

Everybody Wears a Mask

Topic

Purim, Challenge and Response

Grade Level(s)

4th – 12th

Big Ideas

People wear different kinds of masks, both physical and metaphorical.

Masks have different purposes, both festive and not.

Relevant Vocabulary

מְגִלָּה (Megillah)	Scroll
מְגִילַת אֶסְתֵּר (Megillat Esther)	The Scroll of Esther
מְגִלָּה (Megaleh)	Revealing
הֶסְתֵּר (Hester)	Hidden, Secret

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Explore what different masks hide and reveal
2. Analyze how different types of masks perform their functions
3. Create their ideal mask

Materials / Technology Needed

- Everybody Wearing Masks images (included as a separate download); these can be cut out so that they can be viewed separately.
- Mask Image Organizer (optional, included as a separate download)
- Art supplies depending on how the final step manifests (optional)
- Devices with a design app (optional)

Background

Hiding and Revealing on Purim

The theme of being hidden and revealed permeates *Megillat Esther*. This theme can be seen even in the name of the book. While translated literally it means the Book of Esther, the two words of the Hebrew are also puns on other words. מְגִלָּה could be read as מְגִלָּה, meaning “revealing,” while אֶסְתֵּר is a pun on הֶסְתֵּר, meaning “secret” or “hidden.” Thus, the name could be read as “Revealing of the Hidden.” This revealing of the hidden can be found throughout the book.

For example, Queen Esther hides her Jewish identity from King Ahasuerus and his court. However, even though she hides her Jewishness, her personality still comes through. This is especially evident in the way that everyone is transfixed by her as King Ahasuerus searches for a new queen (*Megillat Esther* 2:9 – 15).

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Meanwhile, traditional wisdom asserts that, while God is not mentioned explicitly in all of *Megillat Esther*, God is the hidden force behind the saving of the Jewish people. However, while Esther ultimately shows great courage and speaks up against Haman, her initial reticence motivates Mordechai to tell her that the Jewish people will be saved regardless of her involvement, a hint that God is ultimately behind the saving of the Jewish people (*Megillat Esther* 4:14).

Masks

This theme of hiding and revealing manifests itself in the tradition to dress in costume on Purim. The costume gives celebrants the opportunity to reveal something about themselves as they hide what they regularly look like.

The Purim (or costume) mask stands in sharp contrast to other kinds of masks. While costume masks are usually worn over the eyes (and possibly the whole face), medical masks are worn over the mouth and nose in order to prevent the spread of germs and disease. These masks began to be seen in hospitals in the mid-19th century and spread into the public sphere during the influenza pandemic of 1918 – 1919 ([The Lancet, Volume 396, Issue 10243](#), retrieved March 1, 2022). While the use of masks of the public sphere declined after the end of the influenza pandemic, they became pervasive once again as COVID-19 spread around the world.

In addition, spiritual masks often hide the parts of ourselves that we do not want others to see out of fear for what others might think about us. While it is not always apparent that people are wearing them, these masks can obscure parts of people's personalities or help their personalities come out*.

*For a poignant read about spiritual/invisible masks, check out [this story](#) about a famous musician who gave an invisible mask to a child.

Description of Activities

1. Learners look at images of people wearing different kinds of masks.
 - a. Learners describe:
 - i. The mask that people are wearing.
 - ii. The purpose of the masks.
 - iii. The emotions of the people wearing the masks and why they think the people have those emotions. [Note that in some cases it might be very difficult to figure out the emotions because of the type of mask being worn.]
 - iv. Learners may use the Mask Image Organizer to help them organize their thoughts.
 - b. Consider having learners write captions for each image. [Note that captions can help learners to elucidate what they see in the image.]

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2. Discuss:
 - a. How are masks over one's eyes and over one's mouth different?
 - b. Which is more often worn in order to hide one's face for a costume? While wearing which one is it easier to reveal emotions? Notice the irony?
 - c. When do people tend to wear masks over the eyes? Over the mouth?
 - d. Why do you think masks for costumes are generally worn over the eyes but not necessarily over the mouth?
3. Explain that Purim masks serve a dual purpose, both to hide one's identity and to reveal one's inner self. (See Background for details.)
 - a. Depending on the ability of the learners:
 - i. Bring up Esther concealing her Jewish identity but still revealing her true character throughout the narrative until she revealed her Jewishness to King Ahasuerus.
 - ii. Describe God concealing God's self throughout *Megillat Esther* but revealing God's self through the various miracles that occurred.
4. Learners create their ideal masks:
 - a. Remind learners that these can be costume masks, medical masks, spiritual masks, etc.
 - b. Learners can show their masks either through traditional art supplies or by designing them on a device.
 - c. Learners should consider the following questions as they design their masks:
 - i. When do they like wearing masks?
 - ii. When are they happy to take off masks?
 - iii. When do masks help them feel safe?
 - iv. How do masks reveal or hide who they feel they are?
5. If they are comfortable doing so, learners share their masks and explain why they designed the masks in the ways they did.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Imagine what mask Esther wore at the end of the Megillah. Draw a physical or virtual picture.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Explore the different spiritual masks that Ahasuerus, Haman, and Mordechai wore throughout the Purim saga.