

San Jose Taiko

San Jose Taiko
**School Outreach
Curriculum Guide**

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INTRODUCTION

The materials in this study guide are designed to give your class supplementary information and activities to enhance the performance given at/for your school by San Jose Taiko. The activities in this study guide were inspired by educators who recognize the role of the arts in education to stimulate learning. Creative writing, visual art, music, and sensory activities are included.

America is a country of cultural diversity, composed of individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Through the sharing of cultural music, much can be learned about the value and belief systems of each. San Jose Taiko performs the art of Japanese drumming. By playing Japanese-American music we honor our cultural roots. We draw from a traditional source, yet still express ourselves as Americans. By sharing our music we take pride in our heritage, and hope to encourage others to have pride in their own cultural backgrounds. With our school program we hope to expand children’s knowledge of Japanese music and culture. With our drumming we hope to cross cultural boundaries, by opening hearts and minds to the joy of music.



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Artistic Background

ORIGINS OF THE TAIKO

The Tale of Amaterasu and the Cave tells of the mythological origin of the taiko (drum) and drummer in Japan. The following is one version of the tale.

One day long ago, the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu was visited by her brother Susano, the Storm God. He carelessly let loose his horses in her rice fields to feed them. Amaterasu's crops were destroyed and she became very angry. So great was her anger that she hid away inside a cave vowing never to come out.

The people on earth began to worry. If Amaterasu remained in the cave there would be no more sunshine upon the earth. Without sunshine, the earth would be dark and cold and crops would not grow. Surely they would die. So the people prayed to the gods and goddesses to help them. Finally, Uzume, the Goddess of Mirth came forward.

Uzume went to the cave entrance and began a joyous dance upon a hollow log (barrel). She stomped her feet, beating out wild and inviting rhythms. Inside the cave Amaterasu's curiosity grew. She had to find out what was making the wonderful sounds. Outside the cave entrance the gods and goddesses held a great mirror (the first mirror made by the gods). When Amaterasu peeked out of the cave, her great radiance was captured by the mirror. Amaterasu was so delighted by her beautiful reflection that she forgot her anger and sunshine was restored to the earth.



The goddess Uzume dancing at the entrance to the cave. To lure Amaterasu out of the cave, she invents the first drum, and by stomping out rhythms with her feet, becomes the first taiko drummer.



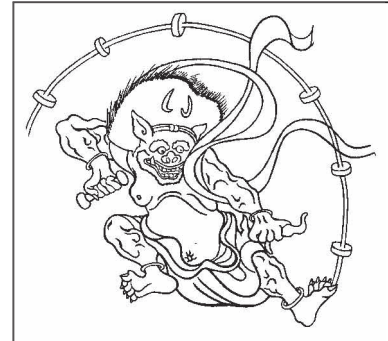
Artistic Background

TAIKO HISTORY

The Japanese word “taiko” (tye-koh) means drum. The directness and immediacy of the drum has made it an important musical instrument in many cultures. The Japanese have used the drum for many reasons. An early practical use of the taiko was to determine the boundaries of the village. A village was as large as the booming sound of the drum would carry. In feudal times the drum was used in battle as military music, to give courage to the samurai warriors, and to intimidate the enemy. Taiko is also found in other areas of Japanese culture. It is used in various types of theater, and is one of the fundamental instruments in the music of the Imperial Court.

Drums play an important part in Japanese religions. In the Shinto belief system, all natural phenomena, the mountains, fire, water, and animals contain a spiritual deity. The taiko is used as a voice to call these gods to give thanks or pray to them. The Japanese folk believed that their music was an offering to the deities, which would bring them good luck. For this reason the taiko was often at the center of many folk festivals. Farmers played the taiko believing that its thunder-like sound would bring rain for their crops. Fishermen played the taiko to ask for a good harvest of fish. At other festivals the drum is played to dispel evil spirits, ward off sickness, or give thanks for prosperity. In the Buddhist religion, rather than calling the gods, taiko is the voice of the Buddha. It is the voice of wisdom and compassion, truth, and beauty, calling out to instruct the people.

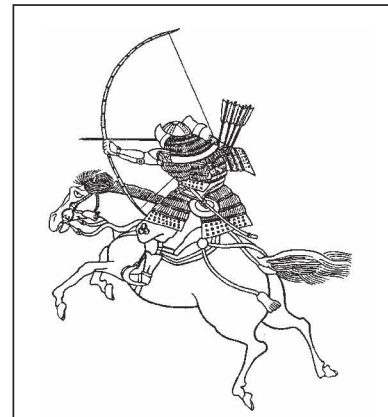
The drum is believed to have a kami, a spirit of its own. It is associated with the changing of the seasons, the cycles of nature, and the celebration of life. Taiko is deeply imbedded in the traditions of the Japanese people and can perhaps be considered the essence, the heartbeat of the Japanese spirit.



Thunder god hammering on his drums



New Year's Festival Drummer



Samurai Warrior



Artistic Background

SAN JOSE TAIKO

San Jose Taiko was formed in 1973 by Asian Americans searching for an artistic expression that could combine their cultural heritage with their diverse experiences in the United States. As the third taiko group to form in North America, many of the founding members of the group were third generation Japanese Americans, who looked to Japan for their initial inspiration. The instrument they selected, because of its symbolism and possibilities, was the Japanese drum, known as *taiko*.

Founded in San Jose Japantown, San Jose Taiko (SJT) is committed to creating new dimensions in Asian American music, by using the taiko as its principal instrument. Respecting the tradition and the origin of taiko as its philosophical basis, SJT has created a riveting percussive art form that synthesizes cross cultural rhythms to music, theatre, athletics and dance. For SJT, the taiko evokes the beauty and harmony of the human spirit, linking the cultural past to the vitality of the present.

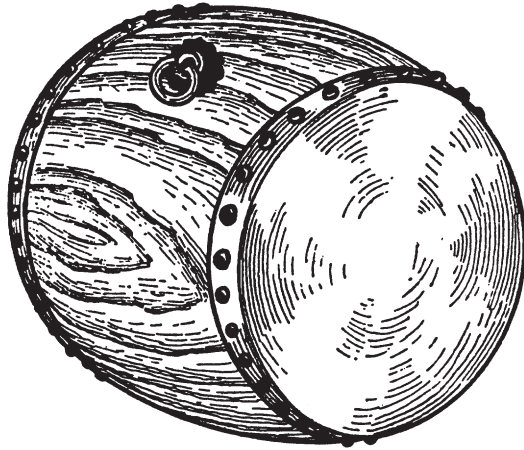
Taiko has the ability to bring people together, magically dissolving the separation between player and audience. All become ONE as they experience the joy and power of the drum. This exchange of energy is what makes the taiko artform so special and continues to renew and transform all who experience it.





Performance Background

THE DRUMS

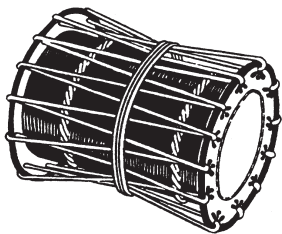


Odaiko/Chudaiko/Josuke

(oh-dye-koh/choo-due-koh/joh-zoo-keh)

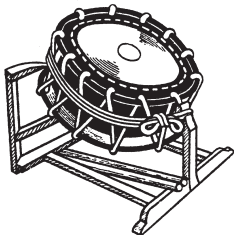
large bass drum/middle sized drum/lead or melody drum

The traditional **taiko** in Japan are made out of a hollowed tree trunk. Taiko makers in America often use oak wine barrels for the body of the drum. Cow hide is stretched across the top and tacked down to create the head or playing surface. The larger the drum body the deeper the sound. Originally goat and mule skins were used to head the drums.



Okedo (oh-keh-doh)

A cylindrical shaped drum, the heads of the *okedo* are attached by lashed rope. This drum also comes in various sizes from very large, to a size that can be carried as it is played.



Shime (shee-meh)

In Japanese, the verb “to tie” is *shimeru* (shee-meh-roo). The heads of this smaller drum are tied together tightly by rope to create a high pitched sound. Tying requires a one or two person pulling system. These drums must be tied each time they are played.



Uchiwa (oo-chee-wah)

The Japanese word *uchiwa* means fan. This drum is shaped like a fan, and held in the hand when played. Its original use was by the temple monks who would beat the *uchiwa* to keep time while they chanted.



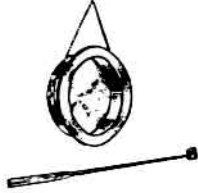
Bachi (bah-chee)

Sticks of varying sizes, used to play the drum. Large *bachi* are used for large drums, small *bachi* for smaller drums. They are made in varieties of wood, most commonly the Japanese oak.



Performance Background

PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS



Atarigane (*ah-tah-ree-gah-neh*)

A small brass gong held in the hand and played with mallet. The mallet head is made of deer antler bone and set on a bamboo stick. By hitting different parts of the gong a variety of tones can be produced. It is normally struck on the inside.



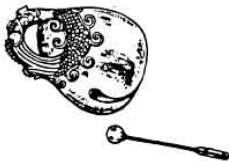
Chappa (*chahp-pah*)

Small hand cymbals made of metal. The size and nature of this instrument, allows the player freedom of movement.



Hyoshigi (*heeyoh-shee-ghee*)

These hard wooden clappers are played in Noh theater during fight scenes. Their clatter adds greatly to the power of the fighting. Outside of the theater, the sound of the hyoshigi was once used by the fire watcher, to signal their night patrol. During the day the same hyoshigi were a signal of the kamishibai man, the candy vendor, calling the children of the neighborhood.



Mokugyo (*moh-kuo-gheeyoh*)

Wooden fish shaped slit gong, known in the West as a Chinese temple block. Originally used in temple ceremonies. It creates a 'clip-pidy clop' sound.



Sasara (*sah-sah-rah*)

A serpent like wooden rattle made out of small slats of wood that are strung together to produce a snapping sound. The sasara is played at the "snow festival". The men dance with them, always playing the "jat-jat" sound three times and always left-right-left.



Shinobue (*shee-noh-booeh*)

Although it is not a percussion instrument, this flute is heard at most folk festivals. Its melody combines well with the sound of the taiko. It is made of a simple narrow length of female shino bamboo, bound and finished lightly with lacquer. This versatile flute is also used in the music of Kabuki theater and other traditional Japanese narrative songs.



Performance Background

RHYTHM

What is rhythm? It is something that repeats itself aurally, visually, or physically. Rhythms can be found everywhere. Rhythms you can see are called patterns. You can see a pattern in a flock of birds, railroad tracks, or the rows of windows on a large office building. Movement also creates rhythm. For example, walking down the street, swinging in a swing, or simply brushing one's teeth creates a rhythm of the body. The easiest rhythms to identify are the ones you can hear. There are everyday rhythms in the ringing of the phone, a carpenter's hammering, or a dog barking. Within your body you have your own unique rhythm--your heartbeat.

Taiko music is composed of many rhythms, often repeated more than once. In musical terms, rhythm is defined as organized beats grouped in patterns which are repeated. Rhythm is one of the basic elements of music.

Different cultures have different methods of teaching rhythms. Much of western music is written in musical notation, a visual map of the music. In Africa, India, and Japan music is taught orally with sound patterns that are sung, repeated and played. The following is an example of a *Taiko* practice pattern called *Renshu* (ren-shoo). It is written to show western notation, the right and left hand pattern and the Japanese taiko oral rhythm vocabulary.

Pattern "C" of Renshu

R R L R R L R R L R L R L
DON KA RA DON KA RA DON KA RA KA RA KA RA



RHYTHM ACTIVITY

■ Purpose:

To identify how rhythm can become music. Students will identify simple rhythmic patterns that exist in everyday life that can be used to create percussive music.

■ Materials:

None needed. Samples of rhythmic music can be used for demonstration purposes.

■ Preparation:

Lead a discussion about rhythm. Ask students to identify everyday rhythms they can hear, see, and create with their movement. Students can find their heartbeats in their pulse and play this rhythm (some physical exertion will make the pulse easier to find). Students can also find different rhythmic patterns by simply saying their names. Discuss this musical experience as a class.

■ Exploration:

Ask the students to suggest different percussive sounds they can make with their bodies. Some suggestions are:

- clapping - gently slapping the knees, chest, thighs
- patting the desk with their hands
- snapping the fingers
- stomping feet on the floor

Get used to these sounds as a group. Ask students if they recall the rhythms they were asked to play during the performance. Using a call and response method (a technique of teaching in many cultures), clap a rhythm for the rest of the class to echo. Repeat the pattern until everyone can play it. Encourage each student to make up their own rhythm for the rest of the class to imitate. As the rhythms are being played, try to create a continuous flow from one rhythm to the next in order to create a clapping song.

■ Extension:

Try this activity with vocal sounds. The specific vocabulary of taiko sounds such as the Japanese *don*, *doro* and *ka* (pronounced *dohn* as in “loan”, *doh-roh*, *kah*) can be used, or students can create their own sounds.



Performance Background

COSTUME



The costume usually worn by taiko drummers for festivals consists of a *happi*, *hachimaki*, *obi*, and *tabi* worn with shorts or pants.



Happi/Hanten (hahp-pee/hahn-ten)

A simple jacket-like garment invented by the fire brigade of Edo (Tokyo) during the Edo period. “Happi” comes from the Chinese word for a chair covering, which it is said to resemble. Usually on the back of the happi is a symbol called a *mon*. The *mon* is the family crest possessed by every Japanese family.



Hachimaki (hah-chee-mah-kee)

A headband. It is said to be derived from a strip of cloth used by warriors to secure their helmets to their heads. This developed into a simple strip of cloth, usually printed with bright color, that is tied around the forehead before engaging in any kind of strenuous work or activity.



Obi (oh-bee)

A belt or sash. The type of obi used to hold a man’s style happi in place is made of thick, stiff fabric three to four inches wide and about three to five feet long. It is tightly wrapped twice around the body and tied in a decorative bow.



Tabi (tah-bee)

Japanese cotton socks with a separate space for the big toe. The carpenter style of happi, which is most commonly used by taiko players, has a rubber sole and can be worn as a shoe.

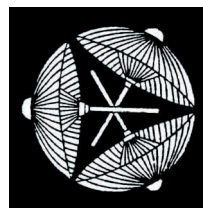


Performance Background

FAMILY CREST

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 designs of flowers and birds represent elegant images of court life. Later in the 12th century, when the samurai class took over the government, they used emblems on their banners, flags, and weapons. They chose designs to represent warriors, such as arrows, dragons, and bats. By the 17th century, family crests became used by the common people as well. The symbols they chose include more familiar objects, like rabbits, mountains and tools.

A great deal can be learned by examining the visual arts of another culture. The mon design tells something about the Japanese economic use of space. Japan is a small island, where many people have learned to live together without wasting space. It makes sense that Japanese design is very simple. The mon shown here are created to fit inside a small circular space; every shape, every line has a purpose to clearly describe the family symbol.



Left to right, top to bottom:
sailboat, taiko, turtle, maple leaf,
feathers, butterfly, parasol, axe.



FAMILY CREST

■ **Purpose:**

To understand the Japanese mon as a symbol for a family. Using Japanese design elements, students will create a mon to represent their own family.

■ **Materials:**

Paper, pencils and pens, or paint.

■ **Preparation:**

Review information on page 11. Discuss the family crests of other cultures. Discuss the possible meaning of the names of different students, such as Lake, Carpenter, Rose. Discuss the translation of names from other languages. Consider other possible sources for a family crest, such as a family business, a family interest, or attribute. Encourage students to discuss source ideas with their own families. With this information, have students select a specific symbol to represent their family.

■ **Exploration:**

Use the circle as a format (at least 8" in diameter). Have students work out a number of sketches/ideas for their mon. Students can select one design to execute in marker pen or paint. Encourage students to share their mon and discuss the process and choice of design.



KI (kee) ACTIVITY

■ **Premise:**

In order to understand other cultures it is important to become familiarized with their spiritual thought and practices, but these types of concepts are often difficult to explain to children. The use of breathing and meditation is basic to most Eastern religions. San Jose Taiko sets time aside to meditate before each taiko practice session as a way to focus and clear away the thoughts of the day. The following activity introduces the simple, non-denominational method of meditation used by San Jose Taiko.

■ **Explanation:**

Your vital life energy is called ki. In both taiko and the martial arts, the ki is one's spiritual energy and source of power. Zen masters, taiko players and martial artists all work at becoming stronger by cultivating their ki. Ki is one of the basic elements of San Jose Taiko's philosophy. The storage house for the ki is called the hara (hah-rah). Hara is a place inside the body. It is the center, a place of harmony. It is located approximately two fingers below the navel. An exercise which teaches how to become more aware of your ki is called hara breathing. Hara breathing is a form of meditation.

■ **Purpose:**

To give students an experience with meditation, and an Asian approach to life.

■ **Preparation:**

Arrange a space large enough for all students to sit comfortably on the floor.

(activity continued on next page)



KI (kee) ACTIVITY

■ Exploration:

Explain and discuss the information provided. Guide students through the following steps. Providing them with a vocalized count can give them a better sense of the pace required.

- 1) Sit on the floor in a position that is comfortable (cross-legged or on the knees is good).
- 2) Let your hands rest in a still position (on the knees or gently clasped together).
- 3) Maintain good posture (face forward and back straight).
- 4) Close your eyes, and keep them closed through the entire meditation.
- 5) Take deep breaths using the following pattern:

1. INHALE ... through the nose, filling the hara with air, to a slow count of four.	2. HOLD ... ki in the hara for a slow count of four.	3. EXHALE ... through the mouth to a slow count of eight.
--	---	--

Repeat this pattern at least ten times.

Ask students how they feel. Do they feel different? Was it difficult? What did they think about as they did the activity? Does breathing and meditating make any sense to them? Have they ever done anything that is similar?

Encourage discussion. With practice meditation can be used to prepare for an upcoming mental or physical activity. The ability to still one's thoughts can clear the mind and rejuvenate the body.

■ Extension:

Creating vocal sounds is another way to use ki. Taiko players and martial artists use sounds called kiai (kee-eye) that come from the hara. Ask students if they recall the vocal sounds made by the taiko drummers. Have students find their hara by placing their hand over their abdomen. Then create the deep vocal sounds of HA, HO, HE, or YO for them to echo. Try this before and after hara breathing to compare the volume and depth of sound.



Additional Resources

MAP OF JAPAN



Size:

Total 377,835 square kilometers; land area 374,744 square kilometers. (a little smaller than the state of California).

Topography:

Mountainous islands with numerous dormant and active volcanoes. Four main islands (**Hokkaido**, **Honshu**, **Shikoku**, and **Kyushu**) and numerous smaller islands to north and south, all prone to earthquakes. Highest point Mount Fuji (3,776 meters). Numerous, rapidly flowing rivers provide water for irrigation and hydroelectric-power generation.



Additional Resources

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Asian Branch Library, 449 9th St., Oakland, CA (510-238-3400)

Kinokuniya Book Store, 1581 Webster St., San Francisco, CA (415-567-7625)

Nichi Bei Bussan, 140 Jackson St, San Jose, CA (408-294-8048)

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