

DRUMBEATS: Catch the Beat! Unit of Study

Introduction

This unit of study was developed by a team of music specialists from Northeast Indiana: Diane Barton, Perry Hill Elementary School, Northeast Allen County School Corporation; Wendy Bloom, Haley Elementary School, Fort Wayne Community Schools; and Dorothy Kittaka, Haverhill Elementary School, Southwest Allen County School Corporation, in conjunction with the *DRUMBEATS: A Percussion Experience* exhibit at the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis. It is designed for elementary arts and classroom teachers to use in correlation with, or independently from the exhibit. The unit’s objective is to teach elementary students in grades K – 5 the cultural use of percussion instruments in Africa. It covers *who, what, when, where, why, and how* Africans use percussion to *create* and *communicate*, by utilizing integrated curriculum lesson plans linking music, language arts and social studies.

Main ideas

- Music functions as the most important cohesive force in everyday African life.
- Stories, folk tales and percussion music help us learn about everyday life in Africa.
- Percussion is used to create and communicate in Africa.

The unit was written using a discipline-based music education approach. It provides content that helps students focus on how musical understanding is developed through four disciplines:

- **Historical and Social Context** — understanding the relationship of music to history and culture to discover how humans have expressed ideas and experiences in sound throughout history.
- **Production** — improvising and performing music to give students a pathway for communicating ideas and expression.
- **Aesthetics** — expressing personal preferences for specific musical works and styles, responding to music intellectually and emotionally, valuing music’s importance in life, and making aesthetic judgments about music.
- **Criticism** — listening to, analyzing and critically examining music using higher level thinking skills such as comparing, contrasting, discriminating, and discussing to make value judgments about musical sounds and compositions.

Proficiencies

The National Standards for Music Education have been used as a framework for the music curriculum content and process in this unit:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding the relationship between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

The unit addresses the following Indiana Language Arts Proficiencies and Competencies:

- Participating in creative dramatics
- Discussing personal experiences
- Listening with enjoyment to storytelling
- Comprehending stories
- Telling why they like to listen to something
- Categorizing
- Asking and answering questions
- Sharing ideas
- Listening and responding
- Comprehending audio-visual materials and electronic media
- Making critical judgments
- Following directions
- Collaborating in groups
- Comparing arts from different cultures
- Comparing and contrasting

The unit addresses the following Indiana Social Studies Proficiencies and Competencies:

- People have similarities and differences.
- People learn from each other in many different ways.
- Practice citizenship through participation in group activities.
- Inquiry skills — using technology, electronic and print media to get information.
- Examine the contributions of various racial and ethnic groups.
- Identify and celebrate the diverse cultural and ethnic contributions.
- Identify common elements of world cultures and American diverse cultures.
- Examine the influence of diverse cultures.

The unit addresses the following Indiana Science Proficiencies and Competencies:

- Materials and manufacturing
- Structure of matter
- Energy transformation
- Manipulation and observation as a “science habit of mind”
- Technology and science

The unit addresses the following Indiana Math Proficiencies and Competencies:

- Develop an understanding of whole numbers and fractions.
- Develop problem-solving abilities.
- Recognize and make connections.
- Develop an understanding of geometric terms.
- Recognize and develop mathematical connections.

The unit addresses the following Indiana Fine Arts Proficiencies and Competencies:

- Learning opportunities provided in creative movement.
- Movement demonstrating individual expressive attitudes.
- Perceiving and responding to visual qualities of works.
- Classifying works of art from world cultures throughout history
- Personally responding to works of art.
- Creating with three dimensional media.

Unit Outline: Lesson Plans Grades K-2

- I. *Who, what, when, where, why and how* do Africans use percussion to *create and communicate*?
 - A. What are percussion instruments: strikers, shakers, scrapers? Play a game to identify and categorize percussion instruments.
 - B. Make your own percussion instrument from found objects in your environment.
 - C. Create a polyrhythm ensemble and play your homemade percussion instruments.
 - D. Learn how African people communicate with signal drum music.
 - E. Use your own percussion instrument to improvise signals and communicate with other members of your music class.
- II. *Stories, folk tales, and percussion (music) help us learn about everyday life in Africa.*
 - A. Learn about the African mbira and listen to selections of mbira music.
 - B. Make mbiras to use along with other African instruments in improvising an original accompaniment to enhance the telling of an African folk tale, entitled, *Why Mosquitoes Buzz In People's Ears*, retold by Verna Aardema.

Unit Outline: Lesson Plans Grades 3-5

- I. *Who, what, when, where, why, and how do Africans use percussion to create and communicate?*
 - A. Participate in a webquest to learn geographical and cultural information about Africa.
 - B. Participate in a webquest to learn about African music, dance and culture.
 - C. Participate in a webquest to locate, learn about and listen to African percussion instruments.
 - D. Participate in a webquest to learn how to play polyrhythms from polyrhythm charts in a dance/drumming ensemble using West African percussion instruments.
 - E. Create polyrhythm charts from a template and compose polyrhythms to play on African percussion instruments, found objects and/or homemade percussion instruments.
 - F. Participate in a webquest to learn about the African amadinda (xylophone). Learn cross rhythm and hocketing polyrhythms from online polyrhythm charts to play on the amadinda to accompany the African song entitled, *mwana wange* (song learned from the same polyrhythm chart). Learn about the accompanying baakisimba dance/drumming ensemble.
 - G. Learn about the West African balafone and its unique link to the West African griots, historians and master musicians.
 - H. Learn how to find and make homemade percussion instruments to play polyrhythms that accompany African songs and dances. Learn how to organize an African drum circle to perform dance/drumming music from polyrhythm charts with African percussion instruments, found objects and/or homemade percussion instruments.
 - I. Learn about the South African mbira and its relationship to African culture.
- II. *Stories, folk tales, and percussion (music) help us learn about everyday life in Africa.*
 - A. Learn about the cultural importance of the griot in Africa by exploring the West African folk tale, entitled, *The Singing Man*, by Angela Medearis.
 - B. Learn about the shekere (African gourd rattle) and compose a rhythm accompaniment for the African folk tale entitled, *Why the Hare Is Always On The Run* retold by Susan Milord in *Tales Alive!* with the shekere, body percussion patterns and xylophones.

Unit Lesson Plan Introduction: Catch the Beat in Africa!

The beat of percussion can be heard everywhere around us! There are percussion instruments in our homes, even hidden among things we consider junk! The sounds of percussion can be heard in our schools and communities. There are also percussion instruments and performers in various places and cultures throughout the world. Let's zoom in to learn *who, what, when, where, why, and how* the people of Africa use percussion to *create* and *communicate*. *Let's catch the beat in Africa!*

Music functions as the most important cohesive force in everyday African life.

African music falls into several categories:

- *functional music* — work songs, hunting songs, cow herding songs, harvest songs, war songs
- *signal drum music*
- *social /recreational music* — cradle songs, play songs, game songs, social dance/drumming ensemble music, folk songs, folk tale/story songs, wedding songs, funeral songs, solo/group songs, reflective songs
- *“talking drum” songs*
- modern *“highlife”* music
- *ceremonial music*, — court songs, historical songs, political songs or *“praise”* songs, which are the cultural and historical songs of *master drummers* and *griots*
- *ritualistic music* — the music of the cults, secret societies, and *drum batteries*.

Stories, folk tales, and percussion (music) help us learn about everyday life in Africa

Percussion, singing, storytelling and dance in African culture

Percussion (music), storytelling and dance are at the center of the lives of people in Africa and bind African society. Unlike Western performances with performers and an audience, African performances are collective, community experiences that encourage group learning and spontaneous participation. Rarely does a group to listen to a performer in Africa without joining in. Africans structure their percussion (music), storytelling and dance for all levels of expertise, each of which is essential in teaching cultural values, history, societal expectations and community life. Percussion (music), storytelling, and dance surround Africans from birth through all stages of life; from childhood to courtship, marriage, work, religious and social celebrations, illness, business matters, family history and funerals.

Percussion is used to create and communicate in Africa

African percussion instruments

Membranophones

What instrument comes to mind when you think of African music? Drums, of course! Drums are the most important percussion instrument in Africa. They come in a variety of shapes and sounds and are played in various settings, using several different techniques. Drums are included in a classification

of percussion instruments called *membranophones* — instruments that produce sound when a membrane or animal skin stretched across the end of a resonating chamber vibrates. The skin is struck with a hand or stick to produce the sound. The body or resonating chamber of the instrument is made of an object easily found in a particular geographical area. The pitch of a membranophone may be changed by tightening or loosening the skin. Some African drums are not membranophones, however, because they are not made with skin heads. A *slit log drum*, for example, sounds when slits of varying lengths are carved into a log and are then struck to produce a variety of pitches.

Idiophones

Another category of commonly used African percussion instruments is *idiophones*. Idiophones produce sound through the use of the naturally resonant material. They do not require a membrane or string to produce sound. They are instruments whose bodies vibrate to produce sound when struck, scraped or shaken. There are two categories of idiophones:

unpitched — *shekeres* (calabash rattles) and other rattles, single and double *iron bells*, *clappers* and *castanets*, *clapping sticks*, and *stamping tubes*; and

pitched — *mbira* (thumb piano), *slit log drums*, and *amadindas* and *balafons* (*xylophones*).

Shekeres and rattles are the most common idiophones in Africa and are made from gourd calabashes, shell, and seeds. Single and double iron bells are used to lay the “*timekeeper*” polyrhythm foundation in African percussion ensembles.

Chordophones and areophones

Although they are not extensively discussed in this unit, two other classifications of instruments, *aerophones* and *chordophones*, are also common throughout the continent. Aerophones produce sound by the vibration of a column of air. Examples include as *whistles*, *flutes*, *pan pipes*, *horns*, *trumpets*, *reed pipes*, and *oboes* made from animal tusks and horns, bamboo, wood, shells, gourds and clay. Chordophones produce sound by the vibration of strings. They come in many varieties and can be divided into three categories:

- those whose strings are plucked, such as *mouth bows*, *lyres*, *harps*, *harp guitars*, *lutes*, and *zithers*;
- those whose strings are struck, such as *struck musical bows* and *dulcimer* type chordophones; and
- those whose strings are bowed, such as *friction bows* and *tube fiddles*.

The buzz on buzzing!

Africans love their music, percussion and otherwise, to buzz! They often attach pieces of metal to percussion instruments to add extra *buzzing* or vibrating sounds when the instruments are played. Some instruments, such as the *mbira* (thumb piano) naturally vibrate or make a buzzing sound. African dancers will often wear metal, wood, shell or gourd rattles on their wrists and ankles to add a buzzing effect to dance music. This affection for “the buzz” is also heard in African vocal music. Buzzing is also used to compliment the sound of chordophones and rattles are added to the resonators on musical bows, harps, lyres, lutes and zithers.

African polyrhythms

Compared to us, most Africans are experts at rhythm and percussion, and know how to build complex rhythmic structures in songs and rhythm pieces played on percussion instruments. They are so good at rhythm they don’t even begin with a steady beat to build rhythmic patterns! Instead they start with an *iron bell* playing an initial rhythm pattern called the “*timekeeper*” *rhythm*. Then, they layer several other rhythm patterns played by various percussion instruments. This music then culminates with the rhythmically complex drumbeat of the *master drummer*. Then they add body percussion, singers and dancers!

These carefully built layers of rhythm are called *polyrhythms*. Africans like to make these complex

rhythms overlap and/or play off one another by using an *interplay of polyrhythms* technique called *cross rhythms* and/or *hocketing*. This involves instruments trading off parts of the interlocking rhythm pattern and/or melody. They also often like to play two pulses of rhythm against three pulses of rhythm. Often they do this with one hand playing the two-pulse pattern and the other hand playing the three-pulse pattern, one against the other on the same drum, by the same player at the same time! This interplay of polyrhythms also occurs with African melodies that are played or sung.

Call and response

In Africa, singing happens spontaneously and creatively in a *call and response* form where parts alternate between a *leader* and a *group*. The group responds to the leader's call, echoing it exactly or replying to it with a phrase that completes or compliments its meaning.

Body percussion

In the large group settings where most African music is made, adults and children alike accompany drumming, singing and dancing with *hand clapping*, *body percussion*, *mouth sounds* and *foot stamping*. This assures everyone's full participation in the music. In such a setting, an adult holding a child in his/her lap often grasps the child's hands and claps various rhythms. As these informal lessons take place time after time, rhythm eventually becomes second nature to an African child.

Movement , dance and visual display

In Africa, percussion, singing, storytelling and dance are performed simultaneously to dramatize and communicate tribal history and beliefs, as well as to convey matters of personal and social importance. Various movements, postures and facial expressions are used both for individual expression and in mimed dramatic dances called *dance dramas*. These are social and historical dramatizations performed at ritualistic or ceremonial occasions. On such occasions, various types of *visual displays*, such as special make up, body painting, head dresses, costumes, ornaments, hairstyles, geometrical paintings on instruments and masks are used to represent special characters, ancestral spirits, mythological beings or gods.