The Maya

Learning Objective:
To recreate a Maya mask.

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Do you know what this is?

Do you know what it is used for?

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In the 1950s, an archaeologist called Alberto Ruz discovered a hidden tomb at the Temple of Inscriptions at Palenque.

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He noticed a stone slab on the temple floor that had strange holes drilled into it. He lifted the slab and discovered a hidden chamber. This is what he said when he first went into the tomb...

Out of the dim shadows emerged a vision from a fairy tale, a fantastic, ethereal sight from another world. It seemed a huge magic grotto carved out of ice, the walls sparkling and glistening like snow crystals. Delicate festoons of stalactites hung like tassels of a curtain, and the stalagmites on the floor looked like drippings from a great candle. The impression, in fact, was that of an abandoned chapel. Across the walls marched stucco figures in low relief. Then my eyes sought the floor. This was almost entirely filled with a great carved stone slab, in perfect condition.

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http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palenque_-_Grabschmuck_des_Pakal.jpg

In the tomb, he found a type of coffin called a sarcophagus. Inside the sarcophagus was the skeleton of Lord Pakal, an important Maya leader, complete with the mask and special beads he was buried with more than a thousand years earlier.

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Only the most important Maya people wore funeral masks when they died. The masks were intended to help the wearer become one of the gods in the afterlife.

Here is another example of a Maya funerary mask.

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Campeche_Jade_Maske_2.JPG

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The Maya didn’t just use masks for funerals. Maya priests, for example, wore scary masks to frighten away demons and Maya warriors wore masks to intimidate their enemies.

Jaguars were used a lot for warriors’ masks and headdresses because they were quick, powerful and agile.

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Today you are going to make your own Maya masks. There are lots of different ways you could do this...

Create a base from black paper.

Cut out lots of squares of green and blue paper and layer them over the base.

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You can then pierce a hole in each side of the mask and add elastic or wool so you can wear it.

You then have a finished mask!

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You could also make a mask using papier mâché...

Blow up a balloon and secure it on a cup with some masking tape.

Cover the balloon with a thin layer of vaseline. This will stop the papier mâché from sticking to the balloon.

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Cut up lots of strips of newspaper.

Mix some PVA glue with a little water and place in a wide bowl.

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Dip a strip of newspaper into the glue and place it onto the balloon. Smooth it down.

Keep adding strips of newspaper in the same way. Make sure you smooth each one down so it isn't lumpy.

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Keep going until you have covered the whole balloon. You should do several layers. Leave it to dry.

Once the papier mâché is dry, carefully pop the balloon and take it out.

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When the papier mâché is dry, carefully cut it in half to make two masks. Trim any rough edges.

Carefully cut out the eyes of your mask.

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To add more detail to your mask, you can add features such as a nose, mouth and eyebrows. You can do this by building up the shapes you need with screwed-up bits of newspaper and then covering them with strips to smooth them over.

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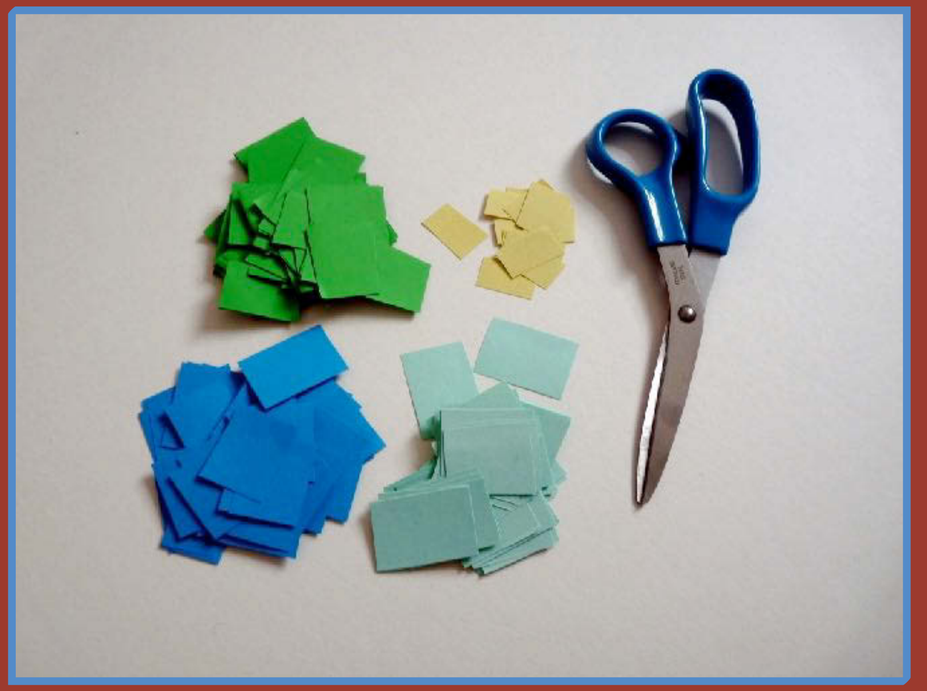
Once you have your basic papier mâché mask, there are several different ways you can decorate it...

Paint the whole mask black.



While the mask is drying, cut out lots of little squares of green and blue paper.

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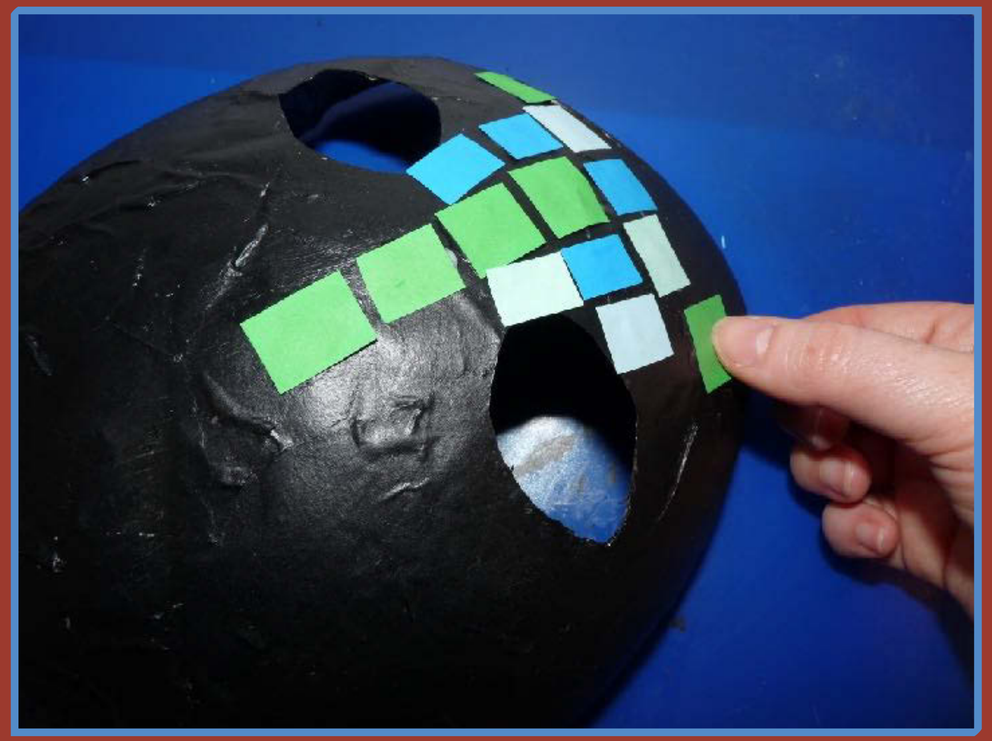

When the mask is dry, arrange the paper mosaic tiles onto the mask.

Keep going until you have covered the whole mask.

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Instead of using coloured paper, you could use strips of tissue paper. Tear or cut the tissue paper into small sections and paste onto the mask with glue. Add a layer of glue over the top to make it shiny.

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Those are just a few ideas for making and decorating Maya masks.

Are you ready to have a go for yourself?

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