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## **Behind the mask we wear is the “self” wanting to be seen and understood**

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Ever wonder why sometimes we find it difficult to understand our children? Did you ever ask yourself why, as an adult who went through childhood and adolescence, it can be challenging to understand their behaviour and personality?

This might be the case because children can choose to wear invisible masks for specific reasons. And these masks could signify something deeper. They could be hiding strong or vulnerable emotions growing inside of them because of fear of being misunderstood, excluded, or cast out. Sometimes, this mask acts as a disguise, a deceiving veil that we, adults, seem to ignore most of the time, perhaps because we don't try enough to notice. Navigating a difficult world around them, wearing a mask will help conceal the anxiety growing deep inside them. Beneath those smiles could be pain and loneliness; deep down, that cheerfulness could be disappointment and frustration of the modern world that we, adults, have created for them. But they keep using the mask because they cannot afford to be condemned, berated, and denounced by society. Such wearing of an invisible mask symbolises this fear of being left out or excluded. Or such wearing of an invisible mask allows them to control this rage growing inside them.

And to adapt and survive, some of them develop cunning and schemes. This mask allows them to navigate the boundaries of fear and bravery, of rejection and acceptance, of make-believe and reality. They use the mask as a survival tool, yet, at times, they are drawn into the tension of keeping this make-believe self from the real, inner self that longs to be seen, heard, and understood. Until then, when the time is right, and given the circumstances that they experience, they might just let their real selves come out, with the hope that the world will accept them, whoever or whatever they are (and have become), especially by the people they love. Or, maybe, they won't.

*This sketch, using pencil with added colour, was chosen from a collection of artwork (drawings and sketches) produced by children between the ages of 7 and 14 during a Children's Art Day held on 05 July 2025 in Bool, Culaba, Biliran, the Philippines. Consent was given by Mike Ethan's parent/guardian for this sketch to be published in Simbolismo. Bionote is not required, and this description was developed from a brief conversation with Mike Ethan, who was asked about his interpretation of his art piece during lunch.*