



Young
Audiences
Arts for
Learning
Massachusetts

Odaiko New England: Taiko Thunder

For Educators

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.

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?

Important Vocabulary to Pre-Teach

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

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

1. How is taiko drumming different than other drumming you have heard or seen? What elements make taiko drumming special?
2. What is the relationship between the movements of the drummers, the size of the drums and the dynamic level of the sound the drums produce?
3. What ways were the taiko used in Japanese culture? Can you think of other cultures that use musical instruments for things other than making music?
4. What methods can we use to teach and learn rhythms? Can you think of other cultures that pass down music via an oral tradition?
5. When did the modern art form of kumi-daiko start?



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Photos for pre-show discussion. Left courtesy of Getty Images by Paul Dymond. Top and bottom right, *Odaiko New England*, courtesy of Young Audiences of MA.



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



Odaiko New England: Taiko Thunder

For Students

About the Program

Odaiko New England: Taiko Thunder is coming to your school. Get ready to learn about the ancient art form of taiko (Japanese drumming) and its importance in Japanese culture.

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.

Pre-Performance 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.

Post-Performance 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

Image courtesy of www.japan.travel