

Dragon Masks

Objective: Students will use slab construction to design and make a mask reflective of Chinese dragons. Students will add color to enhance design features.

Vocabulary: slab, slip, score

Materials: Red clay, cone 05, images of figures and masks.

Tools: Newspaper, rolling pin, slats, canvas, needle tool, slip, scissors, canvas.

Historic/Cultural Background:

Dragons in China are considered powerful and benevolent creatures, and some Chinese even believe they descended from them. It has been many thousands of years ago that dragons have been regarded as spiritual beings, controlling nature such as rainfall, water, hurricane, thunder, rainbows, and stars. Because dragons symbolize power, strength, and good luck, the Emperor of China utilized the image of the dragon to show his imperial power to his people. Yin and yang, a Chinese philosophy of two things interacting with one another to create harmony, applies to dragons as well. The male dragon being yang and the female *Fenghuang* (Chinese phoenix) being yin balances the two legendary creatures. Thus, people came to worship the dragon and fuse the myth with their culture. Dragons are now seen in Chinese festivities such as Chinese New Year and many Chinese movies.

The Chinese compare outstanding and intelligent individuals to dragons, while less capable people with no ambitions are compared to creatures like worms. Dragons have infused the Chinese language so much that many “hope one’s son will become a dragon.”

It is said that the appearance of dragons resembles nine different animals: the horns of a deer, the head of a crocodile, a demon’s eyes, the neck of a snake, a tortoise’s viscera, a hawk’s claws (bravery), palms of a tiger (power), and a cow’s ears (success in the imperial examination). Sometimes dragons are drawn with bat-like wings, but most do not, as they can fly without them. Myths include dragons turning into silkworms, becoming as large as the universe, hiding in water, forming clouds, turning into water, and changing color or glowing in the dark.

As mythical and legendary as dragons are, they hold significance to Chinese culture. The Chinese regard it as a strong presence of bravery, power, and importance.

Instructions: Masks

Day 1:

1. Roll slab thickness of slats.
2. Cut a circle or oval with template.
3. Roll and pinch edges, lay over crumpled newspaper.
4. Pinch nose, thumb press eyes, cut slit for mouth, roll back lips.
5. Add eyes and brows, ears.
6. Add enhancements and decoration to make surrealist masks.
7. Cut holes in edge with straw to add raffia and feathers.







