

Session 21

Who Is Really In There?

The objectives of this session are:

- to explore the idea of perseverance through tough times
- to consider the idea accepting and loving who you are as a step to emotional freedom
- to consider the idea that each person wears a mask and only displays their true authentic self to the people to whom they are closest
- to understand how taking off your mask and revealing your truth can lead to personal freedom
- to explore how a society may have specific behavioral guidelines that are based on gender

Materials and supplies you will need:

- the DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Mulan*
- DVD player (or VCR) and TV monitor
- a chalice and matches or lighter
 - colored pencils or markers
- glue and/or glitter glue
- feathers, sequins or other items to decorate the masks
- scissors and hole punches
- a stapler
- string or ribbon or elastic for tying on the masks
- One copy of *Singing the Living Tradition*

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- If you will not be watching the whole movie, before class starts, use the DVD disc menu to cue up the opening scene of the selection (Scene 21 – A Village Destroyed)
- Watch the movie in its entirety prior to the session (even if you have seen it before), paying particular attention to scenes 21 through 29 and the scenes that particularly illustrate the societal constraints or stereotypes experienced by Mulan because of her gender.

- Prepare the paper plates for the masks ahead of time by nesting two together and cutting out the eyeholes. Staple the plates together punch out the holes for the ties. Make the eye holes and cut the top plate in half. (See the sample page at the end of this lesson.)

Session Outline

Opening Activity: Chalice lighting, reading, and key questions to ponder (5 min)

Premiere: Introduction, Discussion and watching an excerpt of the movie, *Mulan* (35 min)

Reflection: “Breaking the Mold” Discussion and reflection questions (10 min)

Processing: “Looking Behind Your Mask” - (20 min)

Closing: Closing reading (2 min)



Opening Activity (5 min.)

Ask for a volunteer to light the chalice and share with the group (or ask for a volunteer to read) the opening words (#451) from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

“Flame of fire, spark of the universe that warmed our ancestral hearth – agent of life and death, symbol of truth and freedom.

We strive to understand ourselves and our earthly home.”

By Lesleigh Pohl-Kosbau

Begin the session by asking the participants if there has ever been a time in their lives when they had to change their personality or pretend to be something other than their authentic self in order to be accepted or not stand out as different. After everyone who wishes has had a chance to share, ask the participants to consider these key questions: How easy or difficult was it for you to pretend to be someone other than

your authentic self? Did anyone find out that you weren't representing your true self or beliefs? If you were trying to be accepted, were you still accepted after you revealed your true nature or beliefs?

Premiere

Watching *Mulan* (35 min.)

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie, *Mulan*. Ask if anyone has ever seen the movie. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something along these lines:

Mulan is a young woman and the only child of the honorable Fa family. She thinks for herself and speaks her mind; nothing like the quiet, polite and demur girls who can attract suitable husbands. When the Huns invade China, one man from every family in the village is called to arms. Mulan's father, who has an old wound and cannot walk properly, decides to fight for his country and the honor of his family though it is clear that he will not survive an enemy encounter. Mulan, who just got rejected by the matchmaker and fails to fulfill a Chinese girl's traditional duty as desirable bride, decides to save her father from certain death and prove that she is worth something after all knowing that if a woman is found disguising herself as a soldier, she will be executed. She prays to her family's ancestors for protection and luck before leaving, disguised as a man in her father's armor with her family's horse. The ancestors awaken and designate the mighty stone dragon as her magical protector. After the stone dragon is accidentally destroyed, they decide to send Mushu, a little dishonored dragon to follow Mulan and force her to abandon her plan. Weeks later, Mulan, masquerading as the fictitious son Fa Ping, has survived the training camp and she and the other troopers are on their way north to stop the Huns. After being spotted and pursued by

the enemies, an impasse situation in the mountains forces Mulan to come up with an idea to save her friends. She decides to risk everything in order to save China and in the process, her true gender is discovered.

Start the DVD at scene 21 (A Village Destroyed) and watch scenes 21 through 29 (Homecoming). Stop the DVD just after Mulan invites Captain Shang to stay for dinner and Mushu goes back to face the ancestors.

Reflection (10 min.)

Breaking the Mold

Begin the discussion by asking for general impressions, and things which occurred to the group as they were watching the video. Then, if no one brings it up, ask the group to consider:

This film shows a girl going beyond the limitations set by her society. What does society expect of teenagers today? How do you think that society and its expectations have changed since your parents were teenagers? How do you think expectations have changed since your grandparents were teenagers? In what way are our society's expectations similar to those of Mulan's village? How are they different? In Mulan's song at the beginning of the movie (after she is rejected by the matchmaker) she sings: "Look at me – I am not meant to play this part. If I were myself, I would break my family's heart." Why do you think Mulan feels like two people? Can you think of a time when you have felt this way? During the battle scene with the Huns, it is Mulan who saves her friends. Captain Shang's plan would not have saved them. In the palace, after the Emperor is kidnapped, when Shang and his men try to break down the palace door, it is Mulan whom they follow. She is a leader and her gender no longer matters. Why do you think Shang and his men decide to follow Mulan even after they know she is a woman? What are the characteristics of a good leader? (For some biblical references about leadership, look up I Timothy Chapter 3: verses 8-16, Matthew

12:19-21 and Matthew 20:26-28.) In what way does Mulan possess leadership qualities that Captain Shang does not? In our society today, is it more difficult for a woman to be accepted as a CEO of a large corporation or for a man to be accepted as a nurturing parent? How do we change ourselves in order to fit in or meet someone's expectations of us? What does it take to be part of the popular group at your school? What other masks do we wear in our lives? How do our Unitarian Universalist principles encourage us to be true to ourselves? Why is this important to ourselves and to the society in which we live?

Processing (20 min.)

Looking Behind Your Mask

Tell the group that the movie, *Mulan*, illustrates that we all wear masks of one kind or another in our lives and that it is important to not let society tell us who we should be but to be true to ourselves and the best there is within us. Often times, we show one side of ourselves to the world while we keep our true nature or beliefs hidden or only for our families and loved ones to see. Pass out one set of the prepared paper plates to each youth. Ask them to draw or decorate the top plate (the one that has been split in half) as they believe the world wants or expects them to be. Tell them that they should decorate the plate underneath to reflect the person that they truly are; with things that represent what they value or hold dear and represent how they see themselves.

If there's time, ask if anyone wants to share any of the thoughts they had during the exercise.

Closing (2 min.)

To close, ask everyone to rise and form a circle around the chalice. Read (or ask for a volunteer to read) the Closing thought:

"This above all; To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

By William Shakespeare

After a moment of reflection, extinguish the chalice (or have someone else do so), and excuse the youth.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience and have some fun as a group:

More Discussion:

Which character in this movie is the most like you? This is one of the few Disney films in which the villain does not sing a song. How many other "villain songs" can you sing or think of? Why do you think the villain in *Mulan* does not get a song? Captain Shang fires an arrow into the top of the pole and then hands two weights/stones to Yao telling him that the stones are *Strength* and *Discipline*. He says, "You will need both." How does Mulan reach the arrow? If you were to name two more weights, what would you call them? Remember that they must be used together or they can work against you. (Possible examples: intelligence and emotion, speed and endurance, creativity and regulation, faith and reason, etc.) When Mulan leaves, we see the eyes on one of the ancestor's statues "blink" and Grandma wakes up, saying "Mulan is gone." Later we see the ancestor wake up to Grandma's prayer. Is it possible that Grandma can communicate with the ancestors because she is going to be with them soon?

More Activities:

Conduct a "values voting" exercise based on the themes in the movie. Write the words *True* and *False* on two large sheets of paper. Post the

sheets on the walls opposite each other and ask the youth to stand in the middle of the room.

Tell them that you are going to read a series of statements and that after each statement, they should move to the side of the room that corresponds with how they feel about the statement. Examples of statements to read are:

▶ After all is said and done, it is still basically a man's world.

▶ The man should be the primary "breadwinner in the home.

▶ Women are better suited to raise children than men are.

▶ It is the guy's responsibility to ask someone out for a date.

▶ It is always the guy's responsibility to pay for a date regardless of who asked whom out.

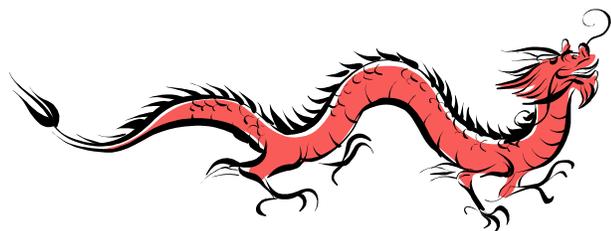
▶ In the home, cooking and doing the laundry are women's work.

▶ Housework should be shared equally no matter who makes more money or works more hours.

▶ Men suffer from peer pressure more than women do.

▶ Women put more pressure on themselves than men do.

▶ Men are naturally better leaders than women are.

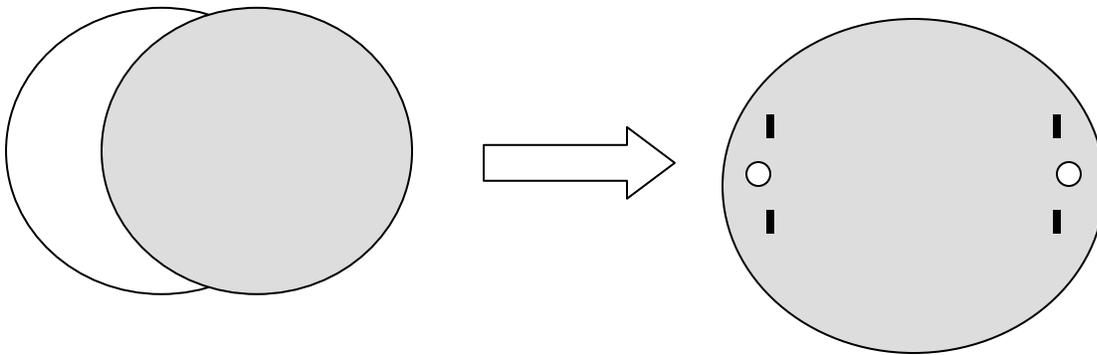


Leader Resource page for making the Transformation Masks

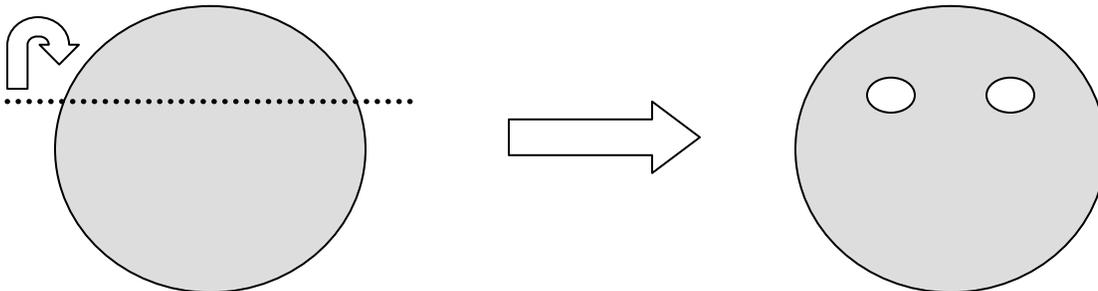
A transformation mask is a type of mask used by indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast and Alaska in ritual dances. These masks usually depict an outer, animal visage, which the performer can open by pulling a string to reveal an inner, human face carved in wood. Northwest coast peoples generally use them in potlatches to illustrate myths, while they are used by Alaska natives for shamanic rituals.

The use of transformation masks is rooted in ancient Kwakiutl (Kwakwaka'wakw) traditions. According to Kwakiutl creation stories, there was once a time when birds, fish, animals and humans differed only in skin covering and had the ability to transform themselves at will. All living beings were unified and animals could take on human form, just as humans could become animals, birds, fish, and mythical creatures. According to Kwakiutl belief, when dancers are wearing these masks, they are transformed into the spirits represented on the mask. A description of the craft for this session is as follows:

Take two paper plates (the thinner "bargain kind work best) and nest them together. Staple them together on each side and punch a hole for the string or ribbon ties.



Fold the plates about 2/3rds of the way up and cut along the fold to make the eyeholes – any shape will do:



Cut the top mask in half vertically. The masks are now ready to decorate as directed in the lesson plan.

