

The art of africa

Sociology



The different forms signified different statuses of women in society as well as their creative aspects.

Young women who were being initiated into womanhood wore the masks in the initiation ceremonies (Foster 1). They showed that the young girls had the courage and determination to take up female responsibilities in society. After initiation, each girl would be given a unique mask made from the trunk of a cotton tree. The maker of the mask would only proceed to make the mask for a girl after hearing screams from the girl undergoing the initiation process.

There were specific requirements that the initiates had to fulfill while wearing the mask. They were not supposed to reveal any of their body parts. Failure to adhere would attract possession by evil spirits. The cover clothing was supposed to be black in color.

When girls need to beautify themselves, there were masks options to fulfill their beauty needs. Beauty masks came in different accessories. The accessories to the masks would attract Mende men.

It is clear that the Sowe masks served the purposes of beautification and conduction of rituals. They were reserved for Sande and Bundu societies. They helped distinguish the Mende women from other tribes in the region.