

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 Artists

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 explore the techniques of Japanese taiko drumming.
2. To understand the history of Japanese taiko drumming and its historical and contemporary role in Japanese culture and traditions.

Essential Questions

1. What is the role of taiko drumming in Japanese culture and traditions?
2. What performance techniques are used to create different sounds on the taiko drums, and how are they incorporated into Japanese ceremonies?
3. How has the history of taiko drumming shaped the art form today?

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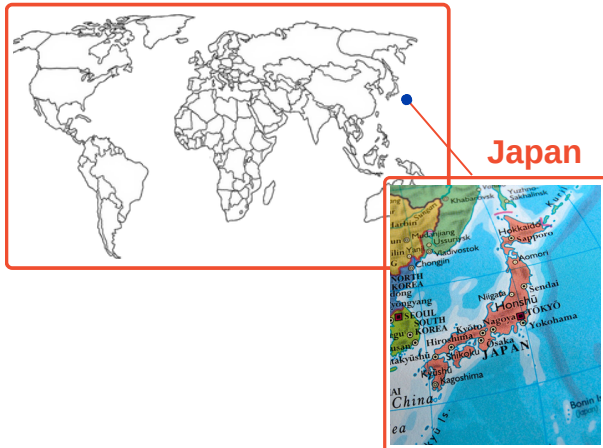
Vocabulary

- **Beat:** the steady pulse of a song or piece of music
- **Rhythm:** a strong pattern of notes or beats in music
- **Percussion instruments:** musical instruments sounded by striking, shaking or scraping
- **Composition:** a piece of music, art, or literature
- **Ceremony:** a formal act or series of acts performed 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 also the name of the art form.

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[Watch on Youtube: Kodo - “O-Daiko” video](#)

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Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What do you know about the country, culture, language, or religion of Japan? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
- What percussion instruments do you know? How are they played? What type(s) of music do they play?
- What does the taiko drum remind you of? What kind of sound do you think this drum will make?

Pre-Performance Activity: Making Rhythms

Learning Goals:

- To identify and explore rhythm in everyday life
- To create rhythmic sounds and patterns



Directions:

1. Discuss rhythm as a strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound. How do you define rhythm? How do you feel a rhythmic pattern?
2. Identify the rhythms that you hear or see on a daily basis. What creates these rhythms? How could you make or imitate those rhythms yourself?
3. In small groups, explore the different percussive sounds you can make with your body by snapping your fingers, clapping your hands, stomping your feet, etc. Experiment with putting these sounds together in a repeating pattern to make a rhythm.
4. Have each group demonstrate their rhythm for the class. Repeat the pattern until everyone can do it together.
5. Discuss the similarities and differences between each group's rhythms. What sounds were used? Were there any surprising sounds? What characteristics could describe each rhythm?

Extensions:

- Ask students to choose favorite songs to play for the class (on Spotify, YouTube, etc.). Clap along to the beat of the song. Then, try the different original rhythmic patterns from the activity along with the music. Are you able to sync the rhythm to the beat of the music? Do certain rhythms feel better with specific songs? Why or why not?
- Have each small group pick a song they know well and find a recording to play (on Spotify, YouTube, etc.). Create a rhythm using body percussion that fits to the beat and feel of the song. How is this process similar or different to the original activity?

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Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What instruments did Odaiko New England use in their performance? How were they played?
- What was your favorite part of the performance? What did it teach you?
- How does the music from the performance compare to the music you listen to?

Post-Performance Activity: Japanese Family Crests

Learning Goals:

- To explore the art form of Japanese family crests
- To create an original crest design

Materials:

“Japanese Family Crests” worksheet (see page 5),
white paper, pencils, black markers,
optional: drafting compasses (to make circles)



Directions:

1. Discuss *mon* (Japanese family crests). Review the “Japanese Family Crests” worksheet as a class. Notice the shape of the crests and the symbols used.
2. Have students brainstorm ideas for their own crest based on their personality, interests, and hobbies. Think about how to represent these ideas graphically.
3. On white paper, have students draw 5-10 circles (using a drafting compass, if possible). Fill the circles with sketches of different ideas from Step 2. Experiment to see what works best as a small shape. Think about which parts of the design will be white and which parts will be black.
4. Have each student pick their favorite design to make as their final crest. Draw a large circle on a new piece of white paper and add the final design. Use black marker to create contrast.
5. Share the crests with the class. Ask each student to talk about their process and how their crest represents them.

Extension:

Create stamps of the crests. Ask your art teacher if they have stamp making supplies, or use erasers and an ink pad. Transfer the stamp design to the carving block or eraser. Carefully carve out the parts of the design that are meant to be white. Roll with ink or dip in an ink pad, then stamp onto paper.

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

- [Odaiko New England Website](#)
- [The Kennedy Center's Digital Japanese Arts Collection](#)
- **Other Taiko Groups:** Osuwa Daiko, KODO, Ondekoza, Shidara, Yamato, San Francisco Taiko Dojo, San Jose Taiko, Kinnara Taiko
- **Taiko Artists:** Seiichi Tanaka, Daihachi Oguchi, Eitetsu Hayashi, Kenny Endo, PJ Hirabayashi, Tiffany Tamaribuchi, Kris Bergstrom, Unit One, Yuta Kato
- Bender, Shawn: *Taiko Boom: Japanese Drumming in Place and Motion*, University of California Press (2012)
- Lendroth, Susan: *Natsumi!*, G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers (2018)
- Varian, Heidi and Seiichi Tanaka: *The Way of Taiko*, Stone Bridge Press (2005)
- Wong, Deborah: *Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy, & the Body Politic in Asian American Taiko*, University of California Press (2019)



Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Music

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (M.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (M.Cr.02)

Performing

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

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (M.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (M.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (M.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (M.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (M.Co.11)

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Curricular Connections, continued

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

History and Social Science

K

- Topic 1: Civics: classroom citizenship (HSS.K.T1)
- Topic 3: History: shared traditions (HSS.K.T3)

Grade 1

- Topic 1: Civics: communities, elections, and leadership (HSS.1.T1)
- Topic 3: History: unity and diversity in the United States (HSS.1.T3)

Grade 2

- Topic 3: History: migrations and cultures (HSS.2.T3)

Grade 7

- Topic 2a: Physical and political geography of East Asia (HSS.7.T2a)
- Topic 2c: Ancient Japan and Korea, c. 300 BCE-1300 CE (HSS.7.T2c)

Grades 9-12

- World History I: Topic 1: Dynamic interactions among regions of the world (HSS.WHI.T1)
- World History I: Topic 3: Interactions of kingdoms and empires c. 1000-1500 (HSS.WHI.T3)
- World History II: Topic 3: The global effects of 19th century imperialism (HSS.WHII.T3)

