

MASK OFF

Objectives

- Students will explore the idea of stereotypes
- Students will identify a mask they can't take off and the metaphoric mask they put on
- Students will understand how stereotypes affect their everyday lives and the adjustments they make to navigate them

Materials needed

- Note cards
- Pens/Pencils

Activity

In Sweatshop Overlord, very early in the show Kristina Wong writes, “this is the mask I can't take off.” The concept of a mask extends past what we put on our faces. Whether it's race, ethnicity, economic standing, or something else, we all have something about ourselves that we can't change or hide that influences how the world and the people in it interact with us.

- Take some time to think about that thing in your life that you can't take off. And think about the stereotypes or implications of that thing. (Example: I can't dance, but because I'm black, people think I can.)
- Ask the students to share any ideas that come to mind.
- What is the metaphoric mask that you put on to try and change or soften how the world views you—the way you speak, how you stand, what you wear, etc.? (Example: When the music comes on, I might go and grab a plate of food so it removes or lowers the expectation from others to dance.)
- Distribute notecards and pens/pencils. On one side of the notecard, ask the students to write the mask they can't take off and on the other side, the metaphoric mask they put on. Encourage students to use additional cards if they have more than one idea.
- Collect all the notecards and pass them back to the class so responses remain anonymous. If a student gets their own, they can put it back and grab a different card.
- Ask the students to carefully consider what's written on the cards. What resonates with you? Would anyone like to share?

While you watch the play, think about the Aunties who came together to make masks to help their communities, and consider the masks they couldn't take off when they walked into the world. Everyone you encounter is wearing the weight of a mask they can't take off. Knowing this, let's give some grace to ourselves and others.

Lesson Extensions

- Challenge students to do this exercise with the people they live with.
- Class discussion or written assignment:
 - Is there any truth to the stereotypes they identify with?
 - What would a world without stereotypes look like?

Lesson Variations

- Students can do this entire exercise alone as a journal entry.
- Students can do this exercise in smaller groups with the potential to share out their personal reflections at the end.