Beats, Rhythms, and Drums: Grooves of the World

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Summary:
We are all born with the rhythm inside us, our hearts thumping out an ongoing, ever-present beat that is individually felt and yet also commonly experienced. Is it any wonder then, that across cultures, the powerful, steady percussion beat of drums have formed the strong, steady base of much music? Through these experiences, children will discover the commonalities shared in drum beats and rhythms across cultures, as well as learn about the rich diversity of drums on the planet. They will learn to listen carefully to basic beats and rhythms employed by the American artist Ella Jenkins. They will cross continents and islands, discovering how beats are melded together in “Jumping Dance Drum” music from the Bahamas. They will discover how different natural resources help shape the unique drums found across various cultures.

Suggested Grade Levels: K-2
Country: Bahamas, the U.S., select African nations
Region: Africa and the African diaspora; international
Genre: Rhythms, percussion music
Instruments: Drums of various types
Language: English, Bahamanian dialect of English

Co-Curricular Areas:
Science/Social Studies: Environment and Natural Resources
Science: Sound Engineering
Language Arts: Research and Poetry
Art: The Art of Drums
Patterns in Art Pieces

The Art work of Len Lye, Particles in Space; Len Lye – 1957. The artwork can be paired with a soundtrack that combines Jumping Dance Drums from the Bahamas, drum music by the Yoruba of Nigeria, and the sounds of Lye’s own metal kinetic sculptures. 'Free Radicals' (Synchronized with the sounds of rhythmic drumming and singing by the African Bagirmi tribe)

National Standards: 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9
Prerequisites: None*
Objectives:
Students will:
- discover the commonalties in beat, rhythms, and drums that are shared by cultures
- learn to listen carefully to basic beats and rhythms
- explore the phenomenon of the drum
- discover how different natural resources of an area shape the unique kinds of drums found in different cultures

Materials:
Smithsonian Folkways Links
- Ella Fitzgerald for Children – Drum Rhythms
  Music Clips
  http://www.folkways.si.edu/ella-jenkins/adventures-in-rhythm/childrens/music/album/smithsonian
- Jumping Dance Drums:
  Music Clips
  http://www.folkways.si.edu/jumping-dance-drums/african-american-music-world/track/smithsonian
  Liner Notes
  Music Clips
  http://www.folkways.si.edu/gabriel-adderly-alfred-henderson-and-howard-johnson/jook-dance/caribbean-sacred/music/track/smithsonian
- Liner Notes from Religious Songs and Drums in the Bahamas
- Smithsonian Folkways’ online jazz exhibition
  http://www.folkways.si.edu/jazz-education-website/music/smithsonian

Large Map Mural of the World
General Classroom Supplies (Paper, clips, markers pencils, stones, popsicle sticks, rubber bands, etc)

First Lesson: Good Vibrations (National Standard #8)
Introduce how sound is made (Vibration Activity)
Note: This experience is needed for making sense of the engineering project in the third lesson segment. It is also a useful assessment of student understanding of sound.

a) Introduce a musical instrument with which students are all familiar, such as a drum. Explain the acoustic and functional properties of its sound-making. If a
drum is not available, simply use an empty coffee can with a cover and the bottom cut out. If using a coffee can, remember to smooth the edges before using it with students. Place some small pieces of paper on the top of the drum while holding the skin of the drum, so that when tapped, the drum cannot vibrate. Notice what happens to the paper pieces: Nothing. Repeat, this time letting go of the skin before tapping. Notice that a sound is made, and that the paper pieces move and “vibrate.”

b) Have students experiment with sounds, seeing and feeling the different vibrations made when sound occurs (for example, hold a ruler on the edge of a desk, with most of the ruler sticking over the desk. Hit the ruler and listen to the sound while watching the vibration; Or strum a rubber band stretched across fingers and listen to, see and feel the vibrations.) Help students understand that drums depend on the activation of vibrations—mostly by human hands or mallets and sticks held by human hands.

Assessment: Students will be able to explain and demonstrate the principle of sound vibration on an instrument or found-sound.

**Second Lesson: There’s A Pattern In That Rhythm** (National Standards #2, 3, 6, 8, 9)

a) Have students listen to their own personal rhythm: their heart beat. Have them find their heart beat or their pulse, and tap out the rhythm they hear: an endless pattern of steady beats.

b) Review the meaning of “patterns” as established in math and the visual arts.

c) Focus on how a steady beat is a pattern, and how other rhythms are also patterns of sound.

d) Have students create visual patterns and assign a sound to each “picture” that they can perform with body percussion.
   For example: ●=clap ⊙=stomp
   The pattern ●●●● ⊙●●●● could be performed in this manner:
   clap-clap-clap-stomp clap-clap-clap-stomp
   Perform various created rhythm patterns.
   - After clapping, snapping, and stomping the rhythms created from these visual patterns, ask students to transition to drums.
   - The pattern ●●●● ●●●● could now be performed in this manner:
     HHHL  HHHL
     BBBD  BBBD
Without visual pictures, challenge students (working independently with partners and/or in small groups) to create musical patterns using their pencils (or palms/fingers). Have them play around with different patterns and use different surface areas to “drum” these patterns. What do they notice? What kinds of surfaces make higher pitches – drums, drums sticks, palms with open fingers or closed fingers? Which make lower pitches?

Introduce Ella Jenkins Folkways site and have students listen attentively to the track with drum rhythms (#113). http://www.folkways.si.edu/ella-jenkins/adventures-in-rhythm/childrens/music/album/smithsonian

Practice the rhythm patterns that are clearly detectable, with and without the recording. Students will learn this first rhythm pattern together as a group and recreate it on their “desk drums.” Then have students work in groups, with each group learning another rhythm from the Ella Jenkins collection. They can listen and learn directly from the recording or as prescribed by the teacher (Tracks 114 -122). Each group practices and performs its own rhythm for the class, and group members are then charged with teaching other groups the rhythm they learned.

Assessment: Students will be able to decipher and discriminate rhythm patterns and to perform them using body percussion and found-sound instruments.

**Third Lesson: What’s That Rhythm and Where Is It From?**
(National Standards #2, 3, 6, 8, 9)

Introduce the idea that there are many types of music from many cultures throughout the world. Emphasize that, invariably, drums are used throughout the world to create rhythm.
b) Have students listen to a musical clip from the Bahamas in which there are three prominent rhythms: http://www.folkways.si.edu/gabriel-adderly-alfred-henderson-and-howard-johnson/jook-dance/caribbean-sacred/music/track/smithsonian . Ask them to focus on the drum beat, and to show it, say it, clap it, tap it, dance it - create some type of basic visual notation for it.

c) Have students listen to the recording again, with eyes closed, focusing on high and low, bright and dull sounds. Ask them to think about what the drum might look like based on what they hear, and to describe the drum by its skin, size, and shape. Have drums or drum-like coffee cans on hand for students to experiment with as they try to imitate these sounds. Ask students to draw their vision of the drum in their engineering journal. Using both diagrams and words, ask them to explain why they think the drum has the design they envision. Following the writing exercise, have students take a 30-second partner share-time to discuss their vision.

d) Introduce the natural and man-made resources that are readily available to people of a given area. Having looked at these, ask students to think about the possible look of their drum again. They should make modifications to their vision as needed. As homework, ask students to search the environment (natural and manmade environments) for things which could be used to create drums and other percussion instruments as well.

e) In an about-face, have students stand around a large map mural on the floor (preferably one that they created). Review the rhythms from yesterday’s “Jumping Dance Drums” musical clip. Although it features three rhythms and various instruments in it, focus on the drum rhythm. (The rhythm is as follows, syllabically: don da da don don da don don don. Match it to the recording.)

f) Listen carefully to the piece again. Ask students to imagine where the music might be from. Have them move to that place on a large mural map which has been stretched across the floor. Discuss responses. Then have them move to the place where the song is actually from - the Bahamas, in the Caribbean. (Consider that students may choose the African continent as the source of the piece, and how it will be necessary to trace the journey across the Atlantic Ocean from their “guess” and the real course.)
g) Students can take this rhythm, and instead of using drums, repeat the rhythm using another “instrument.” Using typical materials and student supplies found in a classroom (pencils, clips, markers, stones, popsicle sticks, rubber bands, paper, etc), encourage students to create their own “musical instrument” to repeat the “Jumping Dance Drums” drum rhythm. Students can work independently, as partners, or in small groups.

Assessment: Students will be able to explain and demonstrate the sonic effects of certain elements of percussion instruments, and the origins of different rhythms and percussion instruments on a global map.

Fourth Lesson: Drums From Around The World (National Standards #6, 9)

a) Ask students to research the drums in various regions of the world and discover from what materials they are constructed. They can write about or diagram their drum, using the internet as a source, including the Smithsonian Folkways website of liner notes on percussion traditions. They attempt to identify how drums are made and how natural resources used to create rhythms. Students can keep written, diagrammatic, and/or web-based notes, as well as incorporate other means of notation. For example, they may write a chant or song about the information. Use the Smithsonian Folkways website, texts and primary sources to support student research.

b) Have students create a poem to describe their drum. They can choose any poetic form, or rhyme scheme, including free flow. The poem should name the drum, describe what it is made from, and express any other information about the drum depending that the student found to
be valuable. Students will then create an art piece to go with the poem and add it to the large mural map from above. An example of drum poem follows:

Coconut tree trunks and shark skin  
Strong and sturdy, brought together to bring stories and music to life  
The pahu drum thumps out rhythms and beats  
As oli are heard, deep and throaty  
Joined with kahiko dancers to tell stories of knowledge and wisdom,  

c) As students find information, encourage discussion and sharing of internet sites, books, videos, photos, and first-hand accounts (from parents, community members, et al). Use Venn-Diagrams to compare and contrast the similarities and unique qualities of different drums (including the kinds of sounds that they “make”).

d) Help students to imagine particular music without the presence of the drum’s beat and rhythm. Reference the Smithsonian Folkways online jazz exhibition: http://www.folkways.si.edu/jazz-education-web-site/music smithsonian

e) Engage in a class discussion that considers the following topics: Why do you think drums are so prevalent in the music of so many cultures? How are drums the same across different cultures? How are they different? Why do you think this might be? Can one find similar rhythms in the different cultures that our classmates chose to research?

Assessment: Students will be able to craft a poem and an art piece inspired by drums and percussion music.

Fifth Lesson: Create Your Own Drum; Share Your Rhythms  
(National Standards #2, 3, 6, 8)

a) Encourage students to engage in an engineering exercise that challenges the use of new-found knowledge in both science and music. They can create their own drum (individually or in pairs) using supplies from the class, from home, and from their neighborhood or community environment. The drum should reflect discoveries made throughout this unit relative to sound and vibration.

b) Using their newly-constructed drums, students can then create rhythm(s) and “commit it to memory” in some way (visually, orally,
through movement, and/or recorded with line notation, technology, etc). Students then share their drums and their rhythms (and recorded means of retaining it) with a partner. Once the partners have learned the two rhythms on their drum, they can then share it with the class and record it for prosperity.