artist moulded the material around a marble or stone face (like papier-mâché). Human or animal hair was used for the hair.

How to make your own Greek-style mask

- Stand in front of the mirror and try to make the following expressions on your face: sad, happy, angry, scared.
- Look carefully at your face and think about the shapes that your face is making, especially your eyes and mouth.
- Make the expression that is best for the character that you are playing.
- Draw this expression on a piece of paper, making sure that the size matches your face. (You might need someone to help you with this.)
- Exaggerate your expression, so that it will be easy to work out what it is if you are looking at it from a distance.
- Stick your drawing onto thick card. Remember to cut out the holes for the eyes and the mouth. (Ask someone to help you do this safely.)
- Cut holes in the sides and thread elastic, string or ribbon through them, so that the mask can be tied on your head.

