

We Wear the Mask

Paul Laurence Dunbar

How does the repeated mask image explain the difference between public appearance and private suffering?

TOTAL TIME	TUMBLETA PASSAGE LOCATION
30 minutes	Poem - complete poem

TEACHER SETUP

Open the work in the Enhanced Reader and cue the span using the START and END anchors below.

START	We wear the mask that grins and lies,
END	We wear the mask!
PASSAGE ID	sec-mask-01

THE MOVE

Track a controlling metaphor as it gains meaning through repetition

WHY THIS PASSAGE

The mask begins as an image of concealment, but each stanza adds pressure: hidden tears, spiritual cries, and a public performance that allows the world to “dream otherwise.” Repetition makes the mask not an object but a social strategy for surviving scrutiny.

MARK

Underline each reference to the mask. Circle words of public appearance such as grin, smile, and sing. Box words of private pain. Connect one public word to the pain it conceals.

NOTICE

- What does the mask allow other people to believe?
- Why does the speaker ask why the world should be “over-wise”?
- How does the final repetition change after the poem reveals the hidden suffering?

THINK

Answer provisionally: How does the repeated mask image explain the difference between public appearance and private suffering? Choose the strongest interpretation you can defend from this passage alone.

WRITE

Write a short evidence-based response. Use at least two details from the assigned passage and explain how they support your interpretation.

CLOSE

Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and say why.

STRONG ANSWER

The mask explains how a public performance can hide private suffering. Smiles and songs are visible, while tears and cries remain concealed; by the final repetition, “we wear the mask” sounds less like decoration than a deliberate defense against a world that sees only surfaces.

EVIDENCE

Use one image of public appearance and one image of concealed pain.

WATCH FOR

Do not treat the mask as simple dishonesty. The poem presents concealment as a response to social pressure and suffering.

SOLO

Read independently.

SUPPORTED

Narration + highlighting.

LISTENING

Listen; same evidence task.

STUDENT PAGE · GRADE 9 · LESSON 292

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WORK	We Wear the Mask
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TUMBLETA PASSAGE LOCATION	Poem - complete poem
PASSAGE ID	sec-mask-01

Your teacher will open or cue the work in the Enhanced Reader. Use the location and verbatim anchors below to confirm the assigned span.

START

We wear the mask that grins and lies,

END

We wear the mask!

READ / LISTEN TO THE ASSIGNED PASSAGE SOLO: read independently. SUPPORTED: use narration and highlighting. LISTENING: listen to the assigned passage. The question and evidence task stay the same.

1. MARK Underline each reference to the mask. Circle words of public appearance such as grin, smile, and sing. Box words of private pain. Connect one public word to the pain it conceals.
2. NOTICE What does the mask allow other people to believe? Why does the speaker ask why the world should be “over-wise”? How does the final repetition change after the poem reveals the hidden suffering?
3. THINK Answer provisionally: How does the repeated mask image explain the difference between public appearance and private suffering?
4. WRITE Write a short response using at least two pieces of evidence from this passage.
5. CLOSE Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and say why.