



Home Education Resource



Session 1

- Talk & Presentation about carnival, followed by an historical investigation activity using photographs from the archive (what has changed or stayed the same over time?) (1 hour)
- Break (15 minutes)
- The history of and meaning behind wearing masks at carnival followed by mask-making (1 hour 15 minutes)

Carnival Information

Elements of Carnival

- Procession
- Music
- Dancing
- Floats
- Costume
- Masks
- Performance

History of Carnival

Earliest mention of Lenten carnival celebration is in 12th Century Rome. Easter was one of the most important dates in the Catholic calendar and the church decided that to properly prepare for it there should be a period of fasting and good behaviour leading up to it – Lent. So as on Shrove Tuesday when we use up ingredients like flour and eggs to make pancakes, it was thought a good idea to have a celebration before this 40 days (excluding Sundays) started.

The Feast of Fools (as seen in *The Feast of Fools* by Pieter Bruegal, c.1570) was a popular medieval festival amongst the clergy that took place before Lent and involved parody of religious authority by younger members. They chose a mock pope/bishop to reign as Lord of Misrule. Carnival was, and continues to be, a form of escapism where you can become someone or somebody else, imitate or parody, without fear of reprisal.

The word carnival comes from the Latin *Carnem Levare*, meaning to remove oneself from flesh or meat (something that was given up for Lent). In Italian it became *carnevale* (flesh farewell), and then in Spanish and Portuguese *carnaval*, in German *karneval*, and in English *carnival*.

Carnival developed in Italy in the 16th Century where masquerade balls were popular and people wore masks and costumes. They became famous and spread to other Catholic countries in Europe. As these countries started to colonise countries in the Americas, they took with them their religion and associated celebrations.

When these countries became free from colonial rule carnival continued and got bigger, in part, because slaves who had witnessed but couldn't join in with celebrations were now free and could have their own, bringing their own culture and influences. For example, in Trinidad, carnival started as masked balls in the colonial houses. This developed into a stronger African influence through Canboulay (from the French Cannes Brulees), a burning of the sugar cane celebration. After Emancipation it developed into a festival for indentured labourers and freed slaves who were banned from taking part in the masquerade carnival events of the colonial elite.

Carnival in the UK

Carnival in the UK is a mixture of cultures, art forms and disciplines. Its main influence comes from the historical, traditional English carnival plus a strong presence from Caribbean and Brazilian carnival.

The English-style carnivals of Bridgwater and the Isle of Wight have histories dating back 400 years. Bridgwater – the largest illuminated carnival in Europe – began to commemorate the 1605 Gunpowder Plot and created its own tradition of winter carnivals. Somerset carnivals place great energy in float building and producing beautifully costumed tableaux.

Notting Hill Carnival, held each August Bank Holiday since 1966, is the largest festival celebration of its kind in Europe and can attract 2 million spectators.

Carnival disciplines (mas/masquerade; calypso; steelpan; floats; majorettes; samba; marching bands; mobile/static sound systems) come together with other art forms, such as music, dance, visual art and theatre, to produce what the carnival sector refers to as the “Greatest Show on Earth”.

Carnival Band

In traditional English carnivals, the carnival king or queen is a young person chosen to represent the carnival for that year, performing certain duties and leading the procession. However, in Caribbean and Brazilian carnivals the king and queen are those that lead their carnival band (group) and wear the major (biggest, most elaborate) costumes. Here, the carnival ‘royalty’ are followed by a section(s), each with 25-80 participants. Carnival is a visual story and using costumes helps tell this story.

Carnival is more than just one day; it is weeks and months of preparation. Mas camps are where the community meet to create their costumes and decorate their floats.

Information taken from:

‘Carnival in Europe & the Americas,’ Barbara Mauldin, in *Carnival!* Barbara Mauldin, ed. (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2004)

‘Carnival: an introduction’

www.carnivalarts.org.uk/ukCarnivalSector/GuidanceampResources.aspx

Masks

Historians have documented the use of masks in celebrations, rituals, pageants, theatrical traditions, and folk customs throughout time and across the world. For the most part, people tend to associate the use of masks with ancient pagan rituals in order to placate or seek protection from evil spirits.

One of the oldest surviving masks is the Mask Of Warka now held in Iraq's National Museum. Also known as the "Mona Lisa of Mesopotamia", the "Sumerian Mona Lisa" and the "Lady of Uruk", the 20-centimetre high limestone sculpture dates from 3100BC and depicts the head of a woman. It is one of the earliest representations of the human face.

The most ancient masks were used to represent supernatural spirits or as a means to contact higher beings. This spiritual use of masks is evident in some ancient African traditions and in many native tribes in North and West America.

In ancient Greece, the use of masks began with performances by masked actors. Masks were used to help the actors convey stories and traditions.

Mask making and mask style is very different across the world and can vary from intricate wooden masks depicting animals to the Commedia dell'Arte masks of Italy. The art of creating a good mask lies not only in technique but also in the understanding of what is needed to produce a new face. A mask needs to have strong character traits and many expressive possibilities.

A key element of carnival is mask and masquerade/mas, dressing up in costume. Through this participants can disguise their identity, meaning they can escape their everyday lives (after all, everyone is equal behind the mask) and become something or somebody else. It also allows them the freedom to create characters that parody, satirise or mock – without the fear of punishment! Carnival characters can represent different subjects and themes, which can then be used to tell a story.

Masks have always been a main feature of the Venetian Carnival. The medieval Carnival of Venice has been described as a 'pandemonium of masks'. First was the mask of the devil and then the menacing Mattacini, throwers of perfumed or smelly eggs (something which was later banned!). Then there was the Wild Man, a character that was between human and beast.

'The masks of the Commedia dell'Arte (a form of theatre with masked "types") all found their ultimate forms and definitive personalities' in carnival, for example: Columbina – a half-mask named after an early actress which it is said was designed for her because she didn't want her beautiful face covered completely; or Medico della Peste (The Plague Doctor) – this has a long beak and originates from a 17th century French doctor who wore such a mask while treating victims of the plague. The most famous Venetian mask is the Bauta – completely white and covering all the face, but which tilts at the bottom allowing the wearer to talk, eat and drink without having to remove it.

Information taken from:

'The Mask, the Mist and the Mirror: *Carnevale in Venice*,' Alessandro Falassi, in *Carnival!* Barbara Mauldin, ed. (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2004)

'Carnival costumes and masks',

www.carnivalarts.org.uk/UKCarnivalSector/GuidanceandResources.aspx



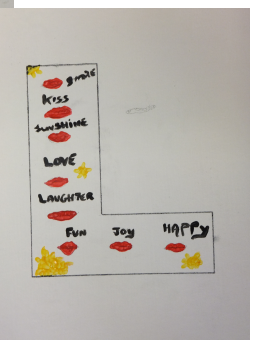
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Session 2

- Creating a bank of words associated with carnival, then producing artwork based around the word CARNIVAL
(1 hour 30 minutes)
- Break
(15 minutes)
- Listening to carnival poems and looking at photographs from the archive, then writing some carnival poetry
(45 minutes)

Carnival Bank of Words

Colourful
 Costumes
 Floats
 Music
 Masks
 Buildings
 Flags & bunting
 Collecting
 Vehicles
 Crowds
 Dancing
 Whistles
 Sequins & jewels
 Cheering
 Feathers
 Excitement
 Fun
 Bands
 King & queen
 Vibrant



Carnival Poetry

Good examples can be found in *Let's Celebrate: Festival Poems*, John Foster, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Poems produced:

Poem 1

The streets heavily littered with people.

Mask costumes of all sorts come to the day.

Everything stops.

Tall things small things all come to the carnival.

Balloons, bells and pipes sing along to the music.

Advertising is sort of known in carnival.

Everybody smiles, laughs and giggles at the things that come past.

Don't you want to come to carnival?

It's such a wonderful place.

Doesn't matter who you are!

Poem 2

The girls are dancing
Swaying in the wind
Some waving ribbons
Above their heads
There's costumes and hats all different sorts
Feathers soaring in the wind
People cheering
You should all come to the carnival
Different floats all dressed in white
The marching bands' clothes as red as roses
Different colours you can see
Different people all around
Things that you haven't seen before
There are smiles on people's faces
They are waving flags
There's people in floats doing different things
You must see what I see in the carnival
Some dressed in blue some dressed in white all bright colours you must see
The colours like a rainbow in the sky
You must see what happens in the carnival
It is as colourful as a rainbow
With all different things that you've never seen before
You must come to the carnival.

Poem 3

Snap, Snap here he comes!
Wreathed in roses, spitting fire!
Snap, Snap in green and red
Leading the way
Whifflers, Criers and Morris Dancers
Dance to his tune.
Snap, snap here he comes!
Through cobbled streets and river wharfs,
Through Norwich heart of town!
Snap, Snap here he comes!
The Mayor with chain behind follows,
Steam rollers' whistles blow.
Join the music of the parade,
Snap, Snap here he comes!
Red scale wings and lashing tail
Leading the way today.
Snap, Snap he'll steal your cap
Give him a penny and he'll give it back
Snap dragon, Snap the dragon.