Black Masking: Labor of a Design

NEW ORLEANS CULTURAL STUDIO | LESSON 65 | GRADES 6–8 | CULTURE & SOURCES

Context before technique

Black masking traditions are living Black New Orleans practices sustained by culture bearers through intricate design and sewing.

Whose story is being told?

Teach this lesson through identified New Orleans institutions and, where possible, community-authored testimony. Name the people, places, and historical context in your examples. Explain what remains unknown or contested.

Responsible artistic engagement

Do not copy specific suits, tribal marks, ceremonial imagery, or claim the student work is masking regalia.

Visual permissions

Do not download photographs or artwork from source websites for public display unless permission or a valid license is confirmed. A live research link is not a license. The included lesson illustration is original conceptual artwork and not historical evidence.

Starter research sources

Backstreet Cultural Museum: Community education

https://www.backstreetmuseum.org/engagement

HNOC: Louisiana history and diverse voices

https://visit.hnoc.org/louisiana-history-museum

Louisiana Visual Arts Benchmarks

Louisiana Department of Education arts standards (official PDF)

Discussion prompts

- Who created or maintains this tradition, space, or object?
- What do outsiders often overlook?
- Which images would require permission, and whose voices are missing?

Teaching note

These starter sources support inquiry, not a complete ethnography. Prioritize up-to-date local perspectives and appropriately compensated cultural partnerships when possible.