

# EMBLEMATIC Repoussé Masks

**Emily Taylor**

**M**y original metal mask idea began when I was teaching art at an intermediate school where my students participated in a cultural art exchange with students in Trojoli, Peru. For this exchange, the Peruvian students studied American culture and sent us handmade collages that reflected their research on our culture.

My students, in turn, studied contemporary Peruvian artists and ancient sun god masks. I had them interpret the sun god masks in metal and send them to the students in Peru. My students were motivated not only by learning about the metal tooling process, but also by learning about Peruvian art and culture.

## **Symbolic Metal Masks**

I have expanded my original lesson to the study of ancient masks and symbolism in multiple cultures. I have my students create their own interpretations of symbolic masks in metal. They deconstruct how past cultures used symbols to represent customs, beliefs, and individuality, then create personal symbols from their own culture to integrate into their mask designs.

## **Introduction**

I show students a PowerPoint presentation on masks and repoussé. We discuss the different types of masks: ceremonial, theatrical, and protective. We talk about all the reasons people have worn them throughout history and in contemporary times—from ceremonial rituals, to plays, to protective hockey masks. We look at how most masks have a cultural derivation, and we talk about symbolism and how

students can make masks that represent their own ideas.

## **Procedures**

Students make thumbnail sketches with several combinations of symbols. Then they draw their approved image

on paper that matches the metal size. This final image is shaded so that the shaded areas represent the parts that will be pushed down and the white areas represent the parts that will be pushed out, or raised. The metal can be copper, aluminum, or brass.



Students trace the design onto the metal using a ballpoint pen on a pad of Styrofoam. Then the fun part begins—repoussé!

### Repoussé

I demonstrate how to tool the metal by gently pushing up from the underside using a variety of different tools. I have found that the large handle of scissors works well for pushing out large flat areas first. After the low relief begins to form, students flip the metal and add concave and convex details. These details can be made with textured and patterned tools or wooden clay tools and the like. The process is repeated until the design is completed.

Students next apply an “antique” finish by painting the metal with India ink. When it dries, they burnish

the metal with steel wool to take off most of the ink, but allowing some to be left in lines and details.

### Mounting on a Background

The final product can be hot-glued to a white or black tag-board background, adding designs and patterns made of construction paper for a more exciting presentation. We practice building up patterns with basic shapes of construction paper. I encourage students to keep the colors neutral or use shades of gray; however, some students added touches of color for variety.

### Assessment

I have students fill out a grade sheet and reflect on their positive and negative first impressions of their work. They have to define what their

symbols mean and identify that the pieces have convex, concave, and neutral parts. Students are required to include interesting details, patterns, and designs on the mask and the background. I expect the repoussé to be done neatly, slowly, and carefully, with no rips or tears in the metal.

Finally, students receive credit for the finishing touch of inking and burnishing. After students fill out their self-assessments, I adjust the points and write positive and constructive comments. In the end, the final products turn out to be lively and dynamic, and the students gain personal insight into themselves. 🌀

*Emily Taylor is an art teacher at Guyer High School in Denton, Texas. etaylor@dentonisd.org*

### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.*

### WEB LINK

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repoussé\\_and\\_chasing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repoussé_and_chasing)

**My original metal mask idea began when I was teaching art at an intermediate school where my students participated in a cultural art exchange with students in Trojoli, Peru.**



*Left to right: Isaak Lopez, Jennifer Dobson, and Jamilia Sutton.*