No Halloween costume would be complete without the proper mask, and although the origin of the mask is cloaked in antiquity and mystery, its usage is universal and varied.

The English term, Mask, was first used in the 16th century, and is translated from the Middle French word, Masque, (masquerade, mascara) which means “a covering to hide or guard the face”. However masks can also be worn on other parts of the body and are sometimes used to protect, disguise, or lend meaning in rituals and performances.

Perhaps masquerading could be traced back to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve, after committing sin (Genesis 3:7) tried to cover their nakedness with fig leaves. Although they couldn’t escape God’s notice, most of us have developed the fine art of masking our emotions or pain from those around us.

Australia and Germany use totem masks that cover the entire body, and story-tellers wear small masks on their fingers to illustrate their tales.

People in Africa, India, Latin America, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan and throughout the Middle East, use them in their various ceremonies and rituals. Some are actually not worn at all, but are displayed as works of art.

In entertainment images of sadness or happiness can be shown by masks, however, some are employed in more sinister ways as battle armor, torture or punishment. Criminals hide their identities with ski masks, cartoon characters, or celebrity faces.
Surgical masks are used by health providers. Other medical masks include the oxygen mask, the anesthetic mask, the burn mask, the face shield that protects medical professionals from bodily fluids, and the CPR mask used in emergencies.

Football, baseball, hockey, skiing, motorcycling, fencing, and auto racing, are a few sports that require participants to wear protective masks.

Although the origin of masks is obscure the creativity of those who have invented so many uses for them is to be applauded.