

WE ARE MASKS

A DRAMEDY IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

We Are Masks examines why people wear masks. Some hide for good reasons. Some for self-preservation. Even when you're ready to take off your mask, it's a hard thing to do. What will happen when the world sees who you really are?

Playwright Bio

Lindsay Price has been involved with theatre education for over 25 years as a playwright, adjudicator, workshop instructor, resource writer, curriculum supervisor, professional development creator, and keynote speaker. Her plays have been performed in schools all over the world with over 1000 productions a year.

Synopsis

Four teenagers wear a variety of masks: Imposter Foster. Persona Paloma. Nolan No-Try. Macy Maintains. Each one has a choice to make: show the world their true self or stay behind their mask. Who will reveal themselves? Who will stay in the shadows? Sure that she's not working hard enough to meet her parents' expectations, Foster feels like an imposter. She decides she can't try out for the annual musical. Paloma, who has spent years as part of the "Drains" trio who dress in black and hate everything and everyone, wants to write music but is afraid of her friends' reactions. Nolan has spent years portraying a slacker and struggles with whether to keep up his no-try character or commit to a newfound love of scenic design. And Macy is struggling to maintain a perfect personality as she's falling apart.

Characters

FOSTER: A super smart girl who loves musicals but has stopped doing them so that she can meet her parents' expectations. She suffers from imposter syndrome.

PALOMA: A girl who has recently found a love of music. She struggles with her old sour persona of dressing in black, having black hair and makeup, and complaining a lot.

NOLAN: A guy who secretly has a passion for design but has always been a slacker. It's better not to try.

MACY: A girl who's hiding her home life while presenting a perfect life to everyone.

QUINN, JESS, GRAY: Three drama students who debate monster coolness.

RYDER, ALAN, MAL: Dance Committee members. Alan is obsessed with bloody stumps.

RAVEN, XANDRA: Part of a trio with Paloma, who dress in black, have black hair and makeup, and complain a lot.

ZUZU: Friend of Macy, ditzy, pretty.

LINK: Friend of Nolan, slacker and proud of it.

MS. BERG: Drama Teacher. Has a mask she's wearing too.

MACY'S MOM: Angry, an alcoholic.

FOSTER'S & NOLAN'S MOM AND DAD: Incredibly focused on their children. They write in progress journals.

Mask Ensemble

MASK ONE: That I know what I'm doing

MASK TWO: My mask gives me a voice

MASK THREE: That I'm unhappy

MASK FOUR: That I'm happy

MASK FIVE: That I'm strong

ROGUE MASK: Destroyer

Themes

Identity, Individuality, Self-image, Personal Growth, friendship

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ How do you describe yourself?
- ★ What sides of your personality do you show in public?
- ★ Is the way you see yourself the same as the way others see you?
- ★ Do you think you are in control of how others see you?
- ★ What masks do people wear in day-to-day life?
- ★ Do you think you wear a mask? Why or why not?
- ★ Are you the same person at home as you are at school?
- ★ If you changed, how would your friends and family react?
- ★ If you changed, would you be excited or afraid to share with your friends?
- ★ Are people capable of change? Why or why not?
- ★ Are you doing anything right now because of your parents?
- ★ Are you acting in a certain way currently because of your friends?
- ★ What is your identity?
- ★ What makes you an individual?

Pre-Read Activities

Draw Yourself: Shapes, Lines, Symbols

- ★ Provide paper and coloured pencils for students.

- ★ Tell students that their first task for the class is to draw themselves. They don't have to be artists or draw themselves true to life. They will use shapes, lines, and symbols (e.g., hashtag, stop sign, peace sign, hourglass, smiley face).
- ★ Take students through the items and have them think about their personality. If they could draw a shape that represents their personality what would it be? Give students suggestions of shapes (circle, square, star, crescent, prism) and encourage them to think of multiple shapes — we are all not just one thing. Model an answer:
 - » *I would draw a square for myself, because I love nerding out on science fiction. But then in the square I'd draw a star because I'm also an extrovert.*
- ★ Next, ask students to think of their personality in terms of lines. Again give examples (curvy, zigzag, straight, slanting, dashed) and model an answer.
- ★ Lastly, ask students to think of their personality in terms of symbols. Give examples and model an answer:
 - » *I would draw a treble clef, because music is a big part of my personality. Whatever emotion I'm feeling, I sing about it.*
- ★ It would be helpful to play music during this activity, so that students don't feel self-conscious.
- ★ When everyone is finished, make a gallery of the sheets (stick them to the wall or a large piece of paper) and have students examine them. Tell students to identify and share one shape, one line, and one symbol that stood out to them.
 - » Gauge your students. If they want to share the reasoning behind their choices publically, give them the opportunity. If not, have them write a journal entry or an exit slip in which they describe their reasoning for each element.

Describe Yourself

- ★ Have students write a description of their outsides and insides. How do they present themselves in public? How do they see themselves in private? Do they believe they are the same inside and out?
- ★ Alternatively, have students describe themselves (outside and inside) using the five senses. What is their look, their sound, their texture/feel, their smell? Have them identify a specific food for taste.

Identity Chart

- ★ Have students make an identity chart for themselves. An identity chart visualizes different aspects of the question, “Who am I?”
 - » Students will need paper and something to write with.
 - » You may want to complete an identity chart for yourself as a model.
- ★ An identity chart starts with students putting their name in a circle or square in the middle of the page.
- ★ Then students draw lines from the centre. At the end of each line, students write one word or phrase that describes them (tall, girl, Scottish background, drama club, piano). Possible categories include:
 - » Family identity
 - » Social identity
 - » Cultural background
 - » Physical appearance
- ★ Ask students to reflect on the final product. What shapes their identity?

Change Monologue

- ★ Students will write a monologue in which a character tells their best friend about a personal change they've made. Write the monologue as if the friend is unreceptive to the change and the character must convince them that the change is good.

Change Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups.
- ★ Groups should discuss the concept of personal change: *Have you ever had a friend change? How did you react? Did the friend have to fight to keep their change? Did they stay changed? Have you ever been the one telling a friend about a change you've made?*
- ★ Groups will create a one-minute scene on the theme of personal change.

Mask Theatrical Moment

- ★ Divide students into groups and have them discuss the concept of a "mask" as it applies to their daily lives. How do they present themselves in school? With family? With friends? Do they think that masks can be used for good?
- ★ Based on their discussion, groups will create a one-minute theatrical moment on the concept of a mask.
- ★ Groups will choose a form for their moment: tableaux, spoken word, movement piece, original scene, song, or film.

Create The Mask

- ★ This activity requires art materials such as crayons, markers, glue, yarn, etc. Give students the following mask "types."
 - » The overachiever
 - » The slacker
 - » "Everything is perfect"
 - » "Life sucks"

- ★ Ask students to pick one of the types (or divide students up among the types) and create a physical mask. How would they visualize the mask?

Identity Control/Change Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will create a three-picture tableau that focuses on the subject of trying to control or change one's identity.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ The first picture will feature a group of students visualizing their current identity. The second picture will show students trying to change/control an aspect of their identity. The third picture will show the aftermath of that decision.
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class.
- ★ Discuss with students: *Are you in control of your identity? Is there something you would change about your identity if you could? Why or why not?*

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *We are Masks*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions.

Read One: What is happening?

1. What is your first impression of the play?
2. Who says, "Because if I fail, they'll all laugh"?
3. When is the time of year to debate "monster coolness"?
4. What does Nolan do for the dance committee?
5. Who says, "We skate through on life's dime"?
6. Why is Macy upset to see Quinn at the grocery store?
7. What does Ms. Berg want Nolan to do?
8. What does Paloma want to do?
9. Who says, "There's a lot of power in a mask"?
10. What do The Trask Twins do?
11. Why does Nolan quit the dance committee?
12. Why does Foster quit the dance committee?
13. What happens when Paloma tells her friends the truth?
14. What is Macy trying to hide?
15. What will happen if Foster doesn't get A's?
16. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why does the playwright choose to have a mask ensemble as well as tell the stories of the four main characters?

2. In your opinion, why does the playwright say, "Create the play's many locations through the use of light and sound rather than realistic set pieces"?
3. How would you describe the set for the play?
4. In your opinion, why does the playwright use a mask to symbolize how a person controls their identity?
5. Analyze Foster's use of language. What kind of words does she use? What can you infer about her character based on her vocabulary and word choice?
6. Based on the way Paloma speaks, how would you visualize her? What is her physicality?
7. What is the significance of the line, "I don't even notice anymore. I wear it all the time"?
8. What is the significance of the line, "Masks aren't all bad, you know. There's a lot of power in a mask"?
9. What is the significance of the line, "My mask hid something bad. Your mask hides something good"?
10. In your opinion what is the main conflict of the play?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *We Are Masks* instead of *We Wear Masks*? What does the mask represent?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about identity? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with changing your identity with what happens in the play.
4. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with controlling your identity with what happens in the play.
5. How does the author want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ Did any scene make you think about how you present yourself?
- ★ Did any scene make you think about how you control your identity?
- ★ Did any scene make you think about changing your identity?

Post-Read Activities

Poster Design

- ★ Based on what you've read, design a poster for the play. How would you visualize it in a single image that would attract an audience? Would you use a box? What kind of box would it be? What font would you use for the title? What information other than the title would you include?

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colours and textures would they choose?

Line Tableau

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a line from the play such as, "The mask I wear is that I know what I'm doing."
- ★ Each group will discuss and decide how they will visualize this line in a tableau.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.
 - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
 - » Why is it important to act out a scene as well as read it?
 - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Original Monologue

- ★ Using the format of the Mask Ensemble monologues in the play, have students write an original monologue. The character must describe their identity in terms of a mask, and describe why their mask is the way it is. Are they in control of their identity? Has it been defined by someone else? Do they want to change their identity? Are they dealing with a rumour or reputation? Do they have a secret they're trying to hide?
- ★ Monologues should be half a page.

Sound Design Description

- ★ There is no specific sound design for this play. Have students write a description of their sound vision. What type of music fits the play? What sounds would you use to create an appropriate mood and atmosphere? How would you use music to transition from scene to scene?

Playwright Process

Playwright Lindsay Price talks about her process writing We are Masks. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

1. What was the originating idea for the play? Where did you start?

I have always been fascinated by the “masks” people wear. Every person acts differently depending on who they are with; that makes for a great place to start with character development. I love writing interesting characters and this play was so much fun to write in that regard.

2. What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

The balance between the four stories and the mask ensemble was tricky to coordinate. There are just so many different masks people wear and I wanted to include as many as possible. You don't want to overload a script though, because then the story gets lost. The play has to move forward. To that end, I can't ever write in a vacuum. I have to get the work in front of students and have them act out the scenes. I need to hear them read the dialogue aloud as much as possible. I need to get their feedback. The workshop component is a big part of the writing process for me, and it means I'm rarely surprised at a play's reaction after it's published. I get out all the kinks and problems beforehand.

3. As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play?

I love the characters in this play. They might be some of my favourite characters. But if I had to pick a favourite, I would choose the “Drains.” They were incredibly fun to write for and come up with dialogue for. “Dead bunny mummy” and “slow death chicken” are just so wonderfully specific. That's what I want for characters; when they're really specific the dialogue tends to write itself.

4. What was it like to see the play performed?

It's always a relief when I write a play that I like, and other people do as well! This doesn't always happen — when I sit down to write a play I'm always thinking about the audience and the market I'm writing for, but I have to love what I'm writing as well. Sometimes I get the balance wrong (I have a play called *Sweep Under Rug* that NEVER gets done). But this play has been well received. I love seeing different approaches to the ways masks are used in the production.

5. What engages you about playwriting?

I love seeing characters live a story and I love watching it happen right in front of me (rather than be distant from the experience through a movie screen). It's an intimate experience and that is very engaging!