

ROMAN THEATRE MASK MAKING



INTRODUCTION

Romans loved to go to the theatre but it was very different to our experience of going to the theatre today. Performances went on for a very long time and people in the audience would talk while the show went on and move around. Roman actors had quite a low status in ancient Rome and some were previously slaves who had earned their freedom by demonstrating a talent for acting. Roman actors had to play several parts during these long performances so they needed stamina to keep going and had different outfits that were easy to get on and off and also theatre masks to help show the mood of the character they were playing. These masks were quite big and exaggerated expressions so that even those at the back of what might be a very large amphitheatre could see and understand the mood (e.g. comic or tragic) that the actor was trying to show.

These instructions will show you how to make either a simple mask which you could do in a short time and in one go, or alternatively if you have more time, and somewhere to leave it to dry over several days, a longer project using papier-mache.

MATERIALS NEEDED TO MAKE A SIMPLE MASK DESIGN

- Cardboard that you can cut with normal scissors – a cereal box is ideal
- Pencil
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Felt-tip pens, and/or paints and brushes if you have them (if using paint, use ready mixed paint or acrylics and don't add water)

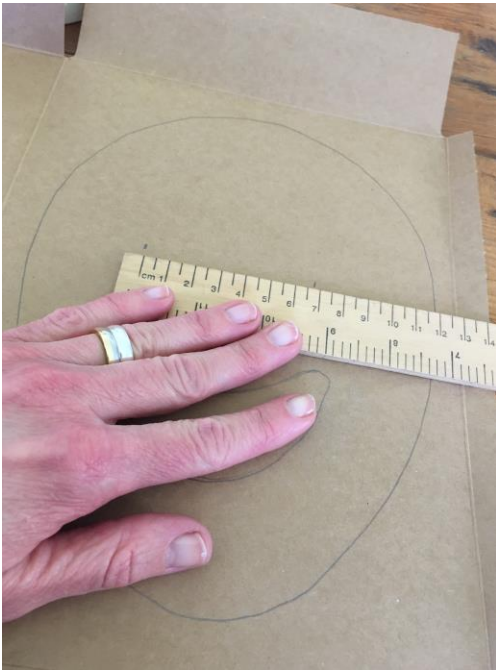
ADDITIONAL MATERIALS NEEDED – If you have more time and want to make a more 3D mask over several days:

- You will need all of the above plus:
- Some newspaper or other scrap paper cut into strips
- Tape (masking tape ideal)
- Papier-mache glue mix = either two parts PVA + one part water mixed well
- OR
- equal parts of flour and water with some salt added to prevent mould mixed well
- Container for soaking papier-mache pieces (again try looking for a clean plastic container that might otherwise go for recycling)

OPTIONAL – elastic or ribbon to tie on to allow you to wear the mask

METHOD

1. Take your cereal box and open it out and undo any glued edges so that you can use the brown inside surface (rather than the branded outer surface).
2. Draw an oval for a face shape on a large flat rectangular part of the box and don't worry if it's not too even. If you want to make a mask that will be



- wearable a good guide is to have the oval approximately the right size is to have it measure around 16cm across the widest part of the oval and be about 21 cm long. Don't cut the oval out yet as you might need extra room to add on e.g. hair and so on. So don't cut it out until you have finished adding all the features and also the colour.
3. About a third of the way down from the top of the head mark 2 eyes by making 2 dots approximately 7cm apart from each other. Then make little circles around the dots to make them pupils – make the circles say 1-1.5 cm diameter. If you want to wear your mask you will need to cut these out carefully. If you are quite young ask a grown up for help with this.
 4. Now look at some of the images of Roman masks and pick one to inspire your design. Remember the features and expression are exaggerated so go for it!
 5. At this stage you have a choice. You can either carry on with it and simply add colour with felt tip pens or paint OR
 6. You can use your drawing to build up some of the features into 3D shapes.
 7. Use smallish pieces of newspaper to scrunch up and tape shapes and features such as e.g. a nose, prominent eyebrows, an interesting hair, beard etc.



8. Tape down the features securely onto the card mask then build up a few thin layers of papier-mache to smooth out and secure the features. About 3 thin layers should be plenty. Let each thin layer of papier-mache dry overnight and for the final layer, perhaps use white paper (you can use scrap paper if it isn't printed on both sides) and use the white side up to leave a nice white layer which you can then have to paint on.



9. When thoroughly dry you can add your paint or felt tip colour. If you are using paint use your paints without diluting them with water and if you have them acrylic paints will give the best coverage.

10. Finally, if you want to wear the masks for fun and have something to hand that can be used to help with that such as elastic, why not try wearing your if someone else you live with made one you can make up your own play and act it out.

