

Christmas mask tradition project



School: "V.M. Craiu" Highschool

Class: 11th grade

Teacher: Suvac Alina

Objectives: -by the end of the activity students will:

- appreciate the Christmas mask traditions;
- promote and preserve the Christmas traditions;
- support one of their colleagues in opening a traditional museum;

A history of Christmas mask tradition:

On Christmas day, children and grown-ups alike wander around, singing carols. They may come from all over the country. Traditionally, they perform their carols wearing masks. The mask stands for a god in his zoomorphic instantiation, impersonated by the group leader, who wears the mask while performing the carol. Traditionally, carolers have bells, whips and drums and make noise to dispel the malevolent spirits. Some of them also wear costumes and masks symbolizing diverse animals such as: bears, goats and horses, which representing the evil forces. From Christmas until Epiphany, they also visit the houses in the neighborhood singing the Carol of The Star and other religious carols, holding a stick with a Star made of cardboard or other materials on top of it. In the first day of the New Year they walk again from house to house chanting a song about luck, throwing rice in the doorways of their receivers.

In the countryside, the caroling tradition comes in different forms. There is the simple caroling, which involves only people singing, and there are special carols, which include dancing and more complex performances. The latter are usually to be found in villages, but you might see some street performances in cities as well.

There is the Christmas carol which involves carolers dressed as bears. In the past, a real bear was also included in the dance. The tradition, called Ursul (the Bear Dance), is mostly kept in Bucovina and Moldova on New Year's Eve. The tradition aims to purify and fertilize the soil for the next year. The bear cult is of Geto-Dacian origins; back then, the bear was a sacred animal.

Another special carol is called Capra (the Goat). In this case, one or several carolers dress up as goats and dance to a pipe tune.

There there is the carol called Mascatii (the Masked People). Carolers wearing hideous masks and large bells try to scare off the old year. They dance and sing and make a lot of noise. The tradition goes back hundreds of years and the masks used on this occasion are hand crafted by traditional craftsmen- although they are not that popular anymore. They can make beautiful gifts however.

Finally, another caroling tradition is called Plugusorul (rough translation – the Small Plow), which is mostly spoken – not sung- and which is meant to wish listeners a good and fruitful year.

The tasks:

- Students had to work in groups of four to make specific Christmas masks.
- They had to present them to the class which had to vote the best ones.
- The best masks were to be displayed at one of the students traditions museum.

Relation to the project aims:

This activity involved students who are in social risk groups and developed their management abilities and group work abilities. In many cases school has to replace the role of the parents, that work abroad, in promoting traditions.

Process of the event:

Students had one week to prepare the masks. In class they presented them, explaining their use and symbol. At the end of all the presentation they voted the best masks and decided which will be displayed at the museum.

The necessary materials and technical resources:

Every group had to do research work on what type of mask they wanted to do and decided together the needed materials.

Images with the students involved in the projects

