



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 for your school by San Jose Taiko. Creative writing, visual art, music, and sensory activities are included.

America is a country of cultural diversity, composed of individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds. We can learn much about each other by sharing our history, traditions, and arts. San Jose Taiko celebrates Japanese culture through the voice of the *taiko*. By sharing our music, we take pride in our heritage and hope to encourage others to have pride in theirs.



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## ORIGINS OF THE TAIKO

**The Tale of Amaterasu and the Cave** tells of the mythological origin of the taiko. 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, destroying Amaterasu's crops. 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. Without it, the earth would be dark and cold, and crops would not grow. The people prayed to the gods and goddesses to help them, and Uzume, the Goddess of Mirth, came forward.

Uzume went to the cave entrance and began a joyous dance upon a hollow log. 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 dances 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.

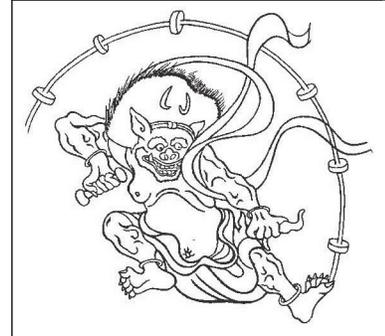


## TAIKO HISTORY

*Taiko* (tye-koh) is the Japanese word for drum. The drum is believed to have a *kami*, or 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.

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 for military music, to give courage to the samurai warriors, and to intimidate the enemy. Taiko is also used in various types of theater and is one of the fundamental instruments in the music of the Imperial Court. 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 catch.

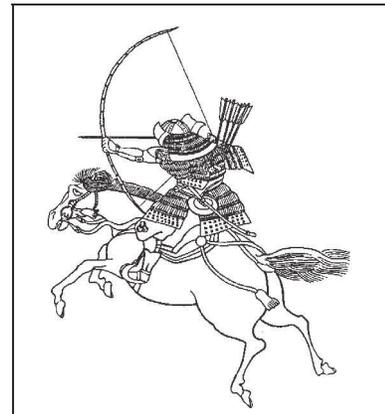
Drums play an important part in Japanese religions. In the Shinto religion, all natural things are thought to contain a spiritual deity. The taiko is used to call these gods to give thanks, dispel evil spirits, or ward off sicknesses. In the Buddhist religion, the taiko considered to be the voice of the Buddha. It is the voice of wisdom, compassion, truth, and beauty, calling out to instruct the people.



Thunder god hammering on his drums



New Year's Festival Drummer



Samurai Warrior



## 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 as their voice was the Japanese drum, or *taiko*.

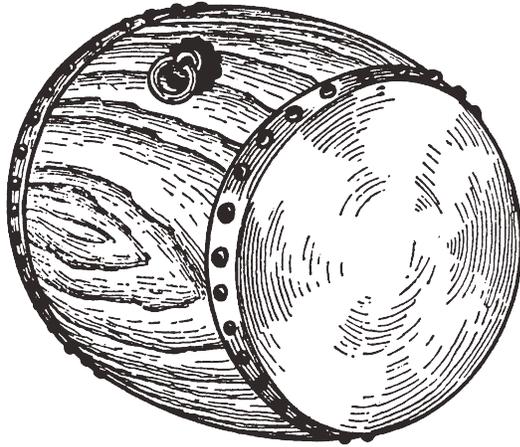
Founded in San Jose Japantown, San Jose Taiko (SJT) is committed to creating new dimensions in Asian American music by using the taiko as its principal instrument. Respecting the tradition and the origin of taiko, SJT has created a riveting percussive art form that synthesizes cross-cultural rhythms with music, theatre, athletics, and dance.

Taiko has the ability to bring people together, dissolving the separation between player and audience. This exchange of energy is what makes the art form of taiko so unique and accessible.





## THE DRUMS

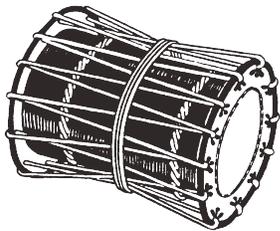


### **Odaiko/Chudaiko/Josuke**

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

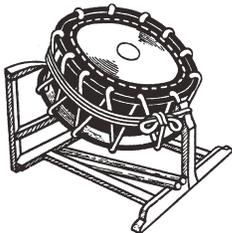
Large bass drum/middle sized drum/lead or melody drum

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. Cowhide 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)

The body of the okedo is shaped like a cylinder, and the heads are attached by lashed rope. This drum also comes in various sizes: from very large to a size small enough so that it 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. These drums must be tied each time they are played and loosened when being stored.



### **Uchiwa** (oo-chee-wah)

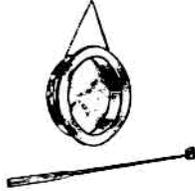
The Japanese word *uchiwa* means fan. This drum is shaped like a fan, and held in the hand when played. Temple monks would beat the *uchiwa* to keep time while they chanted.

### **Bachi** (bah-chee)

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



## 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.



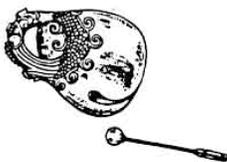
### **Chappa** (*chahp-pah*)

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*, 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.



### **Shinobue** (*shee-noh-booh*)

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.



## RHYTHM

What is rhythm? It is something that repeats itself aurally, visually, or physically. Rhythms can be found everywhere, and ones that repeat 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. Your body creates rhythms when you walk down the street, swing on a swing, or brush y o u r teeth. 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.

Rhythm is one of the basic elements of music. In musical terms, rhythm is defined as organized beats grouped in patterns, which are repeated.

Different cultures have different methods of teaching rhythms. Much of western music is written using the kind of notation you see below, which gives you 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 pattern from an etude called *Renshu* (ren-shoo). It is written to show 1) western notation, 2) the Japanese oral rhythm vocabulary, and 3) the right and left hand patterns.

### Pattern “C” of Renshu

4/4

DON  
right

Ka Ra  
right left

DON  
right

Ka Ra  
right left

DON  
right

Ka Ra  
right left

Ka Ra  
right left

Ka Ra  
right left



## 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, or 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*, *doh-roh*, and *kah*) can be used, or students can create their own sounds.



## 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 the *mon* or family crest.



### **Hachimaki** (hah-chee-mah-kee)

A headband, said to be derived from a strip of cloth used by samurai to secure their helmets to their heads. This developed into a simple strip of cloth, usually printed with bright colors, 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 happi in place is made of thick, stiff fabric three to four inches wide and 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 tabi, 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> century, when the samurai class took over the government, emblems were used on their banners, flags, and weapons. They chose designs to represent warriors, such as arrows, dragons, and bats.

By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, family crests became used by the common people as well. The symbols they chose include more familiar objects, like rabbits, mountains and tools.

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, or 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 familiar with their spiritual thought and practices, but these types of concepts can be 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, which is one of the basic elements of San Jose Taiko's philosophy. The storage house for the ki is called the hara (hah-rah). It is located approximately two fingers below the navel and is considered to be the center of the body and the source of one's strength. 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).
- 2) Let your hands rest in a still position, on the knees or gently clasped together.
- 3) Maintain good posture with 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.
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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.



## 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.



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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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