

Chinese Opera Masks

Opera is as popular in China as a baseball game might be in the United States. A Chinese opera brings together many elements to create a magnificent—sometimes rowdy—production. A typical opera might include songs, an orchestra with a large percussion section, dancing, acting, poetry, mime, acrobatics, elaborate costumes and headdresses, and unusual and dramatic masks. Every aspect of Chinese opera is highly symbolic. The audience can tell the actor's character by the color of makeup, body language, and pantomime.



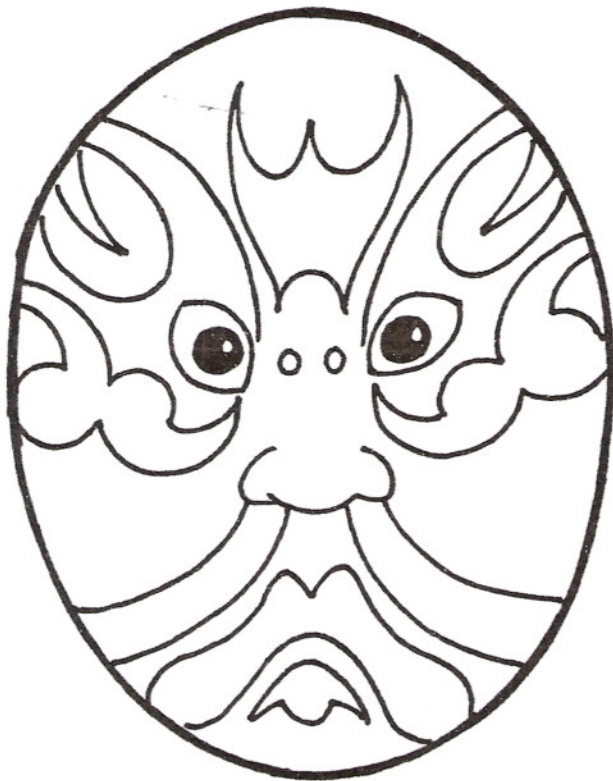
Chinese Opera Masks *(continued)*

Project Description

Your fame as a costume designer for the opera has spread throughout the kingdom. Recently, you were commissioned by the emperor to design a mask—an elaborate opera mask—for an important character in a new opera. You have been given the option of designing a papier mache mask for a loyal, courageous, and brave character; a cruel, brutal warrior; or a character of your choice. This must be your best work because, when the production is over, the mask will hang in the Ancient China Museum.

Color Symbolism for Opera Masks

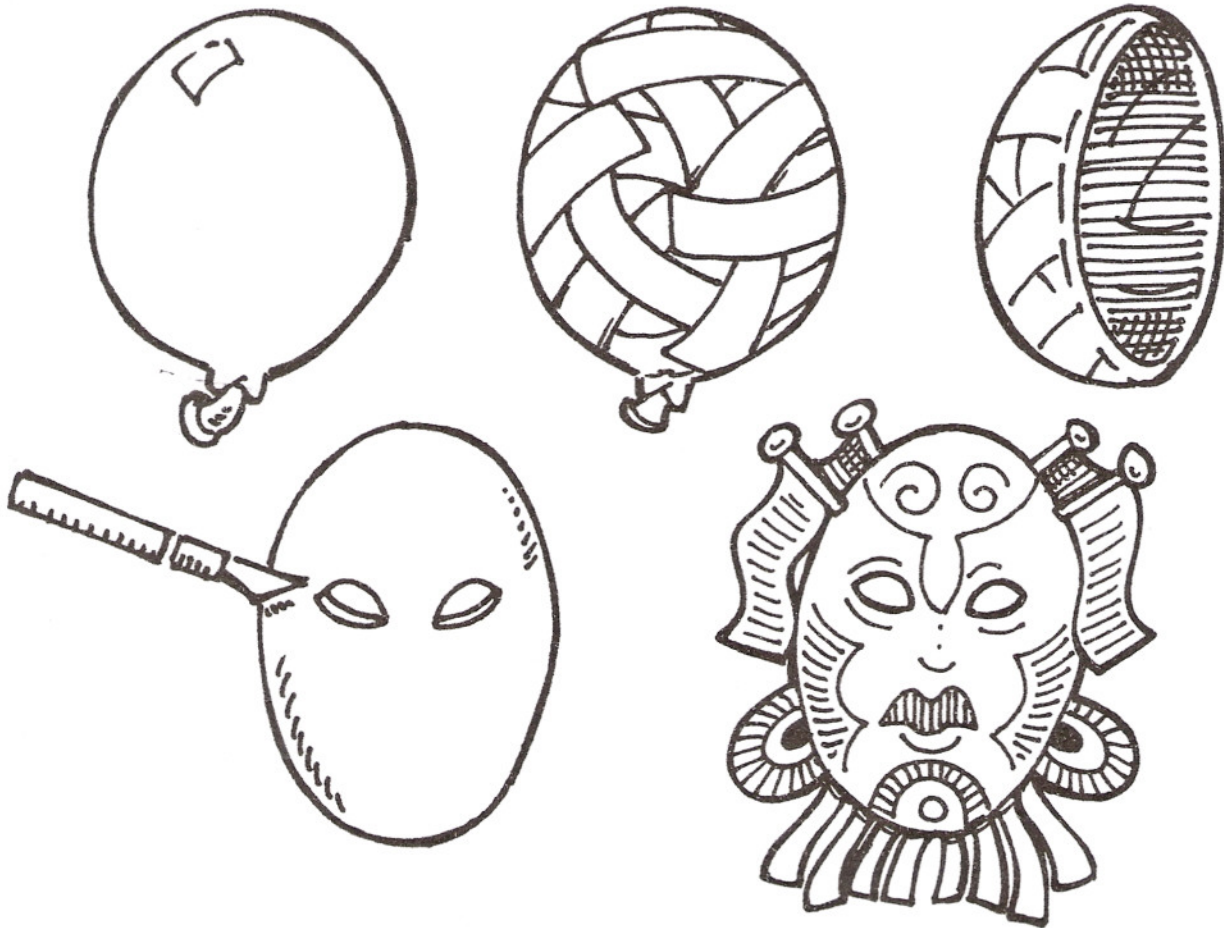
- Red: loyalty, courage
- Purple: wisdom, bravery
- Black: loyalty, integrity
- White: cruelty, treachery
- Blue: valor, resolution
- Green: chivalry
- Yellow: brutality
- Gold and silver: supernatural characters
such as demons and spirits



Chinese Opera Masks *(continued)*

Materials

a large balloon, blown up, to use as a mold for the face
materials for papier mache
paper towels, brown paper bags, or other paper
glue
scissors
tempera or poster paints
masking tape
ribbons, sequins, yarn, glitter, and other decorative items



Chinese Opera Masks *(continued)*

Directions

1. Blow up a balloon until it is big enough to simulate the size of a face.
2. Use the balloon as a mold for the mask.
3. Follow the directions for papier mache found on pages 21–22. Papier mache over half of the area of the balloon.
4. When the mask is thoroughly dry, pop the balloon and discard it.
5. Cut out the eyes with scissors or a sharp knife (adult supervision required).
6. Paint the mask. Use a variety of shapes and colors to represent traditional makeup.
7. Add hair, headdresses, beards, and other touches to create a traditional mask.

