

# Masks, Identity and Bias

*Compelling Question: How can we show parts of our identity in the masks we wear?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45 Minutes	Reading: R1 Writing: W1 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL5 Language: L4, L6
6-7	HS		



## Web Related Connections

### Lessons

- [Coronavirus and Infectious Racism](#)
- [Dolls Are Us](#)
- [Emojis and Me](#)
- [Hair, Identity and Bias](#)
- [Who Am I? Identity Poems](#)

### Other Resources

- [Dos and Don'ts with Special Diversity Events](#)
- [Halloween: When the Goblins, Ghosts and Stereotypes Come Out](#)
- [Safe and Inclusive Schools for All](#)

## Key Words

batch  
coronavirus  
culture  
donate  
essential  
expression  
fashion statement  
health guidelines  
immigrants  
pandemic  
persevere  
personal  
protect  
proud  
recommended  
social distancing

## LESSON OVERVIEW

In April 2020, wearing masks became an important part of our attire and everyday lives due to the global pandemic. The CDC strongly recommends wearing a cloth face covering or face mask to slow the spread of COVID-19. Masks can be used to express one's cultural or ethnic identity. Throughout history, masks have been worn by different cultural and religious groups during important ceremonies like weddings, funerals, etc. Masks are also used to portray characters or as a disguise on festive occasions like Halloween.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to explore the different ways people wear masks, reflect on aspects of our identity that we can express through face masks, and make a face mask that expresses an aspect of our identity.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify the different purposes for wearing masks.
- Students will consider what identity is and what aspects of identity can be conveyed through a face mask.
- Students will create a drawing and a mask that expresses an aspect of their identity.
- Students (grades 5-7) will consider how racial stereotypes and bias can impact some people's experiences and fears in wearing masks.

## MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- Post-It® Notes* (at least 100)
- "[Hawaii embraces aloha print masks while fighting coronavirus](#)" Newsela article (one copy for each student)
- Drawing paper and drawing materials such as markers, colored pencils and crayons

## PROCEDURES



### Information Sharing: About Masks

- Begin the lesson by asking students the following questions:
  - What are masks?
  - What are masks used for?
  - Who wears masks?

- Why are we talking about masks a lot these days?

Depending on what students share, elicit that in early 2020, people began wearing masks to cover their noses and mouths to prevent the spread of coronavirus, a global pandemic. Explain that the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) recommends that everyone wear a cloth face covering or mask when out in public because the virus can spread between people (by speaking, coughing or sneezing) who are close together. When you wear masks, you are less likely to spread germs or a virus you may not know you have.

**Note:** Students may bring up Halloween when eliciting what they know about masks. You can share that during Halloween, people wear masks with the purpose of imitating, scaring and sometimes mocking or making fun of a person, identity or group. You can talk about how this can be based on bias or stereotypes and refer to our [Halloween: When the Goblins, Ghosts and Stereotypes Come Out](#) resource.

2. Divide students into triads (groups of three) and provide 5–8 *Post-It® Notes* for each small group. Have students work together to come up with a list of ideas or what they know about masks (i.e., what they are, how they are worn, when they are worn, masks they have seen, etc.).
3. Reconvene the class and have students share aloud (one triad at a time) what information they came up with. As students share, their responses can be posted on the board or wall for everyone to see. If time permits, place similar or connecting concepts together, or have a student volunteer do that as the notes are brought to the front of the room.
4. Depending on what has been contributed by the groups, share some or all of the following information about masks:
  - Masks are coverings for all or part of the face.
  - Throughout history, masks have been worn by some cultural and religious groups during important ceremonies like weddings, funerals, holidays or festivals, etc.
  - Masks can be used to express one’s cultural or ethnic identity.
  - Masks are used to portray characters or as a disguise on festive occasions like Halloween
  - Masks can be used to scare or entertain people.
  - Masks are used by health workers like doctors, nurses and others. They are worn over the nose and mouth to protect against dust, germs or air pollutants.
  - In early 2020, people began wearing face masks to reduce the spread of coronavirus. Masks can help you and others stay healthy and wearing a mask communicates to others that you care about their health.

## Reading Activity

1. Distribute a copy of the article “[Hawaii embraces aloha print masks while fighting coronavirus](#)” and give students ten minutes to read it silently or read aloud as a class.

**NOTE:** This article from [Newsela](#), which publishes high-interest news articles daily at different reading levels, is at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. It is also available at 3, 7, 9 and 12<sup>th</sup> grade levels. For access to the other grade leveled articles you can register for free.

2. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - What is the article about?
  - Why is it recommended that people should wear face coverings or face masks?
  - How are the aloha masks in Hawai’i “fashion statements?”
  - What is the history of the aloha shirts and what message do they send?
  - In what ways do the aloha masks help people express themselves and their identity?

## Make Your Own Masks

1. Building off the last discussion question, define identity. Elicit/explain the definition as follows:
 

**Identity:** The qualities, beliefs, etc. that make a particular person or group different from others.
2. Ask students: *What are some important aspects of your or other people's identity?* Create a list that could include the following (define any words as necessary):
 

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Race</li> <li>○ Ethnicity</li> <li>○ Nationality</li> <li>○ Religion</li> <li>○ Gender</li> <li>○ Gender Identity</li> <li>○ Socioeconomic Status</li> <li>○ Country of Origin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Family Structure</li> <li>○ Sexual Orientation</li> <li>○ (Dis)ability</li> <li>○ Age or Generation</li> <li>○ Physical Appearance</li> <li>○ Language(s) Spoken</li> <li>○ Geography: where you live, your community</li> <li>○ Talents, Interests and Hobbies</li> </ul>
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3. Ask students: *Have you seen masks that express someone's identity? What are those and how did they express the person's identity?* As needed and appropriate, share the following examples:
  - **Race and Culture:** People have worn masks made of kente cloth, which expresses their African and African American race and culture. ([www.blackenterprise.com/this-clothing-boutique-is-selling-african-print-face-masks-amid-covid-19-outbreak/](http://www.blackenterprise.com/this-clothing-boutique-is-selling-african-print-face-masks-amid-covid-19-outbreak/))
  - **People who are deaf or hearing-impaired:** There have been masks made for hearing impaired and deaf people who rely on lip-reading; these include a clear opening so lip reading can take place. ([www.nbcdfw.com/news/doctors-families-sell-transparent-masks-to-help-hearing-impaired/2368848/](http://www.nbcdfw.com/news/doctors-families-sell-transparent-masks-to-help-hearing-impaired/2368848/))
  - **LGBTQ People:** Masks made of the LGBTQ rainbow flag. ([www.nydailynews.com/coronavirus/ny-coronavirus-gay-polish-couple-20200424-joe6gizqyv4bour6isupdpc64-story.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/coronavirus/ny-coronavirus-gay-polish-couple-20200424-joe6gizqyv4bour6isupdpc64-story.html))
  - **Political Point of View:** Hillary Clinton wore a mask that said "Vote" and a Congresswoman wore a face mask with the words "Medicare for All." ([www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/photo-hillary-clinton-shows-off-vote-face-mask-a-must-have-accessory-for-spring/ar-BB13w5GY](http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/photo-hillary-clinton-shows-off-vote-face-mask-a-must-have-accessory-for-spring/ar-BB13w5GY) and [https://amp.reddit.com/r/SandersForPresident/comments/gkfvva0/aoc\\_wearing\\_a\\_medicare\\_for\\_all\\_mask/](https://amp.reddit.com/r/SandersForPresident/comments/gkfvva0/aoc_wearing_a_medicare_for_all_mask/))
  - **Interests and Hobbies:** For example, Harry Potter face masks have been created. ([www.hitc.com/en-gb/2020/05/14/how-to-get-a-harry-potter-face-mask-from-local-stores-to-diy-at-home/](http://www.hitc.com/en-gb/2020/05/14/how-to-get-a-harry-potter-face-mask-from-local-stores-to-diy-at-home/))
4. Have students conduct online research to find examples of other masks that represent a form of identity. This can be done as a homework assignment, or in class if you allow smartphones or tablets in your classroom. Have students share their examples aloud.
5. Explain to students that they will now create their own masks that express a part of their identity. Remind them of the identity characteristics shared in step #2. Ask students: *In making your own mask, how can you express a part of your identity that is important to you?* Allow for a short brainstorming of ideas.
6. Using paper and drawing materials, have students create a drawing of the mask they want to design. Remind them that they can be as creative as possible, but the mask needs to be practical in that it can be worn outside for protection and cleaned regularly.
 

Explain that when they design their mask, it can include one of the following options to express their identity (and you can brainstorm other ideas):

  - Masks can use fabric with a specific print design.
  - Masks can be dyed a specific color or style.
  - Masks can use a t-shirt that has something important about identity.

- Masks can be embroidered with a design, image or words.
  - Masks can be written or drawn on.
  - You can add items to the mask, scrapbook or collage style.
7. The next step will be to make the masks. These can be done at home as project assignments or if time permits and materials are available, be done in class. You can use the following links for examples of how to make masks, both ones that can be sewn and no-sew masks:
- [How to make a no-sew face mask](#) (written instructions)
  - [Face Mask Sewing Tutorial](#) (video)
  - [Do It Yourself Face Mask: No Sew](#) (video)
  - [Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#) (written instructions for sewn, t-shirt and bandana face coverings)

### Writing Activity for Grades 5–7: Why Mask Wearing May Be Dangerous for Some

1. Remind students that the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) recommends that when people are outside, they wear masks or face coverings, either medical-type masks or homemade masks made from bandanas and other fabric. In some cities and states, wearing masks is required. Explain that because of stereotypes and bias, many Black and Latinx people—particularly men and boys—may feel uncomfortable or scared to wear a mask in public.

Ask: *Do you know why they might be scared to wear a mask in public?*

2. Elicit/explain the definition of stereotype as follows:

**Stereotype:** The false idea that all members of a group are the same and think and behave in the same way.

Explain that one stereotype of Black and Latinx men is that they are dangerous, scary or even criminals. Explain that this is a stereotype some people hold, which is based on bias. Because of this stereotype, men and boys who are Black and Latinx are worried they may be seen in this way and treated badly or targeted in some way.

3. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - Have you seen or heard examples of this bias and stereotype? What did you do?
  - What do you think should be done about these stereotypes and the fear that certain people have about wearing masks in public places?
  - How should we educate people so that everyone can feel safe wearing a mask in public?
4. Have students write a short essay that responds to one of the discussion questions above in step #3. This can be done for homework or in class. Students can then share their essays with the class.

### Closing

Have students share the picture they drew of their mask and describe an aspect of their identity they will convey with their mask.

### ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [10 Fascinating Cultural Masks from Around the World](#) (Western Union/WU, July 19, 2016)
- [“A San Diego man wore a KKK hood as a face mask. Officials say they have no grounds to charge him”](#) (CBS News, May 12, 2020)
- [“Masking while black: A coronavirus story”](#) (*The Washington Post*, April 10, 2020)

- “Masks are here to stay. And they’re quickly becoming a way to express ourselves.” (*The Washington Post*, May 5, 2020)
- “People are wearing colorful face masks to express themselves” (Today, April 15, 2020)
- “The hot fashion accessory of 2020? Masks, masks, and more masks” (Fast Company, April 23, 2020)
- Wearing a Mask: A Coloring Book for Children

## Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.



## Hawaii embraces aloha print masks while fighting coronavirus

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.28.2020

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Level **860L**



Image 1. Coty George in Waianae, Hawaii, on April 3, 2020, wears a green cloth mask with yellow and orange puakenikeni flowers made by the Hawaii designer Ari South. Face masks made with the same colorful prints used for aloha shirts are the latest fashion trend in Hawaii as islanders try to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Photo: Coty George via AP

In Hawaii, masks do more than protect people's faces. They are also fashion statements. Many are made with the same colorful prints used for aloha shirts. Aloha shirts are sometimes known as "Hawaiian shirts" in other parts of the United States. People in Hawaii are trying to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Coronavirus is a flu-like illness. It started in December 2019. It has been spreading across the globe ever since. There is no medicine for it yet. Governments have been asking people to practice social distancing. This means staying home as much as possible. It also means keeping distance from other people. These actions help slow the spread of the virus. Most stores are closed. Ones that are considered essential are allowed to stay open.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention is a government agency in charge of public health. It recommends that people wear cloth face coverings, such as a mask, over their noses and mouths when in public. Masks help slow the spread of the virus.

Surgical masks are in short supply. People want to save them for nurses and doctors working with coronavirus patients.

### Sewing Masks To Meet An Increasing Demand

Those who can sew are digging fabric scraps out of their closets or cutting up old aloha shirts to make masks at home. Local designers are selling some online. However, they are struggling to keep up with an increase in demand. People want to follow new health guidelines to cover their mouths and noses.

The aloha prints are a cheerful expression of Hawaii as people persevere through the sometimes dull days of staying indoors.

It's "another way of really showing the love and aloha spirit for each other," said Candy Suiso. She is a teacher and she wears masks made by her sister. She said it helps in these times when they can't see family and friends.

People started wearing aloha shirts in Hawaii in the 1930s. They often have bright colors, with island images such as hibiscus flowers, seashells and palm trees. Others have Chinese lettering or Japanese fish. They reflect the many cultures of immigrants who have shaped Hawaii's culture.

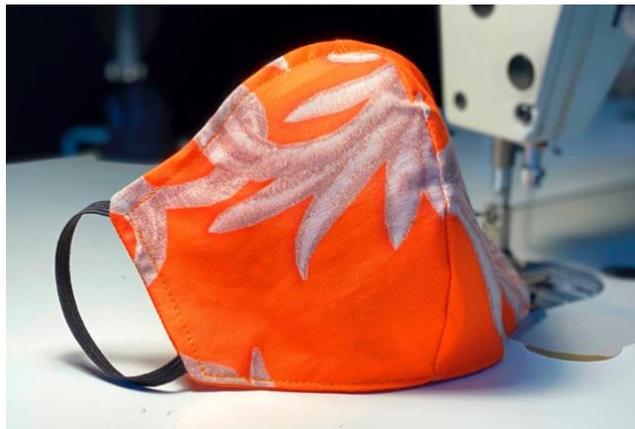


Image 2. Image 2. A mask in Halawa, Hawaii, on March 27, 2020. Face masks made with the same colorful prints used for aloha shirts are the latest fashion trend in Hawaii as

### Colorful Fabrics Often Have Patterns Of Native Plants

Some of today's popular designers use fabric with patterns of native plants. They play a big role in Native Hawaiian legends and hula chants.

Suiso wore a bright print mask recently when she went to pick up something at her office. Everyone giving out lunches to students while school is closed was wearing masks. Most had aloha prints.

Waikiki resident Ricardo Lay said his mother made him an aloha print mask because it's hard to find masks for sale. He likes it because it's an expression of where he's from.

The mayor of Honolulu, Hawaii, declared fabric stores an essential business. That allows them to sell sewing supplies to people who want to make their own masks.

Hawaii designer Kini Zamora's work in masks started with online videos he made. He showed people how to make masks. Then he began making masks to donate to hospitals, school food servers and others.

Zamora found many people wanted to buy masks from him. Some of them didn't sew, didn't have fabric or wanted to help his donation efforts. He started selling masks online, pledging to donate two masks for each one sold. His first batch sold out within a day. His latest batch sold out in a few hours.

"Everyone just flooded our emails wanting more. I was like, 'Oh my gosh, everybody just needs it right now, I guess,'" Zamora said. So far, he's donated more than 600 masks and sold about 300.

Coty George is a nurse. She wears a medical mask at work. At home, she wears a cloth mask to protect her family. She recently posted a photo on social media. In it, she wears a cloth mask, from the designer Ari South. It has yellow and orange flowers on a green background.

### "We Can Do This"

George said the locally made aloha masks are a reminder of days long ago when people in Hawaii made clothes out of rice sacks.

"It reminds you that we can do this," George said. Also, the aloha prints are more personal.

"You have to wear it anyway. Why not be proud to wear it and to feel somehow supported by the community?" she said.

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