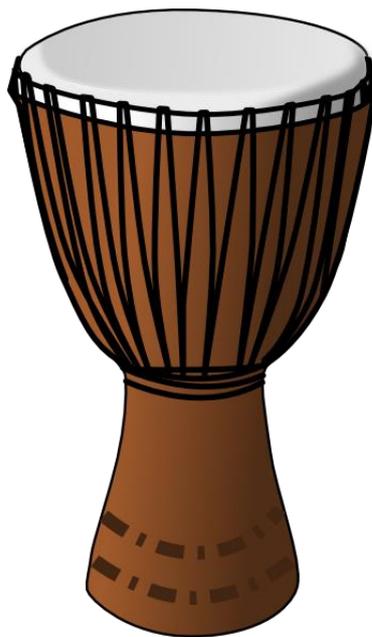


African drumming

A guide to using the Girlguiding Hampshire West djembe drums



This resource accompanies the African instruments owned by Girlguiding Hampshire West:

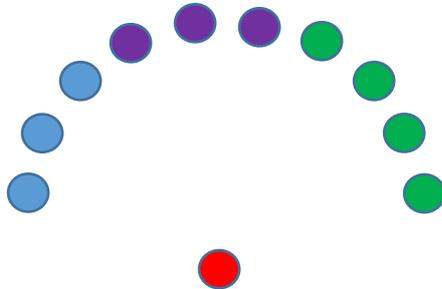
- Set of 15 djembe drums (small, medium & large)
- Box of assorted African percussion instruments
- Two resource books:
 - Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book
 - Andy Gleadhill's Percussion Buddies

Starting out...

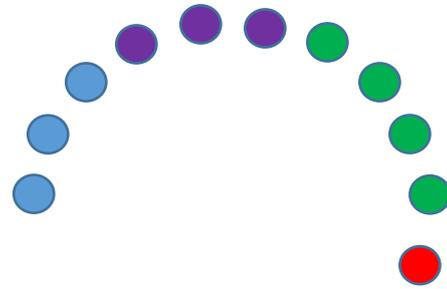
Setting up

Arrange chairs in a semi-circle with a drum by each chair. The leader usually sits at the front or on an end so that all participants can see the leader.

It is useful to group similar sized drums together e.g. **large drums** to the left of the horseshoe, **medium** in the middle and **small** on the right (example below):

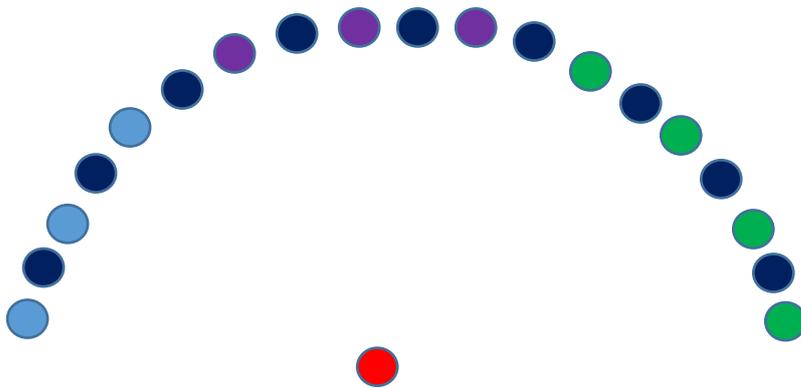


Leader at front of group



Leader on end of group

If you have more participants than drums, a suggestion is to alternate a 'drum chair' with an '**other African percussion**' chair.



Top Tips: When swapping instruments, ask participants to put drums in front of chairs and percussion instruments on chairs and then move one chair to the left/right, rather than trying to pass the instruments round.

Smaller girls will find it very difficult to play a big drum, as they will struggle to hold it in a good playing position (see later).

Put the drum hat under the chair where the drum is - saves trying to match them all up at the end!

Music in Africa

Depending on the age/abilities of the participants, find out what they know about Africa - population, culture, climate, wildlife etc.

Explain a little about music in Africa - p3&4 African Drumming Book

Making a good sound

To make a good sound, you need to have air escaping from the hole at the base of the drum.

Ask the participants to carefully turn the drum upside down and look at where the sound escapes from.



You need to have the drum in the right playing position in order to make a good sound.

Grip the drum between your legs and tip it away from you so it is balanced on the rim at the bottom (allowing the sound to escape).



If you have a smaller drum, you may not need to rest it on the floor and can just hold it between your legs:



Experiment: Ask the participants to stand the drum on the floor, hit the top and listen to the sound.

Now ask them to hold the drum in the playing position and hit it again - they should hear a better sound.

Low and high sounds

Low sounds - the bass note:

A good bass note will produce a full and rounded deep tone.

To produce a good bass tone, the drum must be struck, palm-down, in the middle of the drumhead (skin) with the hand slightly cupped. (Ask the participants to imagine that there is a cherry tomato/grape/tiny mouse under their hand that they don't want to squish!)

Strike the drum and return your hand quickly from the drum - you can use your whole arm and pretend that you are bouncing a basketball, which will give you the correct action.

High sounds - the open notes:

When playing an open tone the drum should be struck with the whole length of the fingers, on the edge of the drum nearest to your body. Keep your elbows slightly raised.

If you imagine the drumhead to be a clock face, your right hand will be on the four and your left hand on the eight.

Your hands must not remain in contact with the drum once you have played the beat but should return to your natural playing position - hovering just above the drum.

Tell participants to imagine that the drumhead is very hot, like a radiator, and so they do not want to leave their hand on it any longer than necessary.

The following warm-up exercises will now introduce participants to some different of music, including:

Rhythm - a beat or pulse

Tempo - the speed of the music

Pitch - high and low sounds

Dynamics - loud and soft sounds

You could ask participants if they know the meaning of any of these words before you begin.

Warm-up exercises

R = right hand, L = left hand

The exercises are written for right-handed participants, however left-handed players will often lead with their left hand so will just reverse the left and right instructions (they will play a mirror image of the exercises).

Exercise 1: Single strokes (rhythm)

The purpose of this exercise is to establish a steady and even beat.

R L R L R L R L

Play even beats one hand after the other.

You could choose whether to use bass (low) notes or open (high) notes.

If you are counting the beats, it looks like this:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L

You could then play at half speed (change in tempo):

X = A rest/silent beat when no sound is played.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R	X	L	X	R	X	L	X	R	X	L	X	R	X	L	X

And at double speed (change in tempo)!:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
RL															

Exercise 2: Double strokes

This exercise now used two beats to each hand or double strokes.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R	R	L	L	R	R	L	L	R	R	L	L	R	R	L	L

Exercise 3: Single & double strokes (paradiddle)

1	2	3	4
R	L	R	R

5	6	7	8
L	R	L	L

9	10	11	12
R	L	R	R

13	14	15	16
L	R	L	L

Exercise 4: Highs and Low (pitch)

H = high sound (open note)

L = low sound (bass note) (NB. L now stands for low)

1	2	3	4
H	H	L	L

5	6	7	8
H	H	L	L

9	10	11	12
H	H	L	L

13	14	15	16
H	H	L	L

Exercise 5: More Highs and Lows

1	2	3	4
H	L	H	H

5	6	7	8
L	H	L	L

9	10	11	12
H	L	H	H

13	14	15	16
L	H	L	L

Participants will often use their dominant hand (i.e. right hand for right-handed player) on the first beat of the bar - so beats 1, 5, 9 and 13, as this gives the beat more emphasis. However, this may not feel natural for all the rhythms - everyone will develop their own technique depending on what feels natural to them!

Instead of counting 1-16, many people prefer to just count 1-4 multiple times.

Once the participants have the hang of it, you will not need to count out loud.

Many groups don't need someone counting at all, but just find the numbers helpful for working out the drum patterns.

Exercise 6: Short and Long

Sh = short

Tr = roll (trill) (long note, in this exercise it lasts for 4 bars)

X = rest/silent note

First it is a good idea to practise just the long note or roll. A roll is performed by the drummer playing one hand after the other as fast as possible.

Try to keep your roll even by using each hand with equal weight and speed.

1	2	3	4
Sh	X	Sh	X

1	2	3	4
Tr	Tr	Tr	Tr

1	2	3	4
Sh	X	Sh	X

1	2	3	4
Tr	Tr	Tr	Tr

Repeat after me (Call and Response)

The leader plays a short rhythm, usually 4 beats long, and the participants echo it back.

You could then ask participants to think of a rhythm (any length) and go round the horseshoe listening to each person's rhythm and everyone playing it back.

A fun thing to do is to base the rhythms on a theme e.g. food, festivals, favourite things to do.

Examples include:

Sti-cky toff-ee pud-ding, Bon-fi-re Night, play-ing in the play-ground etc.

Participants who are playing African instruments (as opposed to drums) can join in with all these activities, but they may just need a little adaptation.

Don't forget to swap the drum players regularly to ensure everyone has a turn with both drums and African instruments (if you are using the other instruments).

You can start to introduce different dynamics too - loud parts and soft parts. Perhaps you could start quietly and get louder and louder...? This emphasises to participants the importance of watching the leader who will indicate when to get louder or softer.

Rainstorm

Explain to the participants that you are going to work together to create a rainstorm effect.

Start quietly, with the wind in the trees - get participants to rub their palms softly on the drumhead.

Build up the rain gradually - you could go around the horseshoe and get participants to change their action one at a time, so you slowly switch from the wind sound to light pattering of raindrops - fingers tapping on the edge of the drum.

The rain then gets heavier - build it up until all participants are playing drum rolls using the deep bass notes.

Gradually make the rainstorm move away, getting participants to change back to lighter playing and then finally to the wind in the trees and then silence...

This is a great activity for showing participants the importance of watching the leader and working together.

Composing a piece...

Split the participants into groups and give them a selection of drums and other African percussion.

Ask them to use the instruments to create their own piece of music using the skills they have learnt - different rhythms, tempos, dynamics etc.

A fun idea is to challenge the participants to tell a story through music. This could be African themed e.g. the story of a family of African elephants making their way to a watering hole, or something the participants can relate to more easily e.g. a musical description of getting ready for school in the morning, or a day at the beach.

Playing together

The first task is to establish a steady pulse.

First ask the entire group to play the rhythm for Drums One with a low bass tone, only on beat number 1 as below

Drums One (large djembe drums)

1	2	3	4
L	X	X	X

1	2	3	4
L	X	X	X

1	2	3	4
L	X	X	X

1	2	3	4
L	X	X	X

This will maintain a steady pulse. When this rhythm is established, leave just two of the large drums to continue with this part and begin to teach the rest of the group Drums Two.

Drums Two plays two high/open tones on beats 1 and 2 and rests on beats 3 and 4 as below:

Drums Two (medium djembes)

1	2	3	4
H	H	X	X

1	2	3	4
H	H	X	X

1	2	3	4
H	H	X	X

1	2	3	4
H	H	X	X

This pattern is again repeated round and round. Wait until the group is comfortable playing both rhythms one and two together before rehearsing Drums Three.

Drums Three is played by the small djembes, which rest on beats 1 and 2 then play a low/base tone on beats 3 and 4.

Drums Three (small djembes)

1	2	3	4
X	X	L	L

1	2	3	4
X	X	L	L

1	2	3	4
X	X	L	L

1	2	3	4
X	X	L	L

When each group is confident in their part, start with Drums One and then add in Drums Two and then Drums Three. Play the rhythms round and round. Add in different dynamics (louds and softs). Perhaps you could end with a roll and then one big bass note all together?!

Sogo

To create a performance of these rhythms, begin with Drums One and then build in Drums Two and Three.

When all three rhythms have been playing together for a while, you could all stop together and start a call and response pattern, with the leader playing a short rhythm and participants copying.

You could then go back into the three different rhythms.

Decide together how you would like to end the piece.

Drums One (large djembes)

1	2	3	4
L	X	X	X

1	2	3	4
L	X	X	X

1	2	3	4
L	X	X	X

1	2	3	4
L	X	X	X

Drums Two (medium djembes)

1	2	3	4
X	X	H	H

1	2	3	4
X	X	L	L

1	2	3	4
X	X	H	H

1	2	3	4
X	X	L	L

Drums Three (small djembes)

1	2	3	4
H	X	H	X

1	2	3	4
L	L	X	H

1	2	3	4
H	X	H	X

1	2	3	4
L	L	X	H

Drums Three takes some practice to get the rhythm right - count carefully!

There are many other pieces that you can play together - this is a summary of information from the accompanying drum and percussion books and my experience, which should get you started, but there are many more activities that you can do.

YouTube is also a great source of ideas and helpful videos!

Good luck and happy playing!