

**Triangle Taiko Drumming Ensemble
Presented by Duke Performances and
Asian/Pacific Studies Institute
Study Guide**

What Is Taiko?

The word taiko (太鼓) means "big drum" in Japanese. Generally, it refers to all drums used in classical Japanese music, whether big or small. Outside Japan, the word refers to any Japanese drums (和太鼓 'wa-daiko' which means "Japanese drum") and to the recent art-form of ensemble taiko drumming (sometimes called, "kumi-daiko"). Triangle Taiko Drumming Ensemble will perform ensemble taiko on October 7, 2005 at Duke.

Taiko began in Japan around 2,000 years ago. The Japanese used Taiko in wars and religious ceremonies, for insect control and entertainment and more. The powerful sound of the taiko drums could be heard across the entire battlefield. In Japan today, there are many festivals, performances and folk art demonstrations using drums, singing and other instruments such as fue (bamboo flute) or kane (cymbals). Taiko flourishes throughout Japan, and each district has developed its own rhythm and style.

Begun in the 1950s, the ensemble style of taiko performance has become popular. Today, thousands of groups play taiko in Japan. Some are professional, some are recreational, and others are collegiate. There are also children's taiko groups. Starting in 2003, elementary and middle schools in Japan began to teach taiko to children.

Taiko in North America

(7th grade Social Studies SCOC GOAL 7: The learner will assess the connections between historical events and contemporary issues in Africa, Asia, and Australia. 7.01 Identify historical events such as invasions, conquests, and migrations and evaluate their relationship to current issues. 7.02 Examine the causes of key historical events in selected areas of Africa, Asia, and Australia and analyze the short- and long-range effects on political, economic, and social institutions.)

As Japanese immigrated to North America in the early part of the 1900's, they brought taiko drums with them. Taiko in North America before 1968 were primarily used as temple drums and in various dojo (martial arts schools). Taiko drumming was established in Hawaii as early as 1910, and in San Francisco in the 1930's. World War II, and the incarceration of hundreds of thousand of Japanese and Japanese-Americans as "enemy aliens" brought Japanese culture in the US to an abrupt halt. Once the war was over, many Japanese tried to assimilate into US culture, and many of the following generation lost much of the language and culture. In 1968, Japanese-born Seiichi Tanaka established the first ensemble taiko group in the US in San Francisco.

Due to the expense of authentic taiko drums made in Japan, US-based taiko groups started to fashion drums out of empty wine barrels. The smallest taiko can cost \$400 with

the largest costing more than \$10,000. Wine barrel taiko drums revolutionized taiko in this country by allowing groups to make their own drums for a few hundred dollars and enabling many more people to become involved. Now there are more than 150 taiko groups in North America. Taiko is not only for Japanese or people with Asian heritage. It is open to anybody who shares a love for its rhythms and sounds. Our local group, Triangle Taiko, has twenty-two members, eight of whom are Japanese. They all simply enjoy drumming together.

(7th grade Social Studies SCOC GOAL 8: The learner will assess the influence and contributions of individuals and cultural groups in Africa, Asia, and Australia. 8.01 Describe the role of key historical figures and evaluate their impact on past and present societies in Africa, Asia, and Australia. 8.02 Describe the role of key groups such as Mongols, Arabs, and Bantu and evaluate their impact on historical and contemporary societies of Africa, Asia, and Australia. 8.03 Identify major discoveries, innovations, and inventions and assess their influence on societies past and present.)

Taiko in Japanese History

The oldest physical evidence of taiko in Japan is a *haniwa* clay figure (from a burial mound) of a drummer that dates from the sixth or seventh century. Taiko began as a battlefield instrument; loud enough to penetrate the din of battle--used to scare the enemy, issue commands and coordinate troop movements. According to paintings, one soldier would carry the taiko lashed to his back, while two other soldiers would beat the taiko on each side. A taiko used by Shingen Takeda, a famous warlord of that era, still exists. It has three large holes cut in the side to increase the volume.

Taiko have been played in refined cultural settings as well. Gagaku music was introduced to Japan in the Nara period (697-794) along with Buddhism, and was quickly adopted as the imperial court music. Gagaku, the oldest continually played court music in the world, is still performed.

Modern Japanese taiko bear strong resemblance to Chinese and Korean instruments, probably introduced in the waves of Korean and Chinese influence from 300-900 AD. The predecessor of the tsuzumi style of taiko may come from as far as India, and came to Japan along with Buddhism. (The tsuzumi drum is a long snare drum beaten with the hand.)

(7th grade Social Studies SCOC GOAL 4: The learner will identify significant patterns in the movement of people, goods, and ideas over time and place in Africa, Asia, and Australia. 4.01 Describe the patterns of and motives for migrations of people, and evaluate the impact on the political, economic, and social development of selected societies and regions. 4.03 Examine key ethical ideas and values deriving from religious, artistic, political, economic, and educational traditions, as well as their diffusion over time, and assess their influence on the development of selected societies and regions in Africa, Asia, and Australia.)

Taiko and Religion

The rumbling of the taiko has been associated with the gods, and has been appropriated by the religions of Japan. About 4,000 years ago, in the Jomon period, taiko signaled activities in the village. Simple taiko beats signaled that hunters were setting out, or that a storm was coming and the women needed to bring in the food they had drying. Because these signals were important to daily life, the people felt grateful and believed that the drum was inhabited by a god.

As this belief developed, only Shinto and Buddhist holy men could beat the taiko. Thus taiko had their place in shrines and temples and were played only on special occasions. Today, taiko continues its place in religious ceremonies in both Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. Some Buddhist sects use taiko to represent the voice of Buddha or as an aid to chanting and meditation. It is used in Shinto rites to offer up prayers and to celebrate village festivals.

(some of this information is from:

<http://triangletaiko.org/>

<http://www.taiko.com/resource/search.html>,

<http://www.janm.org/exhibits/bigdrum/exhibition/article.php>)

Count to ten in Japanese

Japanese Pronunciation of Numbers

- 1) Ichi ("eechee" but 'itchy' is close and an easy way to remember)
- 2) Ni ("knee")
- 3) San (the "a" sounds like the a in "Ma")
- 4) Chi ("chee")
- 5) Go ("go")
- 6) Roku ("roekoo")
- 7) Shichi ("shechee" – she like the pronoun)
- 8) Hachi ("hachee" the "a" sounds like the a in "Ma" and chi rhymes with he)
- 9) Ku ("koo")
- 10) Ju ("Joo")

Suggested Classroom Activities Seventh Grade Science & Math

Build drums from found objects.

(7th Grade Science SCOC Goal 1.07 Prepare models and/or computer simulations to: * Test hypotheses. * Evaluate how data fit.)

- 1) Collect buckets, plastic bins, cans, plastic water jugs, gourds and various materials for drum bodies, "skins" and "drumsticks".
- 2) Draw scale models of planned drums from two views with their measurements. (7th grade math SCOC GOAL 2: The learner will understand and use measurement involving

two- and three-dimensional figures. 2.01 Draw objects to scale and use scale drawings to solve problems.)

3) Calculate the volume of air of the planned drums. (7th grade math SCOC 2.02 Solve problems involving volume and surface area of cylinders, prisms, and composite shapes. 2.08 Use models to find the volumes of prisms and cylinders.)

4) Predict which drums will make lower sounds, which higher; which will make louder and which softer sounds. (7th grade science SCOC Goal 1.01 Identify and create questions and hypotheses that can be answered through scientific investigations. 1.02 Develop appropriate experimental procedures for: * Given questions. * Student generated questions. 1.04 Analyze variables in scientific investigations.)

5) Build the drums. Experiment with making sounds with them by hitting them with hands, sticks, and other objects. Hit them in different places. Make a chart to record your impressions of volume (loudness and softness) and tone (high and low pitch) with each change of hitting the drum. Make adjustments to the drums and record what changes you observe. (7th grade Science SCOC Goal 1.05 Analyze evidence to: * Explain observations. * Make inferences and predictions. * Develop the relationship between evidence and explanation.)

6) Work in an ensemble: create and practice a brief drumming performance—up to a minute of rhythm that you can learn and repeat together. When you get the rhythm down, try adding movement.

7) Write up a report with drawings, predictions, experimental drum models, theories, findings, and conclusions. Prepare a mini-demonstration of your findings for another class. (7th grade science SCOC Goal 1.08 Use oral and written language to: * Communicate findings. * Defend conclusions of scientific investigations)