

The Drum and Maracas:

Learning about Musical Instruments in African-American History

Focus Question: Why do we listen to music?

Outcomes for the week:

- Students will identify the djembe drum from West Africa.
- Students will explain how the drum was used before African people were brought to the United States.
- Students will explain how the drum was used once arriving in America.
- Students will be able to identify a buffalo drum used by the Piscataway people who lived in Prince George's County before colonization.
- Students will read the book *Mariah's Maracas* and instruments from the African diaspora.

Resources for Teacher to build knowledge base:

- Capital News Service coverage of Piscataway Native people:
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=komwUPOlcco>) (2nd-5th grade teachers)
- Ghana and the Djembe drum:*
<https://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/exploreorg/00000144-0a36-d3cb-a96c-7b3f7f180000> (pretty awesome video to show your students)
- Maracas are descendants of the West African Kashaka.* Watch a video about Kashakas:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3G-F1sN_MA (this is pretty awesome and may be great to show the students)

Lesson #1: Music in Africa

Estimated Facilitation Time: 40 min- 1 hour (Early childhood educators teaching P-1st grade may consider breaking this lesson up to spread throughout the week. Teachers of 2nd-5th grade can present in a day or modify as appropriate as well.)

Purpose: This activity is designed to help students begin to understand that African-American history began on the continent of Africa. Also, students will learn that the drum was used for many reasons other than purely entertainment.

Prep Time: Possibly 30 minutes

Find pictures of Black people playing the maracas (and/or the kashakas) and the djembe drum and bring enough images for each student to hold a picture in their hands. You may prefer to print images from the internet which may be easier to find than looking through magazines. You may also want to show a video of djembe playing.

K-1 Facilitation Guide:

- Bring students together in a meeting area where they can all see you and the board you will use to post images. You might want to have a whistle, horn, bell laid out for them to see and touch.

2. **Literacy and Language Development:** Tell them that today we are going to talk about a drum called a djembe. But, first, you want to ask them some questions. “When you are in the car with a grown-up and are in a hurry and want the person in front of them to drive quicker, what do they honk on their steering wheel?” All or some of them will say the correct answer which is “Horn”. Pick up your horn and honk it. Tell them that the horn is honked which is a message for someone to move out of the way. When someone is at your door and they want to let you know that they are there so you can open the door, they either knock or ring the what?” Some or all of the children will say the correct answer, “Bell”. You will ring your bell. “When the referee of a football or basketball game wants to tell a player they are out of bounds, they may yell the words ‘out of bounds’ or blow this instrument which they wear around their neck. What is this instrument called?” Some or all of the children will say “Whistle”. Tell them that the horn, bell and whistle are instruments that can make music and give a message to another person. The djembe drum from the country Guinea in West Africa was used as both a musical instrument and way to share messages. Pass out pictures you pulled from the internet of Black people playing the djembe or holding a djembe drum. Let them look and ask you questions before collecting them back and putting one picture on the board as you talk more.
3. **Content Area:** Tell them that in Africa, each family had a family drum that was used to send messages. Each family had their own drum rhythm. Beat a drum rhythm either on your own djembe drum or on the table. Drum a simple rhythm and have them repeat the pattern back. Help them use the table as their drum to play their own special drum beat. (OPTIONAL: Pass out plastic maracas. Explain that maracas were created based on an African instrument called the kashaka. Show the video of the kashakas. This is optional and may be better for another day. Use your judgment.)
4. **Ask:** What kind of sound do drums/maracas make? How are they different? How are they the same? Let the students make different sounds with their instrument. (Have the students put their maracas in their bookbags or collect the maracas after allowing them playing time if you moved forward with the maraca conversation). (5 min)
5. **Transition Activity:** Distribute coloring page of djembe drum and maracas. After they finish coloring their drums and maracas, show them the video of people playing the drums.
6. **Transition Activity:** Read the book *Mariah’s Maracas* by Khadijah Z. Ali-Coleman if you have begun introducing maracas. If you have not introduced maracas with the drum, then this transition activity may be used for an opening activity the next day as you continue your conversation on instruments of the African diaspora. (10-15 minutes)
7. **OPTIONAL:** Maraca-making activity and a drum decorating activity can be incorporated if this lesson is broken into two separate lessons. The maraca making activity includes getting dried beans and putting them in empty spring water bottles allowing the children to decorate them. The drum making activity includes using empty oatmeal or coffee cannisters and allowing children to glue pre-cut construction paper shapes and animals on their cannisters before using them as drums.

Materials

- a. Coloring pages of the djembe and maracas.
- b. *Mariah’s Maracas* by Khadijah Z. Ali-Coleman
- c. OPTIONAL: plastic maracas to preface the reading of *Mariah’s Maracas*

2nd-5th grade Facilitation Guide:

1. Bring students together in a meeting area where they can all see you and the board you choose to post images. It is also ideal for them to have access to crayons, paper and the ability to draw while still listening and paying attention to you.
2. **Focusing Student Attention:** Tell them that today we are going to talk about music. Ask them what their favorite type of music is. Help them understand that all of their favorite music includes the drum. Play some Afrobeat music and let them listen for a few minutes before moving on. Tell them that the drum comes from the continent of Africa. Tell them that people who are called African-American have early family members who came from different countries in Africa like the drum.
3. **Introductory and Developmental Conversation:** Remind them of the lesson on community and neighborhoods. “Remember when we talked about neighborhoods and communities? Well, when our ancestors were in Africa, they had communities that they called tribes. Each tribal community in Africa had a person in charge of playing the drum. The drummer was responsible for using the drum to announce when a family was arriving and when they were about to make an announcement. They used the drum during celebrations and to tell stories. What instruments do we use today to send messages?” Some students will give the answers you want which are “the horn”, “the bell” and the “whistle”. Discuss what messages these instruments are telling and then select a drum video to reinforce this message. Here are some:
<http://tinyowl.co.uk/around-the-world-with-the-drum/>
4. **Content-Based Reading:** Make a hand-out or write on the board the following passage: The djembe drum is found in all of West Africa, where it is one of the most common instruments. The name Djembe is pronounced without pronouncing the letter “d”. It means “everyone gather together” and defines the drum’s purpose. Drums were important parts of families. They helped spread messages. (5 min)
5. **Content-based art opportunity:** The museum has a list of djembe players you may invite to your class to give an interactive demo with your students. If you are not able to bring in a djembe player, consider bringing in empty coffee cans and oatmeal cylinder cans for students to use as drums. Allow them to practice playing a drum pattern with their makeshift drums. Think-Pair-Share: In partnerships, have them create a drum pattern that they would use for a birthday celebration. Have each partnership share.
6. **Closing assessment Activity:** Ask students to write a paragraph sharing what they learned about the djembe drum. You might want to associate another reading comprehension activity with this assessment activity, assigning as a homework assignment. Use the handout about Jabari and his family’s drum.

Materials:

- a. Empty oatmeal and coffee cans, one for each student
- b. OPTIONAL: If time allows, you may want your students to decorate their drums with constructive paper, glue, markers and stickers.

Extensions: Have an instrument petting zoo. This “zoo” will feature different instruments from different places within the African diaspora. This petting zoo is a great preface to beginning the

discussion as you hone into the djembe or the djembe and maracas. The song “When I play the drums” by Uncle Devin is a great song to play while the children have instruments to play along with the song. You can listen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUAQn9boUI0&list=PLZLzjXJGwgIT719dhZpt8N63DwaqamSbJ&index=12&t=0s>