



Shane 'Dready' Aquart, *Moko Jumbies*, 2016.

Inspiration Artist: Shane 'Dready' Aquart, Al Ebanks, Chris Mann

Age Range: Secondary - High School

Subject Areas: History, Social Studies

WHAT IS CARNIVAL?



**NATIONAL
GALLERY** | CAYMAN
ISLANDS

DART



In This Packet

In this lesson, students will learn about the origins of carnival, local Cayman Islands mas traditions and how carnival productions come together.

Art activities follow for a practical application.



What Is Carnival?

What is carnival?

Carnival arts offers all of us a dynamic tool for self-expression and exploration, a tool to seek out our roots, a tool to develop new forms of looking at the world and its cultures, and finally, a tool to unite the world, to discover

what we all have in common, and to celebrate what makes us different. The power and creativity that underlies these art forms can transform lives.

Where did the word “carnival” come from?

Hundred of years ago, the followers of the Catholic religion in Italy started the tradition of holding a wild costume festival right before the first day of Lent. Because Catholics are not supposed to eat meat during Lent, they called their festival, carnevale — which means “to put away the meat.” As time passed, carnivals in Italy became quite famous; and in fact the practice spread to France, Spain, and all the Catholic countries in Europe. Then as the French, Spanish, and Portuguese began to take control of the Americas and other parts of the world, they brought with them their tradition of celebrating carnival.

The dynamic economic and political history of the Caribbean are indeed the ingredients of festival arts as we find them today throughout the African and Caribbean Diaspora. Once Columbus had steered his boat through Caribbean waters, it was only a hundred years before the slave trade was established. By the early 19th century, some six million slaves had been brought to the Caribbean. Between 1836 and 1917, indentured workers from Europe, west and central Africa, southern China, and India were brought to the Caribbean as laborers.

African influences on carnival traditions

Important to Caribbean festival arts are the ancient African traditions of parading and moving in circles through villages in costumes and masks. Circling villages was believed to bring good fortune, to heal problems, and chill out angry relatives who had died and passed into the next world. Carnival traditions also borrow from the African tradition of putting together natural objects (bones, grasses, beads, shells, fabric) to create a piece of sculpture, a mask, or costume — with each object or combination of objects representing a certain idea or spiritual force.

Feathers were frequently used by Africans in their motherland on masks and headdresses as a symbol of our ability as humans to rise above problems, pains, heartbreaks, illness — to travel to another world to be reborn and to grow spiritually. Today, we see feathers used in many, many forms in creating carnival costumes.

African dance and music traditions transformed the early carnival celebrations in the Americas, as African drum rhythms, large puppets, stick fighters, and stilt dancers began to make their appearances in the carnival festivities.

In many parts of the world, where Catholic Europeans set up colonies and entered into the slave trade, carnival took root. Brazil, once a Portuguese colony, is famous for its carnival, as is Mardi Gras in Louisiana (where African-Americans mixed with French settlers and Native Americans). Carnival celebrations are now found throughout the Caribbean in Barbados, Jamaica, Grenada, Dominica, Haiti, Cuba, St. Thomas, St. Marten; in Central and South America in Belize,

Panama, Brazil; and in large cities in Canada and the U.S. where Caribbean people have settled, including Brooklyn, Miami, and Toronto. Even San Francisco has a carnival!

Carnival was introduced to the region in the 1700, as the French settlers began to arrive. The tradition caught on quickly, and fancy balls were held where the wealthy planters put on masks, wigs, and beautiful dresses and danced long into the night. The use of masks had special meaning for the slaves, because for many African peoples, masking is widely used in their rituals for the dead. Obviously banned from the masked balls of the French, the slaves would hold their own little carnivals in their backyards — using their own rituals and folklore, but also imitating their masters' behavior at the masked balls.

For African people, carnival became a way to express their power as individuals, as well as their rich cultural traditions. After 1838 (when slavery was abolished), the freed Africans began to host their own carnival celebrations in the streets that grew more and more elaborate, and soon became more popular than the balls.

Today, carnival in the Caribbean is like a mirror that reflects the faces the many immigrants who have come to this island nation from Europe, Africa, India, and China. African, Asian, and American Indian influences have been particularly strong.

*All text courtesy of All Ah We, a nonprofit arts organization dedicated to promoting Caribbean heritage. <http://www.allahwe.org/History.html>

Learn more about Carnival in the Caribbean at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWUtZz5_nsc

Local Traditions

Carnival in Cayman

Early history....

In his book *Stories My Grandfather Never Told Me* historian Roy Bodden writes that the earliest form of carnival in the Cayman Islands was Jonkanoo:

"A celebration emanating out of the African Diaspora in which the leader or chief dancer wears an elaborate horned mask or headdress, most often an old dried-out cow head. The celebration in Bodden Town occurred on New Year's Day, when the masqueraders, accompanied by music and singing, made their way down the

street from Gun Square to the United Church's Garden Party at the Manse. Along this route the masqueraders would ask bystanders and householders for money. Those who refused were sometimes subjected to pretended anger or tricks by the masqueraders. Jonkanoo was an established tradition in Bodden town and only fell out of vogue when most of the men had to be away at sea for extended periods. It is still observed in the Bahamas and in certain parts of Jamaica."

Today....

Launched in 1983 by the Rotary Club of Grand Cayman, Batabano is the national carnival of the Cayman Islands. It is held annually during the first week of May. The festival's original name, Batabano, is a salute to Cayman's turtling heritage - the word "Batabano" refers to the tracks left in the sand by sea turtles as they crawl onto the beach to nest.

Carnival in the Cayman Islands has a distinct flavour with the colourful costumes and floats

reflecting our islands heritage and culture in addition to cultural contributions from over 100 resident nationalities.

In keeping with the carnival tradition across the region, the Batabano parade is designed to showcase creativity and to voice social issues and it features a kaleidoscope of music, dance and pageantry.

In 2016, a new carnival was formed in Cayman called CayMAS. CayMAS is comprised of a number of member bands including Swanky International, Chicken Run and Kalabra. These groups came together with the intention of promoting carnival in the Cayman Islands to the world. Since their first event, CayMas has typically taken place during the third weekend in May.

Putting It All Together

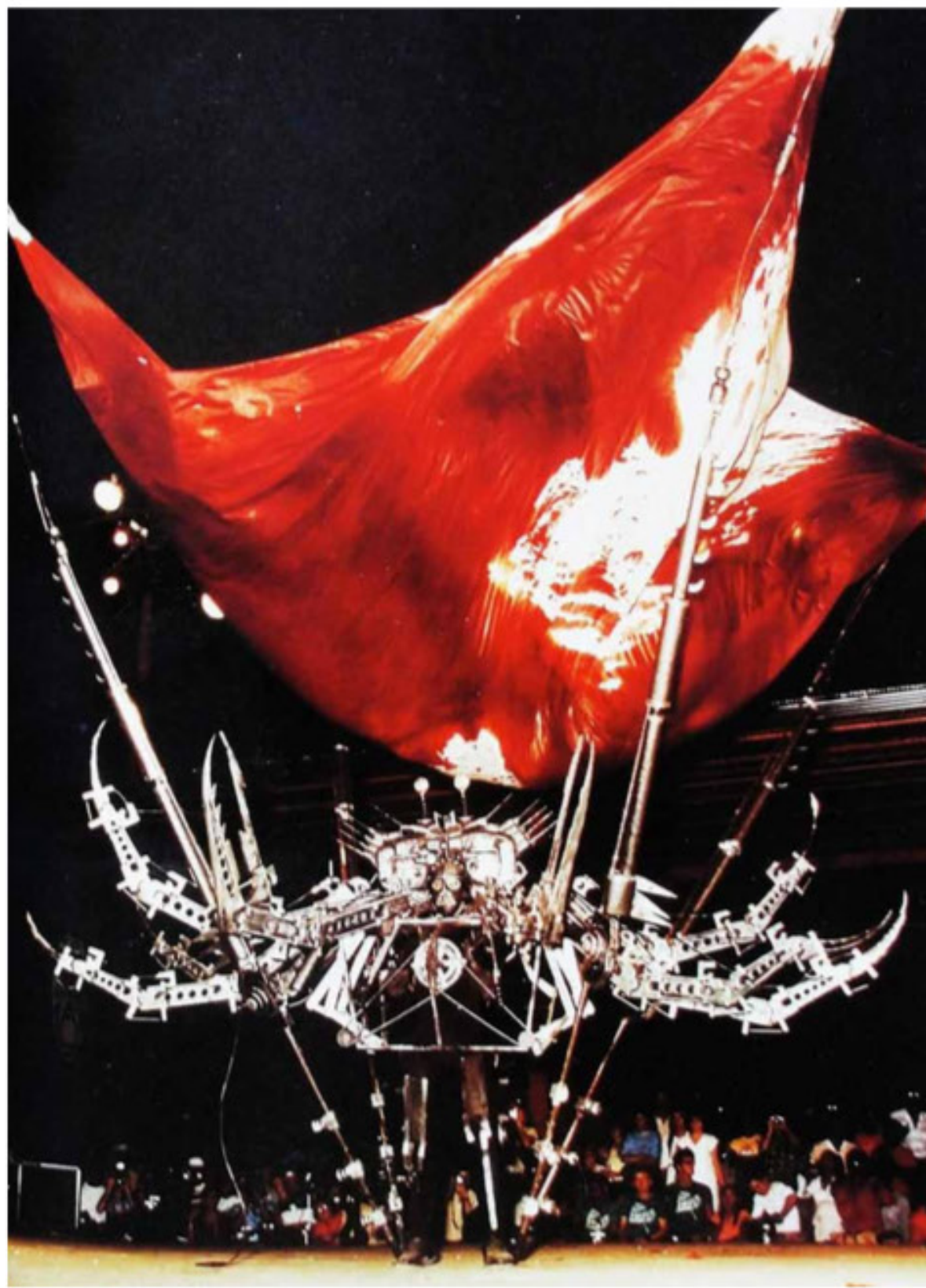
Creating a carnival production

*Text courtesy of All Ah We, a nonprofit arts organization dedicated to promoting Caribbean heritage.
<http://www.allahwe.org/History.html>

In order to put a carnival band together, it takes many weeks of welding; sewing; gluing; applying feathers, sequins, foil papers, glitter and lots of creativity, energy, and patience. The first step is to come up with a theme or overall concept for the band and to develop costume illustrations for each section of dancers. Costumes are then sewn, decorated, and fitted to each individual dancer. All this creative activity takes place in what are referred to in the Caribbean as "mas camps," where teamwork and organisation are crucial to creating an award-winning production.

The larger costumes are usually more difficult to design and build. Huge frames are created by bending wire into shapes, then covering with paper mâché, foam, and other materials. Physics play an important role, as the

costume must be able to move and dance across stages and streets, and not fall apart! Many different forms of decorations and materials (natural and man-made) are used to transform the costume into a dream of the mind's eye.



One of the most incredible Carnival designers in the Caribbean is Peter Minshall. He is acclaimed internationally as the foremost artist working in the field of "dancing mobiles," a form of performance art that combines the three-dimensional quality of large-scale sculpture with the dramatic and choreographic expressiveness of a live human performer. As Minshall has noted, "The dancing mobile is one of

many forms to grow out of the masquerade tradition of Trinidad Carnival.

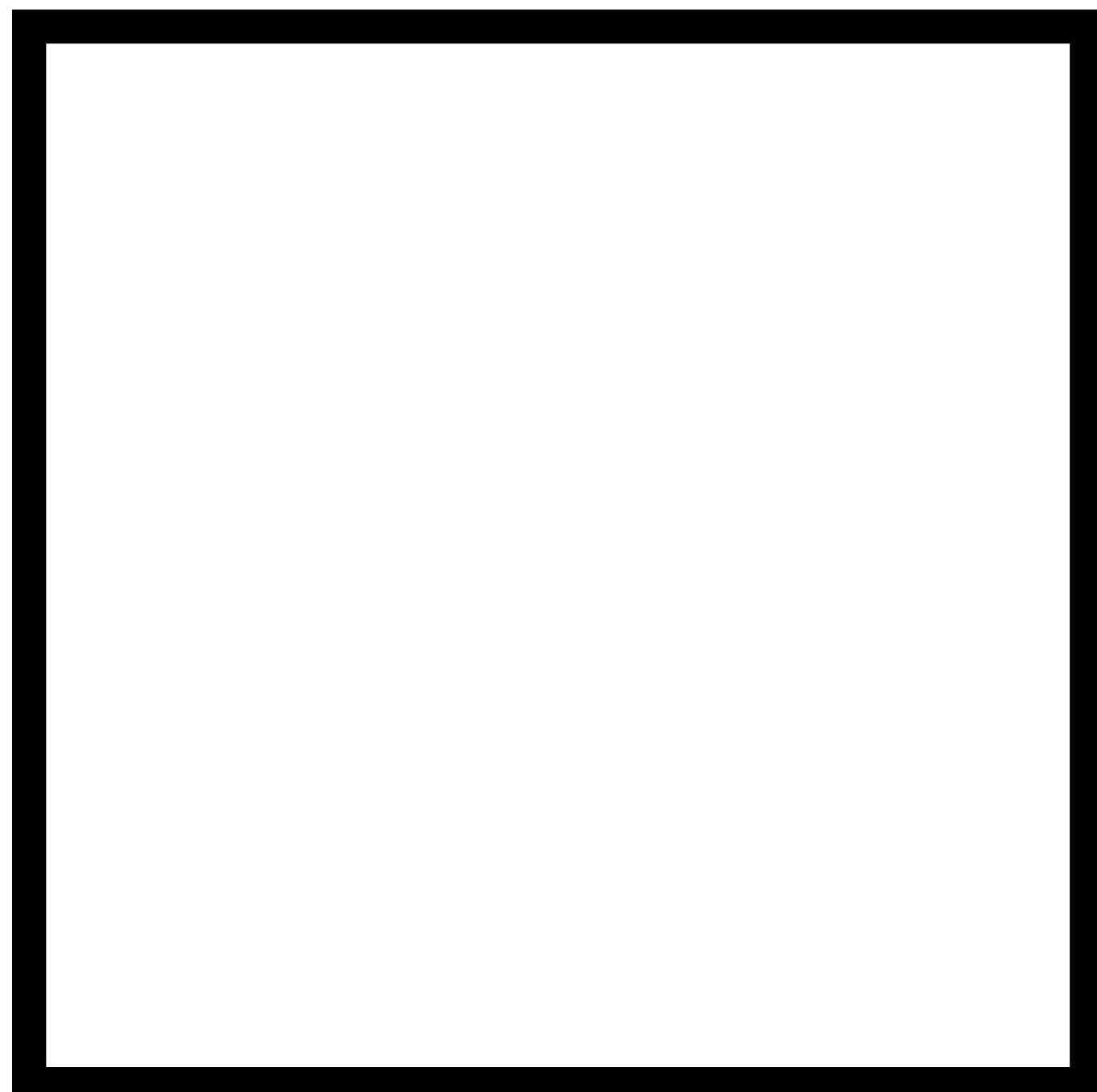
If you created your own Mas Band, what would it look like and what would your 'theme' be?

Activity: My Mas Band

Create your own Mas Band! Answer the following questions with more details about what your band would be like.

- What theme will your band have?
- Why did you choose this theme?
- Will you have only one costume, or many different costumes?
- What colours will you use in the costumes?
- What kind of music will you play?

Draw a small sketch of what one of your costumes might look like.



Local Art and Carnival: Al Ebanks



Al Ebanks, *Among Friends*, 1999.

Among Friends depicts the Carnival band 'Mudders', of which Ebanks and his friends were members. Batabano and Carnival are frequent themes in his work, and he has completed several paintings inspired by the music, dance and flowing colours of various carnival troupes.

Local Art and Carnival: Chris Mann



Chris Mann. *Carnival Dancer*, 1996.

Carnival Dancer depicts the exuberance of its subject through swirling patterns of daubed paint that are suggestive of the rhythmic movement of its dancing protagonists. The two stylised figures are portrayed in swaying motion, with the yellow form of a blazing sun pictured overhead.

Local Art and Carnival: Shane 'Dready' Aquart



Shane 'Dready' Aquart, *Moko Jumbies*, 2016.

Moko Jumbies started with a quote from Trinidadian designer Peter Minshall about his costume *The Dying Swan*, which he created for 2016 carnival. He wrote, "I had seen 'Moko Jumbies' all my life, but one day, suddenly, I thought 'my god he's a ballerina on toes...' This is not a costume, this is Mas." This work by Aquart illustrates the connecting threads and histories in carnival practices. In these revellers we see the wide shared history of the Caribbean and the blending of European and African cultures across the region. Learn more about Moko Jumbies here: <http://www.ncctt.org/new/index.php/about-ncc/departments/regional/trad-carnival-characters/337-traditional-mas-characters-moko-jumbie.html>

Art Activity: Make Your Own Mask

Materials:

- Glue
- Pencil
- Eraser
- Crayons/coloured pencils
- Paint (optional)
- Paper/card stock
- Hole punch
- String
- Stapler



Draw the outline for a carnival mask on a piece of card or paper. Card works best as it is heavier. You can use the outline provided on the next page, or design your own mask shape.

Cut out the mask and decorate it with the below options (or anything else you have at home that you would like to use). You can also use combinations of these materials - many carnival costumes use glitter, feathers *and* beads!

1. Dry rice and beans
2. Crayons or paint
3. Paper or cloth
4. Beads/sequins
5. Feathers

If you choose to use paint, be sure not to put it on too thickly as it will weigh down your paper. Make sure glue and paint dry before going onto your next layer of decoration.

When you are done decorating, let the mask completely dry. You can leave your mask as is. Or, if you want to wear it, punch a hole at the centre of either side of the mask. Thread one end of your string through and tie it in a thick knot to keep it securely in place. Do the same on the other side.

