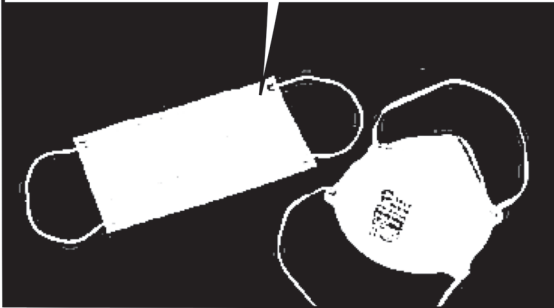


MASKING LITERACY

BY ANYA GREGG AND ELLIE STAMER

In this graphic article, we offer a point-of-view perspective of a tool that has become prominent in our everyday literacies in the last two years: Masks. Masks are a great example of a tool or material object that can be considered as a component of everyday literate activities. We use masks for very practical purposes, but we also understand them to represent a wide range of meanings. Our uptake of masks and masking shapes us and our communications. They impact our physical activities, and they act as visual representations of our ideas, opinions and identities. In this article we share our ideas about what a mask might have to say regarding their role in our complex literate lives.

HI THERE! I'M A PROTECTIVE FACE MASK. I'M A USEFUL TOOL, BUT WE'VE BEEN IN THE NEWS A LOT LATELY, AND WE'VE BECOME INVOLVED IN A LOT OF PEOPLE'S LITERATE ACTIVITIES.



SOME PEOPLE SEE MASKS AS A NECESSARY INCONVENIENCE, BUT AS THEY'VE BEEN INCORPORATED INTO EVERYDAY LIFE, MASKS HAVE ALSO BECOME A WAY FOR PEOPLE TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES.



COOL COLORS AND FUN DESIGNS CAN HELP TO COMMUNICATE THE WEARER'S INTERESTS OR PERSONALITY. YOU GO GIRL!



BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC, I'M ALSO BEING WORN IN TONS OF MEDIA.



THIS IS SUPERSTORE, AN NBC SHOW. THEY CHOSE TO INCLUDE MASKED ACTORS!

MASKS HAVE ALSO BEEN INCORPORATED INTO PERFORMANCES BY MOVIE MAKERS, DANCE CHOREOGRAPHERS, AND THEATER COMPANIES.



EVEN THOUGH THE IDEA OF WEARING MASKS IN PUBLIC IS VERY YOUNG IN THE USA, OTHER PLACES HAVE USED MASKS AS A TOOL FOR A LONG TIME.

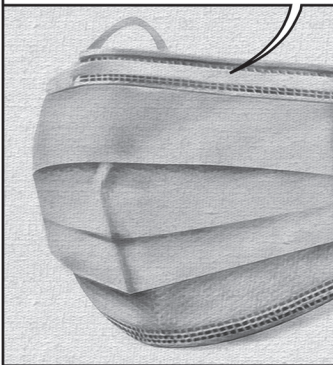


IN 2020, TIME MAGAZINE RAN AN ARTICLE ABOUT HOW EASILY COUNTRIES SUCH AS CHINA, THAILAND AND JAPAN ADAPTED TO WEARING MASKS AT THE START OF THE PANDEMIC, BECAUSE THEY HAD ANTECEDENT KNOWLEDGE FOR THE PRACTICE.



PUBLIC MASK WEARING HAS BEEN USED REGULARLY TO FIGHT THE SPREAD OF INFECTIOUS DISEASE IN JAPAN SINCE THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY! THE SPANISH FLU PANDEMIC CHANGED THE GAME FOR MASK WEARING THERE, AND IT'S USEFUL TOOL FOR HEALTH CARE EVER SINCE.

IN THE U.S., MASKS USED TO BE SEEN MOSTLY IN HOSPITALS.



MASK WEARING IN THE U.S. IN PUBLIC PLACES, OR EVEN IN PRIVATE HOMES, ONLY BECAME COMMON DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC IN MARCH 2020.





AND SOME PEOPLE (IN THE U.S. PARTICULARLY) STILL FEEL THAT I (THE HUMBLE MASK) REPRESENT A KIND OF INTERFERENCE OR CONTROL THAT THEY FEEL IS OVER-REACHING.



I'M JUST A TOOL... YOU SAID IT...

MY IDENTITY CHANGES BASED ON HOW COMMUNITIES USE ME AS PART OF THEIR ONGOING EXPERIENCE.



WHILE I DO HELP KEEP PEOPLE SAFE, I CAN ALSO CREATE PROBLEMS. FOR MEMBERS OF THE DEAF/HARD-OF-HEARING COMMUNITY, COVERING MOUTHS MEANS THEY CAN'T LIP READ, WHICH CAN CREATE COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES.

HERE IS A MASK THAT LETS YOU SEE THE WEARER'S FACE! GREAT FOR GAUGING EMOTIONS, AND FOR PEOPLE WHO NEED TO LIP READ, BUT MAYBE NOT SO GREAT WHEN YOU HAVE SOMETHING IN YOUR TEETH.

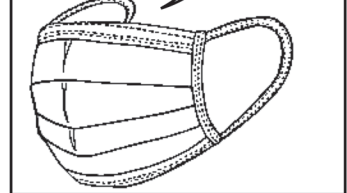


IF YOU LOOK AT MASKS AS TOOLS, IT MIGHT BE A LITTLE EASIER TO SEPARATE ME, YOUR MASK, FROM THE WAYS PEOPLE ARE INCLUDING ME IN LARGER ARGUMENTS ABOUT THE PANDEMIC, AND OTHER POLITICAL ISSUES.



WHAT ARE SOME WAYS MASKS ARE IMPACTING YOUR EVERYDAY LITERATE ACTIVITIES?

A LOT OF WAYS. THANKS FOR MASKING!





Anya Gregg is an eighteen-year-old intern at the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, but because of the pandemic has to work at home.



Eleanor Stamer graduated in May 2021 from ISU. She was in the publishing studies sequence and was one of the editor interns for the GWRJ for two years. When she isn't reading or searching for jobs, she's probably listening to Taylor Swift or watching the Great British Baking Show.