

RHYTHMRiSE

presents

Drum

Circles

**Guidebook
for School
Facilitators**



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What are drum circles?

**Guided group activities where students use drumming
to express emotions, build social connections,
& enhance mental & emotional well-being**

How are drum circles used in schools?

**Drum circles are
structured yet
flexible**

**Teachers lead
short drumming
sessions during
class time**

**Music teachers
use as part of music
curriculum**

**Anyone can learn
to facilitate a drum
circle!**

**Guidance counselors
& therapists drum
with students, too**

**Drum circles are
increasingly valued
in educational
settings!**

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Category	Elementary	Middle School	High School
Motor Skills	Develop basic coordination (bass, tone, slap), play steady beats	Improve hand technique, explore dynamics & speed control	Refine technique, enhance finesse & control, explore hand independence
Rhythm Awareness	Keep a steady beat, follow call-and-response patterns	Play syncopation, understand time signatures, layer rhythms	Master complex rhythms, improvise, & experiment with groove variations
Listening Skills	Recognize different drum sounds, copy leader's patterns	Listen for group dynamics, respond to tempo changes	Listen for rhythmic interplay, react to musical cues from peers
Creativity & Expression	Make simple rhythms, use storytelling in drumming	Create original rhythms, experiment with tempo & accents	Improvise confidently, compose layered rhythms
Group Cooperation	Take turns, play together, follow a leader	Play in unison & independent parts, interact with peers	Lead drum circles, collaborate on compositions
Cultural Awareness	Learn drumming as a fun activity with basic cultural context	Understand origins of different drumming styles (e.g., African, Latin)	Explore drumming traditions deeply, discuss cultural significance
Confidence & Leadership	Feel comfortable playing, participate in group activities	Lead small groups, call-and-response leadership	Direct full drum circles, facilitate group rhythms
Emotional & Social Benefits	Express emotions through rhythm, enjoy teamwork	Use drumming for stress relief, teamwork & personal growth	Explore drumming for self-expression, mindfulness & performance

**focus &
concentration**

creativity

**emotional
expression**

**self-
regulation**

**fun &
enjoyment**

stress relief

**listening
skills**

coordination

**confidence &
self-esteem**

**motor
skills**

What are the Therapeutic Benefits of Drum Circles?

Therapeutic Benefits

(cont'd)

**cultural
awareness**

**cognitive
development**

teamwork

**non-verbal
communication**

**routine
& structure**

**impulse
control**

**energy
release**

**social
bonding**

**reduced
performance
anxiety**

**sensory
processing**

**goal setting
& achieving**

Brain Benefits

Dopamine Release

- Creates feelings of pleasure & reward

Serotonin Boost

- Enhances mood & happiness

Endorphin Release

- Reduces pain and makes kids feel good

Cortisol Reduction

- Lowers stress levels

Oxytocin Increase

- Promotes bonding & trust among peers

Improved Brain Connectivity

- Helps different parts of brain communicate better

Enhanced Neuroplasticity

- Supports brain's ability to learn & adapt

Alpha Wave Production

- Promotes relaxation & calm focus

Memory Enhancement

- Strengthens ability to remember

Enhanced Creativity

- Stimulates creative thinking & problem-solving

Instruments to Use

Djembe "JEM-bae" Drums:

**Traditional African hand drum,
typically carved from a single piece
of wood & topped with
goatskin drumhead**

**Known for rich, deep bass tones
& sharp high-pitched sounds**

**Played with bare hands to produce
a variety of rhythms**



Alternatives:

**Hand drums such as bongos,
congas, cajóns, tambourines,
or shakers**

**Makeshift drums like buckets,
pots, or boxes, covered with
fabric, canvas, or latex**

**Digital percussion apps
are helpful to accompany**

History of Djembes

**Likely invented 700-800
years ago!**

**Created by Mandinke tribe,
in what is now Mali**

Used for:

**communication to send messages
over long distances**

**ceremonies, rituals, celebrations
community gatherings**

spiritual & cultural practices

storytelling

**connecting communities through
music & dance**



**Still an important
instrument today,
in Mali, Guinea, Senegal,
& other West African countries**

Main Djembe Parts



Drumhead (Top Surface)

Main part hit to make sound
Traditionally made with goat skin



Body (Shell)

Hollow, goblet-shaped or hourglass shaped body of drum

Amplifies drumhead sound

Traditionally hand-carved from single wood piece

**Top of Body:
"Bowl"**

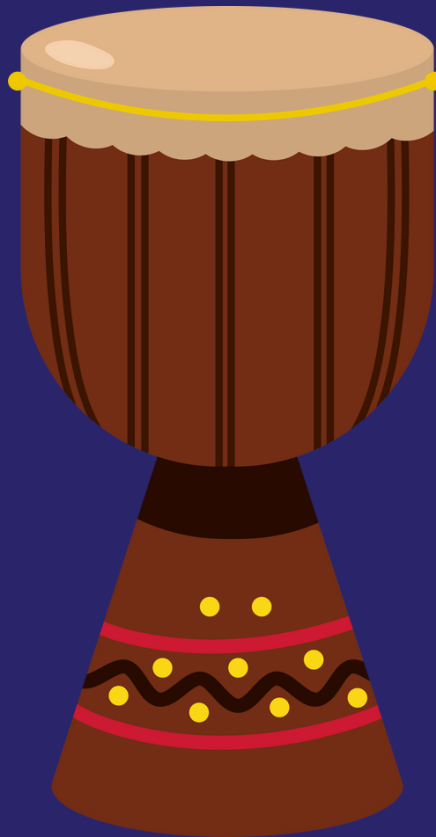


**Top of Body:
"Trumpet"**

Sound Hole (Bottom Opening)

**Lets air & sound escape
for volume & richness
of sound**

**Blocking the hole makes
sound quieter & muffled**



Tension Ropes

**Holds drumhead tight
for clear sound**

**Tightening ropes
raises pitch; loosening
lowers pitch**

Djembe Parts Song

(K-3)

**Sing to the Tune of
"If You're Happy
& You Know It"**



Verse 1 – Drumhead **(tap drumhead)**

**If you tap upon the head,
it sings out! (x2)**

**That's the drumhead
on the top,
It will never ever stop!**

**If you tap upon the head,
it sings out!**

Verse 2 – Rim **(tap edge of drum)**

**If you tap along the rim,
it rings bright! (x2)**

**It's the edge around the top,
& it makes a little pop!**

**If you tap along the rim,
it rings bright!**

Verse 4 – Sound Hole **(lift drum slightly)**

**If you let the drum breathe,
it plays loud! (x2)**

**The sound hole at the base,
Helps the music fill the space!**

**If you let the drum breathe,
it plays loud!**

Verse 3 – Shell **(pat side of drum)**

**If you listen to the shell,
it's so strong! (x2)**

**It's the belly of the drum,
Making music,
boom-boom-boom!**

**If you listen to the shell,
it's so strong!**

Verse 5 – Ropes **(pretend to pull ropes)**

**If you tighten up the ropes,
it sounds high!**

**If you loosen up the ropes,
it sounds low!**

**The drumhead is kept tight,
So it sounds just right!**

**If you tighten up the ropes,
it sounds high!**

Positioning for Djembe Drumming:

- Sit on chair or stool
- Sit on front edge seat
- Do not lean into djembe - Recline back slightly
- Place djembe in-between legs to keep it secure
- Keep bottom of drum in the air (not pressed against ground or lap!)



3 Ways to Strike the Head of Djembe:

Bass!
Tone!
Slap!

Bass:

Lowest-pitch, deep sound

Hit the center of the drum with a heavy, flat palm

Relaxed yet firm hand for controlled, moderate pressure

Often played with one hand



Tone:

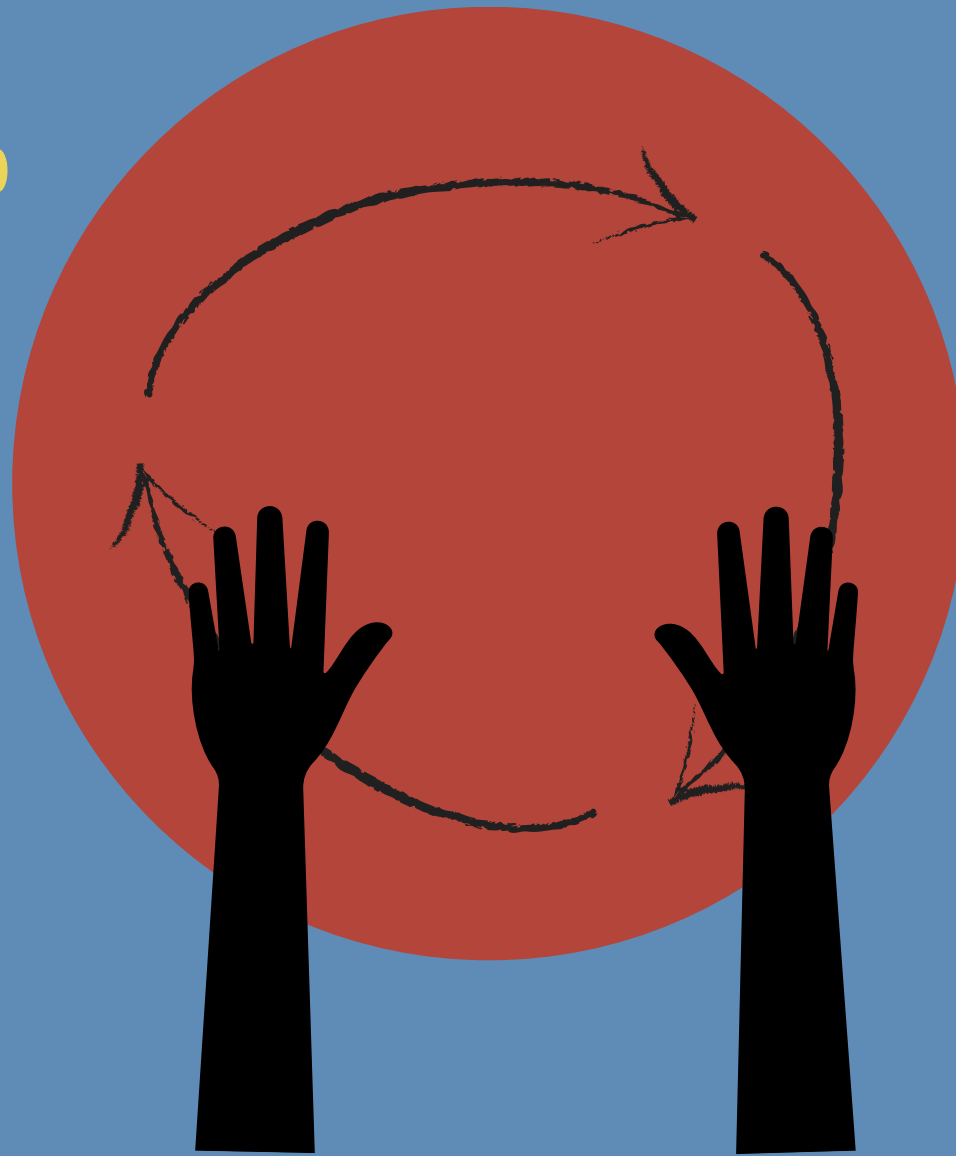
Medium-pitched, clear sound

Hit the edge of drum
(slightly more
toward center
than for a slap)

Often
played with
dominant hand or
alternating hands

Keep fingers
flat & move
the arm,
not just
the wrist

Action is
deliberate
and controlled



Slap:

Highest-pitched, sharp & crisp sound

Hit the edge of drum with slight curvature of fingers

Flick of wrist in quick, snapping motion

Often played with both hands, together





BEATS & RHYTHM

**Sound Words
to Connect
K-3
Students
with
Drum Sounds**

**BASS
=
"BOOM"**

**TONE
=
"POP"**

**SLAP
=
"TAP"**

Basic Beats

1.

"The Boom Beat"

Bass – Rest – Bass – Rest

For K-3:

"Boom – Shh – Boom – Shh"

2.

"The Pop Beat"

Tone – Rest – Tone – Rest

For K-3:

"Pop – And – Pop – And"

3.

"The Rain Beat"

Bass – Tone – Bass – Tone

For K-3:

"Rain– Drops– Rain – Drops"

4.

"The Heartbeat"

Bass – Tone – Rest

Bass – Tone – Rest

For K-3:

"BOOM – boom – (pause)

BOOM – boom – (pause)"

5.

"The Gallop Beat"

**Bass – Tone –
Tone – Rest**

For K-3:

**"Boom – Trot–
Trot – (pause)"**

**Bass
& Tone**

Basic Beats



1.

"The Clap & Tap Beat"

Clap – Clap – Slap – Slap

For K-3:

**"Clap – Clap –
Tap – Tap"**

4.

"The Hippo Hop"

**Slap – Bass –
Bass – Slap**

For K-3:

**"Hop– Hippo –
Hippo – Hop"**

2.

"The Train Beat"

Slap – Tone – Slap – Tone

For K-3:

**"Chug – Chug –
Boom – Chug"**

3.

"The Tap Pop Beat"

Slap – Slap – Slap – Tone

For K-3:

**"Tap – Tap –
Tap – Pop"**

5.

"The Jump & Splash Beat"

Bass – Slap – Rest – Slap

For K-3:

"Jump – Splash –(pause)– Splash"

Adding Slap

6-Beat Rhythms

**Bass – Tone – Bass –
Tone – Bass – Tone**

**Slap – Tone –
Slap – Tone –
Slap – Tone**

**Bass – Slap – Bass –
Slap – Bass – Slap**

**Slap – Slap –
Tone – Tone –
Bass – Bass**

**Tone –
Bass –
Slap –
Slap –
Bass –
Tone**

6-Beat Rhythms

**Tone – Bass
Clap – Clap –
Bass – Tone**

**Bass – Clap– Tone –
Tone – Clap – Bass**

**Slap – Rest–
Slap – Stomp –
Slap – Clap**

**Stomp – Rest –
Bass – Rest–
Tone – Clap**

**Bass – Clap– Tone –
Tone – Clap – Bass**

**Slap – Rest –
Tone– Tone –
Tone – Clap**

**Tone – Bass –
Stomp – Slap –
Slap – Slap**

Adding Movements

FUN & GAMES*



***loosely listed from more simple to more challenging**

GAME #1: **FREEZE BEATS**

Description:

Students play rhythms freely until leader signals them to stop (freeze)

How to Play:

- **Free Play:**
Student express themselves with different rhythms
- **Signal to Freeze:**
Leader calls out "Freeze!"
at random intervals
- **Hold position:**
Drummers must stop playing until leader gives new signal to play



This game encourages improv & quick listening skills!

Tips:

- Encourage creativity during free play
- Ensure signals to freeze are clear & consistent

GAME # 2: **ECHO CLAPPING**

Description:

Start with clapping patterns before starting to drum, aiding in transitions from simple to more complex rhythms



How to Play:

- 1. Clapping Patterns:**
Facilitator claps a rhythm pattern
- 2. Echo Clapping:**
The group echoes the clapping pattern
- 3. Transition to drumming:**
Students replicate the same rhythm on their drums

Tips:

Begin with easy clapping patterns & gradually increase difficulty

Ensure students understand the rhythm before moving to drums

This game promotes active listening & memorization!

GAME #3:

CALL & RESPONSE

Description:

One student leader plays a simple rhythm

The rest of the group echoes it back

How to Play:

- 1. Leader Selection:**
Choose a student to lead with a basic rhythm
- 2. Echoing:**
The group listens & replicates the rhythm
- 3. Rotation:**
Rotate the leader role to give each student a chance

Tips:

- Start with short, simple rhythms**
- Use visual or verbal cues to guide students**

This game enhances listening skills & rhythmic accuracy!

GAME #4: MIRROR DRUMMING

Description:

**Pairs of students
mirror each other's
drumming patterns**

How to Play:

- 1. Pair Up: Divide students into pairs**
- 2. Lead & Mirror: One student leads with a rhythm while the other mirrors it**
- 3. Switch Roles: After a few minutes, switch roles so each child can lead & follow**

Tips:

- Encourage clear & consistent rhythms**
- Promote eye contact & listening between pairs**

**This game fosters
attentiveness & 30
synchronization!**

GAME #5:

PASSING THE BEAT

Tips:

- **Encourage clear & distinct beats**
- **Help students remember sequence as it grows**

How to Play:

1. Start the Beat:

The first student plays a simple beat

2. Pass the Beat:

Clockwise, each next student adds a new beat to existing pattern

3. Continue Building:

The group continues adding to the sequence, reinforcing collective rhythm-building

Description:

Students take turns adding a beat to a growing rhythm pattern

This game enhances collaboration & memory!



GAME #6: **RHYTHM RELAY**

Description:

A team-based game where students pass a rhythm around the circle

Tips:

- **Keep rhythms simple initially & increase complexity gradually**
- **Encourage teamwork & attentive listening**

How to Play:

Divide into Teams: Split group into two teams

Start the Rhythm: First student in each team starts a rhythm

Pass the Rhythm & Continue Relay: Each next student on team replicates rhythm & adds their own, building complexity

Team recognition: Not determined by speed, but rather by quality, collaboration, and creative expression

This game promotes active listening & team unity!

GAME #7: STORY BEATS

Description:

Combine storytelling
with drumming
Each student contributes
a beat that represents a
part of the story

How to play:

- **Start the Story:**
The leader begins
a simple story
- **Add Drum Beats:**
As the story
progresses, students
add beats that match
the narrative
(ex: slow & loud for
elephant walking)
- **Collaborate:**
Continue building story
collaboratively with
rhythmic additions



**This game integrates
creativity with rhythm!**

Tips:

- Use imaginative
stories to engage
students
- Help students
consider how rhythms
can represent story
elements



GAME #8:

GROUP COMPOSITION

This game fosters teamwork & creative expression!

Description:
Collaboratively create a group rhythm piece

- Tips:**
- **Encourage creativity & experimentation with different rhythms**
 - **Facilitate open communication & collaboration among students**

How to Play:

- **Assign Roles:**
Assign different rhythm roles to each student
- **Compose Together:**
Work together to compose a cohesive rhythm piece
- **Perform the Composition:**
Perform the collective creation as a group

**So many ways
to lead drum circles,
both structured &
improvisational**

**Most importantly
for facilitator & students:**

**HAVE
FUN!**



