

CREATIVE ARTS learning springboards



Masks of the Commedia dell'Arte

Exploring comic archetypes

Aim: Understanding comic archetypes and where they come from; creating masks from leaf-mache instead of the original leather.

The grotesque masks of the 16th Century Italian Commedia dell'arte are recognised by huge, long noses, vast, bulbous cheeks, bushy eyebrows and clownish grins and grimaces. The servants or 'zanni' (the English word 'zany' is derived from it) were mischievous and untrustworthy, and their masks tended to have a wide grin, like the pumpkin smile we carve at Halloween.

The characters are known as archetypes, and they always behave with set characteristics. The zanni carried sticks that were split at the end, and when shaken they made a slapping noise; this is where the term 'slapstick comedy' comes from. The comic characters in many of Shakespeare's plays such as A Midsummer Night's Dream are inspired by the Commedia archetypes. In his tragedies, Shakespeare created scenes of comic relief, such as the drunk porter in Macbeth.

Activities:

- Research the archetypes of the Commedia dell'Arte and the masks that represented them.
- Explore the comic characters in A Midsummer Night's Dream ((known as the 'Mechanicals' because they were tradespeople) and identify comic 'types'.
- Create a leaf mache mask for a chosen character using leaves instead of paper.



More springboards: Creative Arts Springboard: Leaf mache mask instructions

Success criteria:

- ✓ I know and can describe the characteristics of a comic archetypes
- ✓ I can identify comic archetypes in a story and explain how I know this.

Shakespeare's 'Woodland' plays

Leaves, cobweb and flower-themed costumes

Aim: Imaginative costume design inspired by characters and the natural world.

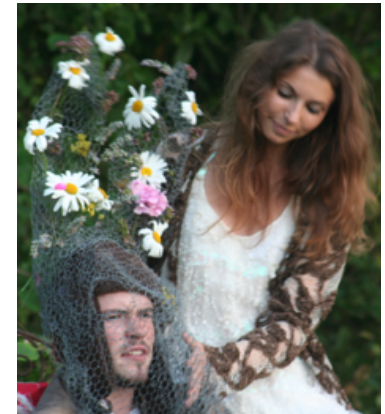
Several of Shakespeare's plays are set in woodland. As well as A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It also heads into the forest after the opening scenes at court. The forest represents a place of calm and safety from the corridors of power, as the banished Duke says:

*'Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?'*

Shakespeare grew up in Stratford-upon-Avon which was flanked on the north-west side by the Forest of Arden (a forest so dense that even the Romans decide to avoid it when road-building), and this is the forest in which he sets As You Like It.

Activities:

- Study woodland scenes from A Midsummer Night's Dream or As You Like It and design a costume inspired by the environment and plants described.
- Consult the Royal Shakespeare Company education page/learning zone on their website to learn more about these plays and staging them.
- Research Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) and his painting of Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, alongside Sir Joseph Noel Paton's *Elves and Fairies*; William Blake's watercolour *Jacques and the Wounded Stag* (1806) inspired by As You Like It; John Singer Sargent's painting of the actress Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth (1899).



Success criteria:

- ✓ I am able to use text that describes the environment and nature to inspire my costume design
- ✓ I can use the internet to support and improve my interpretation of characters, reflected in my costume design.

