

# Power of Myth

## Lesson 8: Masks of the Hero: Concealing our true selves

12.12.2021

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**Objectives:** Explore masks and their function in myths and our lives.

**Materials:** Laptop/YouTube access, materials for making masks.

**Time allotments:** Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service. (end class around 9:50/11:50 to begin chapel 9:55/11:55).

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### 1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
  - ▶ In stories you know, a mask is used to... (fill in the blank describing different ways masks function for heroes or villains).
  - ▶ From our MST (Ministerial Search Team) session last week, what stood out to you as meaningful? Are there additional hopes and dreams you have for our new minister?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

### 2. Silly Fun: Guess the Rhythm (5 minutes max)

One youth leads and changes the rhythm. The group mimics the changing rhythm while another youth tries to guess who the leader is.

Prep: Teachers, pick one youth to be the “guesser” and ask them to leave the room. Quietly, select a different youth to be the “leader” by pointing at them. The rest of the group should follow the “leader” without exposing who they are. The “leader” can clap, snap, move their body, etc. to start and change the rhythm. Once the rhythm starts, invite the “guesser” to come back into the room. The “guesser” gets three tries to identify the “leader.” Repeat as time allows.

### 3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

**Teacher reads:** (from Joseph Campbell, paraphrased)

“All the religions of the world, all the gods and heroes, are masks of the same transcendent truth, which is ultimately unknowable.”

#### 4. Masked Heroes and Villains (25 minutes)

**Teacher summarizes:** Myths from across different cultures share an interest in masks and how they function in stories. Masks simultaneously reveal and conceal; they draw our attention to what is outside and inside, the seen and unseen, the private self and the public world. Masks can conceal the true identity of a god/hero/enemy, allowing them the freedom to act and move without being constrained by their identity. And yet, the very mask that offers freedom can trap a character in mystery and block understanding.

More functionally, masks can be used to frighten enemies, and hide flaws and weaknesses. Masks can also mark an important shift in a character’s state – from human to animal, happy to sad, good to evil, or vice versa.

In ancient Latin, the word *persona*, or the public image we present to the world, meant a “mask.” *Persona* was the character played by an actor on stage; and while an actor’s *persona* was certainly not a lie or falsehood, it was only part of the truth. Like all masks, there is much more to the “real” person beneath the mask.

#### Watch clips from Harry Potter and Star Wars:

- Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdTrxqeQuvw> (2:03 min)  
Context: Harry, Ron, and Hermione drink Polyjuice potion, which allows them to take on the appearance of Slytherin students for the purpose of asking Draco Malfoy what he knows about the attacks on Hogwarts students. (We don’t see Hermione transformed because she accidentally uses a cat, not human, hair!)
- Star Wars, Revenge of the Sith: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6bEs3dxjPg> (4:24 min)  
Context: Anakin, fearing the death of his secret wife Padme, turns to Emperor Palpatine for help. Palpatine, who is also the Sith Lord, convinces Anakin that the dark side can save her. Anakin believes him and turns on the Jedi, so Obi Wan Kenobi fights Anakin, leaving him to die near the lava pits.
- Star Wars, Return of the Jedi: <https://youtu.be/ogfba09z2uc?t=135> (4:13 min, but cued to start at 2:15)  
Context: Luke Skywalker reminds Darth Vader that the Jedi Anakin is still within him. With a change of heart, Vader saves Luke from Emperor Palpatine. Luke in turn tries to save his father by dragging Vader to a spaceship.

### Questions for Discussion:

- How does Polyjuice potion function like a mask?  
*(Hint: They “hide” in order to see; go undercover in order to uncover; mask in order to unmask!)*
- Iconic throughout the *Star Wars* saga, what is the significance of Darth Vader’s mask? If Anakin became mean, but stayed a regular guy who did not transform into the Sith Lord, Darth Vader, how might it affect your emotional response to the movies?  
*(Hint: Masks obscure parts of people, which can make someone seem less human than they actually are, as well as can make it easier for us to distance ourselves from people who do acts of evil. Think about the emotional difference between seeing a storm trooper killed versus a resistance fighter killed.)*
- Do you literally or figuratively wear “masks”? How do your “masks” function in your life?
- When someone sees through our efforts to mask how we are feeling or mask the way we are different from others, it can be startling, maybe even embarrassing. At the same time, when someone sees a deeper part of who we are, it can be a relief and an opportunity for healing connection. For example, if you are feeling sad, but try and shrug it off, how might it feel when someone asks you, “but how are you really?” Have you ever asked someone how they are *really* feeling? What happened?
- Are there other examples from your life when someone has seen through your “mask” or you have seen through someone else’s?

### 7. Mask Making (20 minutes)

**Teacher reads:** The world is full of masks, and we are all mask makers. Masks both hide and conceal, but masks also express who we are. Perhaps what’s most important about masks is that they represent our desire to know who we are.

Invite youth to each make a mask using materials provided, keeping these parameters in mind:

- The OUTSIDE of the mask will depict one of their beloved heroes/anti-heroes/villains from myths and movies.
- On the INSIDE of the mask, youth will write words that describe what that character’s TRUE self is like: What is their innermost dream, weakness, fear, love, hate, pain, hope, purpose, etc.?
- Leave time for each youth to share their mask with the class.

### 8. Say goodbye until next time: Extinguish the chalice, saying together: “May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

9. **Help clean up classroom** before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets

## Viewing clips, in order of sequence:

- *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdTrxqeQuvw> (2:03 min)
- *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6bEs3dxjPg> (4:24 min)
- *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*: <https://youtu.be/ogfba09z2uc?t=135> (4:13 min, but cued to start at 2:15)