

A dramatic movie poster for 'The Man in the Iron Mask'. The title 'THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK' is at the top in a large, ornate, metallic font. Below the title, a large, menacing iron mask with glowing eyes looms in the background. In the foreground, a man with a beard and a red cloak holds a sword aloft. To his right, a man in a dark cloak and hat looks on. In the bottom right, a man in a dark cloak and hat is shown in profile, looking towards the center. The overall tone is dark and epic.

# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

**Book:**  
**The Man in the Iron Mask**

**Literacy Standards:**  
**Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening,**  
**Viewing Non-Print Text, Critical Thinking**

**Cross-Curricular Applications:**  
**Social Studies, Art, Physical Education**

**MARVEL®**



# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## **Why graphic novel adaptations of classic books?**

Students enter middle school and high school at a range of reading levels, and although many students are prepared to read classic and canonical works, a large number of students have difficulty navigating these often densely worded texts. Other students, who may have biological needs causing them to have difficulty with reading (such as dyslexia or ADHD) might also be greatly challenged. However, these texts are still necessary as they help students develop the background knowledge often needed to navigate newer literary texts, films, and even television programs. Background knowledge in canonical works helps students develop an understanding of intertextuality (the existence of links between one text and another text), helping them to critically engage and read any number of other texts (including advertisements).

Graphic novel adaptations of classical texts are not meant to supplant or replace the traditional print copies of the books. However, they help students develop an entryway into reading. As with other adaptations, including abridged versions of classical texts, they help students figure out what is occurring in a dense text by requiring them to find order and sequence in the illustrations. Vocabulary in graphic novels is usually less dense (though it can still have a significant level of complexity).

As reading instruction tells us, there are three different levels of student reading ability, and these levels are based on the level of vocabulary, the overall concept, and sophistication of the structure of the text – their independent level, their instructional level, and their frustration level. Graphic novels are typically written at any student's independent reading level, helping them to develop successful comprehension of the story.

## **Graphic novels and visualization:**

The illustrations help students better understand setting and character, helping them to distinguish between characters. The use of different styles of "balloons" help students differentiate between external speech (dialogue or spoken soliloquy) and internal speech (thought). Visualization is sometimes a strategy for reading with which students struggle, especially students with limited exposure to a variety of locations. Even successful readers may lose track of the setting as they continue reading. Graphic novels can show students what Ancient Rome looked like in each individual panel, helping them to continually "visualize" or see the setting. When traditional printed texts feature a plethora of characters, some of whom are described so as to be nearly indistinguishable from another, students may have difficulty remembering characters, following dialogue, or tracing actions.

Graphic novels make illustrated distinctions between characters, helping students to keep track of this information. If students are capable of seeing or visualizing a text, they are also better able to move into other important strategies for reading. These strategies include previewing (with a picture walk) and anticipating, connecting (text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world), questioning, and monitoring their own comprehension.

## **Graphic novels and advanced readers:**

Independent graphic novels, developed by authors/illustrators which are unique storylines, differ from these adaptations because they tell original stories that can be used with any level of student proficiency – including advanced and honors-level students. Because graphic novel versions of classical texts are adaptations, many teachers may feel these texts should not be used with advanced and honors-level students. On the contrary, these adaptations are also helpful to advanced students, who can engage in more critical discussions about the illustrations (including an illustrator's use of line, color, and posture) and their connection to the text. These students are also capable of having discussions about the significance of the adaptation, recognizing and discussing how the adaptation becomes an entirely new text (which is a discussion students can also have with films). They can also discuss the ways in which these adaptations mirror or alter the central ideas (the theme and motifs) of a literary text and the significance of these changes.





# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## **Graphic novels and engagement:**

Students who are reluctant readers can also benefit when teachers employ graphic novels. Students become reluctant readers for any number of reasons and include students who are functionally literate as well as students who are a-literate (they can read, but won't). When students repeatedly encounter texts that are too challenging or at their frustration level (even with instructional support), they begin to see themselves as failures. When reading a graphic novel, most students begin to see that they are successful while reading.

Graphic novels also validate the reading interests of many students, including (though not limited to) young men. Some students resist reading because they do not see themselves in the novels (they are not novels which appeal to them or with which they can make easy connections), because they find the novels too simplistic and not engaging, or because the novels don't connect to their personal reading habits. These students will likely find graphic novels engaging, helping them to find a renewed interest in reading.

## **Graphic novels and assessment:**

Teachers are still capable of teaching literary devices, such as conflict (internal and external), plot, character development, tone, mood, diction, and setting with graphic novels. Fictional graphic novels still contain the elements of traditional fictional pieces like short stories, novellas, and novels. Teachers are also still capable of assessing student comprehension of the story. Generating questions which are literal, inferential, and critical, as well as asking students to conduct retellings of the novel help teachers ensure that students have understood the novel. Assessing student understanding of sequencing can also occur visually, with teachers copying pages from a graphic novel and asking students to arrange panels to recreate the sequence of the story. Teachers can also assess miscues and analyze student miscues using graphic novels. As such, graphic novels become another form of text that teachers are able to use for educational purposes.

## **Why Marvel Illustrated:**

Marvel Illustrated graphic novels differ greatly in quality from a large number of other graphic adaptations of traditional novels. These graphic novel adaptations are written and illustrated by comic book authors and illustrators renowned for their incredible work. The illustrations surpass most other graphic adaptations of classic novels because of the detail, attention to lines, symmetry, borders, body structure, and color. The high gloss finish, the color illustration, the intricate care in binding, and overall design are not only appealing to students, but also to instructors. As they were developed by a company whose readers continuously return to the pages of their trade paperbacks and comic books, the hardcover and paperback binding of these graphic novels, as well as the quality of the paper, ensure that they will withstand multiple readings.

**Brian Kelley is currently a PhD candidate in the Language, Literacy, and Learning program at Fordham University. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in English and his Masters of Arts in Reading from New Jersey City University. He is also a certified English teacher and Reading Specialist in the State of New Jersey and has taught high school (grades 9-12, developmental skills-Advanced Placement courses) as well as college courses.**



# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## Ordering Information

**The Man in the Iron Mask**

**Price: \$14.99**

**ISBN: 978-0-7851-2593-8**

**Diamond Code: AUG082442**

The Marvel Illustrated books are available from all major book wholesalers and retailers throughout the United States and Canada, such as Amazon, Baker & Taylor, Barnes & Noble, Bookazine, Borders, Follett, Ingram, Partners West, and others. For more information, contact:

**Diamond Book Distributors**

**1966 Greenspring Drive, Suite 300**

**Timonium, MD 21093**

**Phone: 1-800-452-6642 x. 862**

**Fax: 410-560-2583**

**[books@diamondbookdistributors.com](mailto:books@diamondbookdistributors.com)**

Or use the Diamond code to order from your local comic book store. To find a shop near you, visit [www.comicshoplocator.com](http://www.comicshoplocator.com) or call 1-888-COMIC-BOOK.

## **Also Available** *(in TPB)*

**Last of the Mohicans**

**Price: \$14.99**

**ISBN: 978-0-7851-2444-3**

**Diamond Code: JUL0823962**

## **Coming Soon** *(in HC)*

**Treasure Island**

**Price: \$14.99**

**ISBN: 978-0-7851-2595-2**

**Diamond Code: NOV082455**

**The Three Musketeers**

**Price: \$14.99**

**ISBN: 978-0-7851-3138-0**

**Diamond Code: SEP088352**

## **Also Available** *(in HC)*

**Last of the Mohicans**

**Price: \$19.99**

**ISBN: 978-0-7851-2443-6**

**Diamond Code: DEC072251**

**The Man in the Iron Mask**

**Price: \$19.99**

**ISBN: 978-0-7851-2592-1**

**Diamond Code: DEC072252**

**Treasure Island**

**Price: \$19.99**

**ISBN: 978-0-7851-2594-5**

**Diamond Code: DEC072253**

## **Coming Soon** *(in HC)*

**The Three Musketeers**

**Price: \$19.99**

**ISBN: 978-0-7851-3137-3**

**Diamond Code: OCT082520**



# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## VOCABULARY

This list is a partial list of words found in the glossary and serves as a model of a possible list of vocabulary words teachers can use. When exploring such vocabulary, ask students to integrate these words into their discussions and writing assignments. Also be certain to generate a word wall based on the vocabulary you select from the writing. Remember that essential vocabulary (words essential for understanding the story) might best be taught at the beginning of the lesson, prior to reading the text.

**Antiquity**

**Azure**

**Barque**

**Battery**

**Bleeding** (medical procedure)

**Château**

**Confer**

**Corps**

**Countenance**

**Effrontery**

**Fête**

**Impregnable**

**Luminous**

**Presage**

**Promenade**

**Sheathe**

**Tempest**

**Venerate**



# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## Background

*The Man in the Iron Mask* tells a story of a man who was imprisoned and forced to wear an iron mask as punishment. Though not only did the mask have the ability to crush his spirit, stripping him of visual awareness of his physical condition, it also had the power to humiliate him. Anyone who looked upon him would immediately know that he was a prisoner, sentenced to wear a mask as punishment for some crime. In this book, wearing the iron mask causes the prisoner to develop a great lust for revenge against the king.

French culture in particular (and European culture generally) used masks for various purposes, from punishment to celebration. In celebration, the masks were used in events known as “masques” (or “masquerades”) and ranged in style from outrageous to political. The masks hid people’s true identities, allowing them to become someone else (even for a brief period of time). As such, masques (as events) allowed people to escape their real lives and revel in the moment. Masques and masquerades are still common today. In fact, Mardi Gras, a tradition of masquing from French culture, is still celebrated in the United States today.

# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## STEP ONE: RESEARCH

**Assign students to one of five groups. In their groups, ask students to explore one of the five following topics:**

*The real man in the iron mask*

*The use of masks as punishment*

*The use of masks as entertainment*

*Masquerades and masques*

*The cultural implication of masking (as in Mardi Gras)*

**Students should gather enough information on the above topics to allow for a ten to fifteen minute presentation.**

**The presentation should occur as in a group, with each member participating.**





# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## STEP TWO: DESIGNING A MASK

Students will design two masks. These masks will be worn for two different purposes. Students should be certain to measure their faces and make accurate-sized masks.

The first mask will be worn by students throughout one school day. This mask should mirror in some manner the mask worn by the Man in the Iron Mask. Each mask should be similar, with little originality. By wearing a full-face mask similar to the iron mask throughout the school day, students may begin to understand the effect such masks have on individuals. They may begin to question what it would feel like to spend many years wearing a mask. Note: In some schools, teachers and principals may want to get parental permission before engaging in this activity.

Students should design the second mask to be elaborate and festive. This mask will be personal and should be developed to show personality. This mask may even be worn by students in celebration of Mardi Gras (or a masque event in general). The materials chosen for the mask would be largely dependent upon the teacher's budget (teachers might encourage parents to provide materials from home). While they work to create their masks, the teacher may provide students with a sample of designs common in masques. Ask students to discuss why these sample designs were created. Also, ask students to explore the cultural ramification of the masks. For example, a mask of a court jester might show blushed full cheeks and sharp features. Asking questions like, "Why might a mask like this exist?" or "What were the creators saying about court jesters in general (or this court jester in particular)?" may help students think critically about "cultural stereotypes".



# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## **STEP THREE:**

### **HOST A MASQUERADE**

**If possible, ask the physical education teacher to conduct lessons in ballroom dancing to help students prepare for a masquerade. Invite parents, fellow teachers, and community members to help decorate the gymnasium in preparation for the event. Encourage students to participate in the masquerade by wearing their festive masks.**





# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## **STEP FOUR: CRITICAL WRITING**

Now that the students have had a night (or day) of fun and celebration, ask them to explore their reactions to the lesson, as well as to *The Man in the Iron Mask*, by engaging in critical reflection through writing. The following prompts are meant to help students explore their reactions to the lesson:

Reflect on how it felt to wear a mask for an entire school day. Think about the iron mask. It had no real personality, no real way of conveying who you are, and might have appeared disturbing to other people. Why might countries use such a mask for the purposes of punishment? As you write your response, think about whether you would a) ever want to be punished by wearing such a mask and b) punish someone else by requiring they wear such a mask.

When you wore your mask at the ball, you were, for a brief time, able to become someone else. Reflect on creating and wearing your mask. Why might masks be popular even today? Be certain to think about your personal reaction to the event.



# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## STEP FIVE:

### CRITICAL VIEWING

In the movie version of the *Phantom of the Opera* (2004), there is a masquerade scene referred to as the Bal Masquerade. When you show students the scene, provide them with the lyrics for the song accompanying the scene. Show this scene in class. Before showing the scene, however, you should prepare students to analyze the scene by discussing the cultural implications of masques. You may want to ask questions like, “Why would aristocrats wear masks and costumes depicting commoners?” You may also ask students to consider a number of the implications of outfits, the setting of the masque, and the manner in which the film depicts the aristocratic celebrations.

As students watch the scene, they should first be encouraged to listen to the lyrics of the scene and the dialogue that occurs in the scene. You may wish to show the scene multiple times to allow the students to take notes while they’re watching. In a final viewing, you want the students to read the lyrics while the scene is played, asking students to pay careful attention to the language used in the lyrics.

Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to analyze the lyrics and dialogue, paying careful attention to the implications of the lyrics. What do the lyrics suggest about the purpose of masquerades? Ask them to also discuss the notes they recorded while viewing the scene. Ask them to explore the connection between the scene and their research and experiences with masks and masques.



# THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

## STEP SIX:

### WRITING A SPECULATIVE PROMPT

Ask students to respond to the following speculative prompt. If possible, you may want to find a picture which can help students think about the writing task.

*Your friend Alex spoke to you about getting plastic surgery. His/her major rationale for wanting plastic surgery is, “I want to have someone else’s face. I’m tired of looking at my own face.” Write a narrative explaining your reaction to your friend’s comments. Be certain that you relate the story of The Man in the Iron Mask somewhere in your narrative. You may also choose to include information from your research and your personal experiences wearing two different masks.*

