

Unmasked: A Literacy Event

Rhett Rayburn

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Writing has always been the best way for me to express my emotions and explain my vivid imagination. Since the age of six, I have written stories and clever pieces of literature for my own private collection; having always excelled at composing poetry, however, I spent most of my time trying to create new works to add to my poetic list. Recently, I have decided I want to "unmask" myself and get my efforts into the public eye.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, my friend Mary helped me in my initial "unmasking." Mary and I were introduced when I was sixteen. She was a head-length shorter than me and had golden blond hair, complemented by almond brown eyes. It did not take long before she and I became close friends. She became my biggest fan, and I became her favorite writer. Our close friendship was challenged, though, when she moved to New York to live with her aunt and uncle; however, we still corresponded via email.

At the beginning of my senior year in high school, I began to write more poems than ever before; I had a fever, and the only prescription was more writing. After reflecting on the previous year of my life, I wrote a poem now referred to as "The Masks Poem." This poem was divided into two parts; the first part was titled "Sea of Masks," and the second was titled "Broken Mask." I primarily wrote this poem to express my frustrations with conformity in society. In the first part of the poem, I addressed the fact I was pretending to be what others wanted me to be so I could fit into their world, a world of masks. In the second part of the poem, I wrote about breaking free from a world of conformity and embracing individuality. Because I had taken on a real subject

that bothered me, this poem was one I was proud of writing.

Months had passed since the writing of the poem and my last communication with Mary. I felt it was time to check on how she was and to share my poem with another person. Mary called me that night shortly after reading my poem in the email and wanted to talk about my writing at length. She felt the need to analyze each line and every literary device. I could not deny her the conversation for I, too, enjoyed talking about my works; discussing something I wrote was a rarity, so I took pleasure in the moments when I could do so. She asked every question imaginable from, "How did you come up with this line?" to "What exactly did you mean by writing this?" The conversation was an incredible boost to my self-esteem.

For three months, I did not hear from Mary. When she finally contacted me, our conversation began with the usual queries about how things were going and what was new in our lives. However, when she brought up the subject of school, Mary cut to the chase. She had a request to ask of me.

"Can you do me a favor?" she asked innocently.

"I don't know. It depends. What is the favor you want from me?" I questioned, knowing the answer could be something I might regret.

"My English class has an assignment on American poetry, and I was wondering if I could use one of your poems?" she requested in a nonchalant tone.

"I guess it wouldn't be a problem. Which poem would you like to use?" I asked, as I feared her response.

"I was hoping to use the Masks one I read a while back," she said.

Reluctantly, I allowed her to use my poem as the topic of her assignment; I figured it was her "F," not mine. Shortly after sending her a new copy of the poem, I feared her classmates'

responses and began to doubt myself.

Another week passed as I awaited Mary's report on how much her class hated my writing. Finally, Mary sent me a message over AOL Instant Messenger about her assignment's grade. I anxiously waited as she typed her message; each second increased the fear in my mind and accelerated the pace of my heartbeat. She finally began the conversation.

"Hey, I got some big news for you," she typed.

"Oh really? How much did your class hate my poem?" I typed, wishing my fingers could pound out a way to express my fear.

"Actually, all the kids in my class asked if you were still alive and wanted to know why they never heard of you before," she posted on the message screen.

"You mean they liked my poem?" I asked as I lifted my jaw off the floor below.

"Yeah, they thought you were a real big time writer, just like the ones we were reading about. My teacher was even highly impressed and thought you were some unknown writer," she replied. In that moment, I viewed Mary as an angel sent to make me feel like a million dollars. We continued talking about her class's response for the whole night; I was in so much shock I constantly had to confirm it.

After my experience with Mary's English class and my poem, I feel much more confident in my abilities as a writer. I now share my works with those who will read them, which is something I had never done in the past. Hopefully, all my encounters with others' criticisms on my writing will go as smoothly as my first one with Mary's class. Now, as I begin my freshman year in college, I hope my writing skills will continue to improve so that I can become a better poet and can revel in my "unmasking."

Sea of Masks

I wear this mask
To hide from the world
Not revealing to them my true face—
The face of the tortured artist
Covered by a joker's smile
In fear that what others may see
May lead to my own dismay.
I instead portray this false self
A self accepted by society
I blend into a sea of people
A sea of masks.

Broken Mask

Rise from the sea
Remove your mask
No longer must we hide
Hide in this masquerade
Doomed to dance aimlessly
A dance of blind fools
All fearing to illuminate themselves
We shall allow the sun to shine

On our naked faces

Feeling the warmth

Of our true identities

Now we look forward

On a fading sea

Showing the world with its own broken mask

That we are not afraid.