

Odaiko New England: *Taiko Thunder* Educational Guide, Grades K-12



About the Performance

Odaiko New England demonstrates the ancient art form of taiko (Japanese drumming) and its importance in Japanese culture. This energetic and engaging program highlights kumi-daiko (ensemble drumming) and combines traditional taiko rhythms with dynamic movement and rhythms from other musical traditions. Students explore kata (drumming technique) and the concept of kiai (vocalizing energy), and also join the performers on stage to play the taiko drums.



About the Artist

Odaiko New England (ONE) was formed in 1994 and is one of the premier taiko groups on the East Coast. By combining Japanese aesthetic sensibility with the American spirit, ONE has forged its own distinctive style and voice.

In Japan the sounds of taiko are infused into various aspects of daily life. From Shinto and Buddhist rituals to celebratory festivals, taiko is said to be the voice and spirit of the Japanese. Its rhythms reflect the sounds of nature, the changing of the seasons, a mother's heartbeat. The sound of taiko is palpable and its language is universal. It speaks across boundaries of race, class, culture, and religion, and appeals to people of all ages and gender. Brought together by a common love of taiko, the members and supporters of Odaiko New England reflect the diversity of New England, united to share taiko with as many people as possible.

Program Learning Goals

1. To experience and learn about the techniques of Japanese taiko drumming.
2. To explore the history of Japanese taiko drumming, and its historical and contemporary role in Japanese culture and traditions.

Essential Questions

1. How are the different drums and techniques of taiko drumming used to make different sounds, or for different ceremonies?
2. What is the role of taiko drumming in Japanese culture and traditions?
3. How has the history of taiko drumming shaped the art form today?

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Vocabulary

- **Rhythm:** A strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound
- **Percussion:** In music, making sound by striking of one solid object with or against another Beat: The basic unit of time in a piece of music
- **Composition:** A piece of music, art, or literature.
- **Ceremony:** A formal act or series of acts done in a certain way to honor a special occasion

Key Facts and Cultural Context for Students

Taiko is a form of drumming that comes from Japan. Taiko is the Japanese word for Drum and is also the word for the art form. Can you find Japan on the map? What do you know about the country, culture, language, or religion of Japan? What would you like to know? What resources could you use to find out more?



Taiko Drums

This is a taiko drum. What does it remind you of? What kind of sound do you think this drum will make?

What do you know about drums?

What other cultures do you recall that use drums?

[Click on this link](#) to listen to a sample of Taiko drumming.

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Pre-Show Activity: Making Rhythms

- A rhythm is a strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound. Can you identify any rhythms that you hear or see on a daily basis? How could you make those rhythms yourself?
- Try making some different percussive sounds with your body by snapping your fingers, clapping your hands, stomping your feet, etc... Put these sounds together in a repeating pattern to make a rhythm.
- Demonstrate your rhythm for your classmates to echo. Repeat the pattern until everyone can do it. Take turns teaching and learning different rhythms.



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Educational Guide, Grades K-12

Post-Show Activity: Japanese Family Crests

The origin of the mon (mohn), the Japanese family crest, goes back to the 11th century. The ruling families of the Imperial Court designed family symbols to put on their formal clothing. The design of flowers and birds represent the elegant images of court life.

In the 12th century, the samurai class took over the government and used emblems on their banners, flags, and weapons. They chose designs to represent warriors, such as arrows, dragons, and bats. By the 17th century, the common people used family crests as well. The symbols they chose include more familiar objects, such as rabbits, mountains, and tools.

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The *aoi* (hollyhock) was the crest of the *Tokugawa-shōgun* family, which reigned over Japan from the 17th through the 19th centuries.



This *mon* has Mt. Fuji and a sailboat in a circle. Mountains are used for *mon* as well. *Takeda Shingen*, a *samurai* in the *sengoku* (Warring States) era, used one of them for the design on his banner.



A *mon* whose design is a Chinese character



Yama-ni-kasumi: a mist hanging over a mountain



The *tsuru* (crane) is a lucky bird in Japan. It often appears in Japanese folk tales.



Chō: butterfly



Fundō: balance



Isé-ebi-maru: lobster

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Further Resources

Search the internet for the following Taiko groups and artists. Look for videos of performances, interviews, and photos:

- Taiko Groups: Osuwa Daiko, KODO, Ondekoza, Shidara, Yamato, San Francisco Taiko Dojo, San Jose Taiko, Kinnara Taiko, of course, Odaiko New England.
- Taiko Artists: Seiichi Tanaka, Daihachi Oguchi, Eitetsu Hayashi, Kenny Endo, PJ Hirabayashi, Tiffany Tamaribuchi, Kris Bergstrom, Unit One, Yuta Kato

Books:

- The Way of Taiko by Heidi Varian & Seiichi Tanaka
- Taiko Boom: Japanese Drumming in Place and Motion by Shawn Bender
- Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy, & the Body Politic in Asian American Taiko by Deborah Wong

Websites:

1. www.taikosource.com
2. www.taiko.com

Curricular Connections

Music K-12

Creating

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. Improvise short original musical ideas. (M.Cr.01)
2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. Connect multiple original musical ideas together into a single piece. (M.Cr.02)
3. Refine and complete artistic work. Explore different musical ideas by experimenting with the voice or instruments. (.M.Cr.03)

Performing

6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (M.P.06)

Responding

7. Perceive and analyze artistic work. (M.R.07)
8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (.M.R.8)
9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. Demonstrate active listening as an audience member (e.g., noticing details, making connections). (M.R.09)

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Connecting

10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. Make connections between personal experience and a musical work. (M.Co.10)

11. Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. Identify how musical ideas and traditions migrate with the people who originated them to affect other cultures, historical periods, and musical genres and styles (e.g., immigrant European folk music). (M.Co.11)

History/Social Science K-12

K.Topic 2. Geography: connections among places [K.T2]

Topic 3: History: shared traditions [K.T3]

Gr. 1 Topic 2. Geography: places to explore [1.T2]

Gr. 2 Topic 2. Geography and its effects on people [2.T2]

Topic 3. History: migrations and cultures [2.T3]

World Geography and Ancient Civilizations II Topic 2. East Asia [7.T2]

Physical and political geography of East Asia [7.T2a]

Early East Asian societies, religions, and cultures Ancient China, c. 1600 BCE–500 CE [7.T2b]