

TAIKO DRUMMING

“If you can say it, you can play it.”

Traditional saying

Overview: Taiko is known as the modern art of traditional Japanese drumming in a group ensemble that uses martial art like movements and "ki-ais" (shouting to encourage high energy.) The performance may also dramatize Japanese folktales and use props.

Drums were used in ancient times to signify the boundaries of a village. Peasant events such as the rice harvests or dance festivals were celebrated with drums. Drums were used to pray for rain and other religious ceremonies. Drums lead warriors into battles in order to scare off the enemy. They were included in Japanese folklore. In one example, by drumming, the Sun God would come out of its cave. Japanese culture has celebrated the athleticism of traditional drumming techniques for thousands of years.

Taiko became popular around the world in the 1950's and came to the U.S. in 1968 by Grand Master Seiichi Tanaka, who wanted it to be a common household word, like chopsticks and sushi.

Taiko means "big drum," but there are many shapes and sizes. The dojo or band can include other rhythmic instruments. The sound made by striking the drum is defined by a syllable, and to play the rhythmic phrase the student copies a pattern of Taiko syllables.

Uchite (Taiko drummer), can wear loose fitting happi (short coat), with an obi (belt), hachimaki (headband), and tabi (shoes with big toe separated). The crest symbolizes Taiko and can be reproduced upon their clothing and drum. It stands for thunder.

How to get started without the real Taiko drums?

1. What sizes are the drums? There are basically three sizes,

Odaiko - Big Drum

Example: upside down plastic garbage cans (ask the PE teacher at your school), wood barrels, plastic lunch tubs.

Jozuke - Medium Drum

Example: plastic pickle containers (free from Dairy Queen)
Plastic buckets, plastic laundry containers, old tires

Shime - Small Drum

Example: Plastic containers from hardware store, gallon ice cream containers.

Use clear packing tape to make a drum surface, or simply turn container upside down.

2. What do I use for bachi?

Borrow rhythm sticks from the music room.

DRUM VOCABULARY:

Dojo - Japanese term for school or group in training

Hitori de - Play alone

Ishoo Ni - Play together

Ki ai - the shouts and verbal cues Taiko players use to keep time, increase their energy, and encourage one another.

Owari Mashoo - Stop, finish, quit

Sensei - Teacher

Tataki Mashoo - Let's beat the drum!

Uchite - A Taiko drummer

How to play...the sound of the drum is the "note"

Syllables:

Do or Don - strike hara

Ka or Ko - strike fuchi

Do-Ron or Do-Ka - strike 2 times on hara

Ka-Ra - strike 2 times on fuchi

Do-Don - strike 2 times on hara, second is stronger

Su - rest (silence)

Tsu - play lightly

Practice:

A. Don Don Don Don

B. Doka Doka Doka Doka

C. Don__ Don__ Ka-Ra Ka-Ra Ka-Ra

D. Don__ Doka Don__ Doka

1. Students can make up their own phrases, solo or with a partner, and share with class.

2. The composer(s) phrase can be written on 2'x 4"lined tag board.

3. The phrase can be named. Suggestion: "The Gallop" or "The Kangaroo."

4. Dojo (drum players) can learn and play each other's phrases.

5. Combine phrases together.

6. The bachi can also be hit together and that syllable can be called ____?
7. Say the phrase aloud as they are played.
8. Use the command "Owari Mashoo" to stop, finish, quit.
9. Use the command "Tataki Mashoo" to start playing.
10. Students rotate to different size drums after 3-5 minutes.
11. Have Odaiko group play alone or "Hitori de"
12. Have Jozuke and Shime drum Uchites (players) play "Ishoo Ni."
(In other words, together.)
13. Students and teacher can embellish phrases with movement of arms, body turns, switching places, kicks, and lunges. Think of karate, martial arts, or dance.
14. Add props such as fans, scarves, or Japanese costume.
15. Teach a Japanese dance such as Tanko Bushi (The Coal Miner) or Bon Odori (The Fan Dance) using small steps and small hand gestures.

Warm-Up to Taiko

1. Start class in a circle. Each student has a pair of sticks or bachi. All hit rhythm sticks together seven times counting in Japanese. On "8" or hachi, students are silent, with their bachi apart, while one student says: "SU" (which means rest). Go around circle until all have had a turn. (ichi, ni, san, shi, go roku, shichi, hachi, "SU.") On "SU", use the diaphragm in the body's upper abdominal, in order to get a strong, sharp sound. (Can be done by simply clapping.)
2. Without sticks, teacher and students participate in stretch and strength exercises. All participate while counting to "10" in Japanese for each exercise. (ichi, ni, san, shi, go, roku, shichi, hachi, kyu, jyu) Students may even offer their own ideas for an exercise to share with the class. Since Taiko uses a strong stance, try lunges (one leg bent, one straight) while making large circles with arms. Try some kicks, turns, punches, balances, and jumps.
3. Students work in partnerships to make a 10-count exercise. The two should try to integrate their movements together. They may mirror each other, work side by side, or compliment each other's movement. (Emphasize that Taiko uses movements while beating the drum.) Students may elect to show their exercise to the rest of the class and teach it. Eventually, the activity can be coupled with the actual Taiko drum rhythms.
4. The bulk of the class time is spent practicing drumming. Start with the easiest and add more rhythm sentences along the way. Try putting two together and add some movements. Rotate students to the three different sized drums. With all the noise it can be beneficial to create a signal to gain everybody's attention.
5. Clean up the drums and sticks and have students form two lines from each corner of the gym. Have students run to center, then to opposite corner, alternating one person at a time. Try adding a jump or turn in the center.

6. Finishing class with a circle and a bow.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES:

1. Make a practice drum. Learn the Japanese names to all the parts.
2. Make a hachimaki (headband) or Obi (belt) by tearing cloth into long strips. Add a crest.
3. Watch a performance in person or on video.
4. Visit a local youth (10-18 years) Taiko class. Stan Shikuma's Kazedaiko
Phone: 206.236.2753
5. Invite the Hyogo Business and Cultural Center to do a free class lesson.
6. Make a mask based upon a Japanese folktale.

Resources

Books

Bernson, Mary Hammond and Betsy Goolian. *Modern Japan: An Idea Book for K-12*. Publication Manager/Social Studies Development Center/ Indian University/ 2805 E. 10th St./ Suite 120/ Bloomington, Indiana 47405
phone: 812-855-3838.

This book can help develop lessons on creating a family crest and other traditions.

Coerr, Eleanor. *Sadaka and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. Picture version.

Miller, Kathryn Shultz. *A Thousand Cranes*. 1988.

Sakade, Florence. *Japanese Children's Favorite Stories*. (1958)

This book has folklore about the tengu, a kind of Japanese trickster figure.

Weikart, Phyllis S. *Teaching Folk Dance/Successful Steps*. Materials from High/Scope Press. 1-800-40 PRESS. Music recordings: *Rhythmically Moving*.

Websites

Education@seattleinternational.org

www.seattleinternational.org

Seattle International Children's Festival

Hotline: 206.684.7336

Mosaic teacher workshops each spring in Seattle and Tacoma, WA. Workshops are based on the events at that years festival of performers around the world and are easy to take right back to the classroom to use.

www.taiko.com

Premier Taiko resource on the web. Has links to many groups and Taiko makers, history, instructions and more.

www.seattlekokontaiko.org/

First Taiko group formed in Seattle, 1980. Local, free concerts.

www.studyguide.sundance.org/taiko

Introduces Japan to school aged kids 10-14 by way of other countries. Fun paper crane peace project explained. Book study guides and lesson plans.

www.origami.as/home

Click on "instructors" click under "specific items, and you can learn to make a paper crane.

www.rhythmweb.com/taiko

Learn how to make simple rhythm instruments and start a drum circle.

www.hyogobcc.org

Hyogo Business and Cultural Center/ 2001 Sixth Ave./ Suite 2610/ Seattle, WA 98121 206.728.0610.

Education and Culture outreach program. Free visits to your school to teach mini lesson plans about Japan.