

STUDY GUIDE  
2005 - 2006 Season

# TAIKO PROJECT



Kids' Participation - Northgate School | Highpoint Elementary School - Seattle, Washington



TT Minor Elementary School | Whitworth Elementary School - Seattle, Washington



This Study Guide was developed as part of the "Big Drum: Taiko in the United States," an exhibition curated by the Japanese American National Museum.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is now more important than ever to acknowledge the need for art education.

The materials in this study guide are designed to give your class supplementary information and activities to enhance the student's appreciation of the TAIKOPROJECT while instilling a broader base of knowledge and understanding of our society's diversity through different cultural perspectives.

America is a country of widespread cultural diversity. Music, and drumming, is a part of every culture, and its function in each culture is integral to its life and vitality. What is an African dance without the drummers? What would Irish music sound like without the dohbran (hand drum)? And what is a Japanese matsuri (festival) without the taiko?

Much can be learned about different cultural traditions and lifestyles by experiencing its music. The TAIKOPROJECT performs contemporary Japanese American taiko drumming. It is an artform drawn from our Japanese ancestry, but nurtured in America by multi-generational Asian Americans in search of a voice for their dual-culture identity. Through the sharing of our music and stories, we share our pride in our heritage and culture, and encourage others to have pride in and explore their own cultural backgrounds, and those of others.

With our school program, we hope to expand students' knowledge of Japanese American taiko. With our drumming and stories, we hope to cross cultural boundaries and open their minds to our world of music, history, and creative expression. This guide is designed to encourage students to explore the ideas and themes found in the TAIKOPROJECT through individual and class activities, and to prepare them for a more understandable viewing of the performance.

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"Home" (2003)  
choreographed by Michelle Fujii  
TAIKOPROJECT:(re)generation  
photo by Robert Meyers

"Many Sides" (2003)  
composed by Masato Baba  
TAIKOPROJECT:(re)generation  
photo by Robert Meyers

"Discovery of a Voice" (2003)  
TAIKOPROJECT:(re)generation  
photo by Robert Meyers

## ORIGINS OF JAPANESE TAIKO

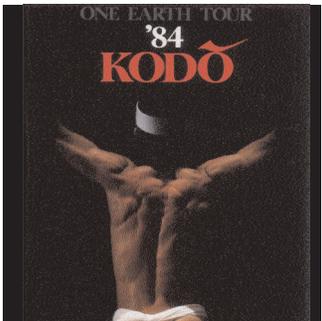
The Japanese word “taiko” (tye-koh) literally means “drum.” The taiko has been used in Japanese life and culture for centuries. One of its earliest known uses was to determine the boundaries of a village. A village was as large as the powerful sound of its taiko could carry. In the 6th Century, in battle, beating the taiko was used to give courage to samurai warriors and to intimidate the enemy. Taiko is also found in more formalized areas of Japanese culture, such as in Kabuki and Noh theatre and the traditional Gagaku music of the Imperial Court.



Taiko also plays an important part in religious activities in Japan. In Shintoism, all natural phenomena, the mountains, fire, water, and animals are thought to contain a spirit of a deity or god. The taiko is often used as a voice to call these gods to give thanks to them or pray to them. They believed that their music was an offering to these deities, which would bring them good fortune. For this reason, taiko was often at the center of folk festivals. Farmers played the taiko believing that its thunder would bring rain for their crops. Fishermen played the taiko to request a bountiful catch. In other festivals the taiko is played to dispel evil spirits, ward off sickness, or give thanks for prosperity. In Buddhism, the taiko is considered the voice of the Buddha, along with the horagai, or conch shell.

The modern kumi-daiko (group drumming) ensemble started after World War II in Japan. Daihachi Oguchi, a jazz drummer discovered taiko and was captivated by its power. In the early 50's he started what is considered to be the first taiko group, Osuwa Daiko, in Nagano, Japan. Taiko groups were formed all throughout Japan since that time, in large part to a desire to return to traditional Japanese arts and culture.

Two other taiko groups from Japan are considered major influences on American taiko, Tokyo's “O Edo Sukeroku Taiko” and “Ondeko-za.” O Edo Sukeroku Taiko is known for its dynamic double-drum style of taiko drumming and slant style of taiko drumming. Ondeko-za started in 1969, by Tagayasu Den, and in 1981, the group split, giving birth to the most internationally-known taiko group, “Kodo.”



Gagaku/Bugaku  
courtesy of Kinnara

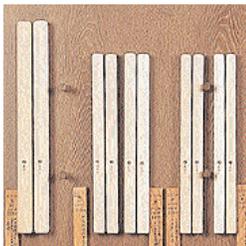
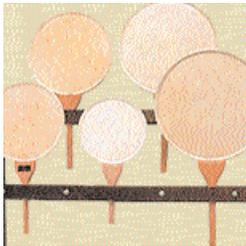
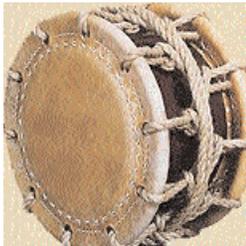
Taiko skinning drawings  
courtesy of Miyamoto Unosuke  
Shoten

Kodo Promotional Card (1984)  
courtesy of Kodo

## MUSICAL INSTRUMENTATION

### Odaiko

The Odaiko is the largest drum in the taiko family. When “O-“ is added to the beginning of words in Japanese, it often means “Great.” The “Odaiko” is considered the “Great Drum,” and although they vary in size, it is usually the largest drum in a set, and can be as large as 12 feet in diameter. The TAIKOPROJECT’s “Odaiko” is 5 feet in diameter.



From top: Odaiko  
Chudaiko  
Okedo  
Shimedaiko  
Uchiwadaiko  
Bachi

Photos provided by  
Asano Taiko Company, Ltd.

### Chudaiko

The Chudaiko is considered the medium drum of a taiko set, and is usually around 1 1/2 - 2 feet in diameter. The Chudaiko and Odaiko are considered “Nagado-taiko,” their wooden bodies carved from a single tree trunk and the cowskin drumheads stretched and secured with metal tacks.

### Okedo

The Okedo is a lighter drum made from wooden staves put together like a bucket.

The drumheads are stretched over metal rings and sewn together, and then stretched over the wooden bodies with ropes and a special tying method. Its lighter weight makes it easier for taiko players to carry it while playing, often with an over-the-shoulder strap.

### Shimedaiko

The Shimedaiko is made from a wooden body, stretched with rope or with metal bolts. It is tightened higher than any other taiko, and its piercing tone cuts through the low pitches of the other taiko drums.

### Uchiwadaiko

The Uchiwadaiko is a drumhead stretched

over a metal ring, like the shimedaiko, but then the ring is attached to a wooden handle. It is often used in dances where the dancer plays the drum with one stick but is freed up to move around easily. “Uchiwa” means “fan” in Japanese, as the uchiwadaiko looks like a Japanese fan.

### Bachi

Bachi are drumsticks used for playing taiko. They are made from a variety of soft and hardwoods, such as hinoki (Japanese cedar) and hou (magnolia), softwoods, and kashi (Japanese white oak) and maple, hardwoods. They are also made in different sizes—with larger bachi for larger drums, and smaller bachi for smaller drums.

### Chappa

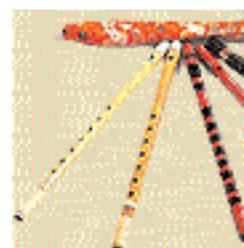
Small brass Japanese hand cymbals

### Atarigane

Brass gong struck with a small mallet in different places to make different sounds.

### Yokobue

Bamboo side flute often played in accompaniment to taiko, especially in matsuri, festivals.



From top: Chappa  
and Atarigane  
Yokobue



### Homemade Taiko

When taiko first began in the United States, many groups had to make their own drums due to the high expense of purchasing a taiko from Japan. Thus the invention of the American-style wine barrel taiko came into being. In addition to being a necessity, making one's own drum taught the taiko player their first important lesson – to respect the instrument.

The intention of this activity is to create your own instruments in order to form your own taiko ensemble. While doing this process, the student's will also potentially feel a sense of pride and respect towards their own personal taiko.



### Activity 1: Newspaper bachi (drumsticks)

Items needed: newspaper, duct tape

Take 6-8 layers of newspaper and roll them. The diameter should be about 1 1/2 – 2 inches. Fasten the ends with duct tape. If possible, tape the entire newspaper surface so as not to get one's hands and/or the classroom dirty from the newspaper print.



### Activity 2: Coffee Can Taiko (drum)

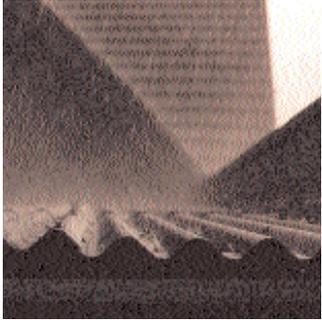
Items needed: emptied coffee cans, clear packing tape

Remove the lid from the coffee can. Cover the entire top with clear packing tape. Refer to the pictures on the left. Although any taping style will work, the recommended way is to first start by taping a cross (horizontal, vertical). Then proceed to tape an "X". After this is done, proceed to tape

### Student Outcomes:

- Create your own drumsticks and drum
- Learn about the process of making an instrument
- Learn how to respect your own instrument

Conclusion: After this activity, your class will be ready to create your own taiko ensemble! Proceed to the following exercises.



## WHAT IS RHYTHM?

Rhythm is something that repeats itself, aurally, visually, or physically. You can hear rhythms everywhere---when it rains, you hear the rhythms of rain hitting roofs of buildings, when you pass a construction site, you hear the rhythms of the jackhammer hitting the ground, and when the telephone rings.

When you can see rhythms, they are called patterns. You can see a pattern in a succession of traffic lights down the street, in rows of windows of a wide building, and even in the pages of a book when you flip them from back to front.



Finally, you can make rhythms with movement. Almost anything you do creates rhythm. Walking creates rhythms with your arms, your legs, and your whole body. When you eat something, your chewing creates a rhythm (and a tasty one, at that!). Put your hand over your heart. This is your own unique, personal rhythm!

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

Are you ready to try it out? Here we go!



### Exercise 1: Finding Rhythm Together

Student Outcomes: Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate steady tempo. Rhythms, hand/feet coordination, and group listening
- Understand the three ways we encounter rhythms in our daily lives
- Make up their own short, improvisational rhythms

Anticipatory Set: Go over the three types of rhythms and have students identify rhythms that they have experienced.

Activity: Have the students stand up and form a circle. Explain that you are all going to play a rhythm together, starting with a basic “stomp” walk. In an easy tempo, guide students to walk in unison, “right, left, right, left...” until they are all together. Once they have the “stomp” walk together, then have everyone clap on each step. Then clap every other step...then every third step...and finally every fourth step. Once they’ve tried all of these, try this simple pattern with clapping while still doing the basic “stomp” walk:

- clap once every four steps four times
- clap once every three steps four times
- clap once every two steps four times
- clap once every step four times
- and repeat!

WHAT IS RHYTHM? *continued*

Once they have mastered this, then have them try passing around a “pulse” in the circle—begin with the “stomp” walk in place, then once your “basebeat” is set, designate a student to start the pulse and the direction (clockwise or counter-clockwise), and start with one clap and send it around, keeping in time with the “stomp” walk. Be sure they do not speed it up and explain that if even if the person in front of them doesn’t get it, try to keep the rhythm going. If this goes well, you can try two variations:

- sending around two pulses (after one is set and traveling around, have the same student – or yourself – send around a second pulse)
- change direction of the pulse with a triple clap (you facilitate this, once the pulse is traveling, after a clap, clap three times fast, with the third clap ending on the next person’s clap, upon which the pulse will change direction)

If they master this, you can take the next step and have students do a four count improvisational call-and-response. Start this the same way, with the “stomp” and then, one by one each student has four counts to clap any rhythm, and then the class tries to repeat with the same rhythm. Immediately after the class is done repeating, the next student gives the four-count call and the class responds.

Conclusion: After the activity, go over learning points and encourage students to come up with new rhythm patterns with stomping and clapping and prep them for Activity 2.



## KUCHI SHOGA

Most taiko players learn songs through “kuchi shoga.” “Kuchi” means “mouth” and “shoga” means “to sing.” Literally, taiko players learn how to “sing” the taiko songs and then transfer that song into playing it on the drum. It is one of many styles of learning music and can be notated verbally and written. Each verbal sound represents a sound made by the drum and a time value.



- Don (dohn)                      Hard right hand strike to the drum head (1/4 note)
- Dogo (doh-goh)                Hard right/left strikes to the drum head (2 – 1/4 notes)
- Tsu (tsoo)                        Soft right hand strike to the drum head (1/4 note)
- Tsuku (tsoo-koo)                Soft right/left strikes to the drum head (2 – 1/4 notes)
- Ka (kah)                          Hard right hand strike to the drum rim (1/4 note)
- Kara (kah-rah)                  Hard right/left strikes to the drum rim (2 – 1/4 notes)
- Su (soo)                          A Rest – don’t play – (1/4 note)
- Eii-yess-SA!!                    A Kiai – instead of playing the drum, yell!!!  
(aaaayyy – like “day,”– yess—SAW!!)



Bryan Yamami  
photo by Robert Meyers

Michelle Fujii, Tiffany Furuta,  
Shoji Kameda  
photo by Edward Ikuta

TAIKOPROJECT  
Arizona workshop  
photo by Alan Tang

## RENSHU Song Patterns

“Renshu” means “practice” in Japanese and is also a taiko song that almost all American taiko players have learned as their first taiko song. It was written by Seiichi Tanaka, the founder of San Francisco Taiko Dojo.

Here are “Renshu” patterns one and two:

### Pattern One

Don	Don	Don	Don	Dondondondon	Dorotsuku	Don	Don
R	L	R	L	R L R L	R L R L	R	L
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

### Pattern Two

Don	Kara	Don	Kara	Don	Kara	Kara	Kara
R	R L	R	R L	R	R L	R L	R L
1		2		3		4	

## Exercise 2: Learning Kuchi Shoga!

**Student Outcomes:** Students will be able to:

- Sing Renshu Patterns One and Two
- Play Renshu Patterns One and Two on their laps
- Develop their own “kuchi shoga” ideas and rhythm patterns

**Anticipatory Set:** Go over definition of “kuchi shoga” and vocalize with students the vocabulary of taiko “kuchi shoga.”

**Activity Part One:** Starting with Renshu Pattern One, sing the patterns out with the students. Clap on the numbered beats to help keep them together, remind them to listen to each other and to sing the patterns strongly and in time. Once they can sing Renshu Pattern One, go over the hand movements, which are just right-left through the pattern. See notation for R & L denoted beats. Have students sing and play patterns simultaneously. Repeat process for Pattern Two, which is a little trickier. If they get through both, try splitting them into two groups and going back and forth, and then even further, to have one group sing/play Pattern One, while the other sing/plays Pattern Two twice (since Pattern one is twice as long). If they get this, then try speeding up the tempo!

**Conclusion:** After this activity, you can go into two directions. If the students have homemade instruments, they can create sounds and songs on them. If you are proceeding to the next exercise without homemade instruments, you can run the exercises with just vocal drumming/songs, or use “found” instruments to create songs and rhythmic patterns.

## ORAL TRADITION

In many folk music traditions throughout the world like Africa, India, Japan, etc., learning music was transmitted orally. The music was taught by using a verbal vocabulary, which represented the sounds of the instrument. In the previous kuchi shouga lesson, you were introduced to this vocabulary used for taiko.

Within this activity, your class will create your own oral vocabulary. Then you can create your own taiko songs!

### Activity 1: Create your own Vocabulary of Sound

You or one student designated as the leader will play one sound at a time on the taiko. The leader can strike the center of the drum loudly, softly, hit the side or the rim. Be creative and find different places on your taiko that could create a variety of sounds. As the leader makes one sound, the class will come up with a syllable or word to describe what they heard. This will create your rhythmic vocabulary.

### Activity 2: Create your own rhythms

Put 4 of those vocabulary words together which forms a rhythm. Slowly begin by saying 4 sounds. Then have the students repeat after you. Finish by playing those sounds on the taiko.

Slowly create longer rhythms. If adventurous, begin to join some of these rhythms. This will create a song. Some easy formats are AABA, ABA, ABCD, and ABACA

### Student Outcomes

- Students will create their own vocabulary for sounds
- Students will create their own taiko songs.

Conclusion: By now, students have learned the origins of Japanese taiko, the history of American taiko, they have experienced rhythm patterns first-hand, and have created their own sounds, and arranged them into short song patterns! Now, they are ready to see the show! Encourage them to try to pick out aspects of previous lessons in the show and musical patterns in the taiko songs and to relate their own cultural origins to the stories and music of our Japanese American style of taiko drumming!

## GLOSSARY

Bachi	Drumsticks used to play taiko
Kama-ete	“Get ready” command for preparing to play taiko
Kata	The movement, discipline, and form when playing taiko
Kiai	Spirited yelling and vocals while playing taiko
Kuchi Shoga	Vocal notation for translating taiko into songs/sounds
Kumidaiko	The artform of contemporary group taiko drumming
Narimono	Percussion and other instruments used with taiko
Odaiko	“The Great Drum”
Sensei	“Teacher,” calling someone “sensei” is also a sign of respect (your teacher at school, your coach in sports, are all your “sensei”s!)
Taiko	“Drum” Americans have taken to calling group drumming “Taiko.”
Wadaiko	“Japanese Drumming” Japanese call group drumming “Wadaiko” while “Taiko” to them, just means “Drum.”



## RESOURCES

<a href="http://www.taiko.com">www.taiko.com</a>	Rolling Thunder Taiko Resource website Good source for general taiko information
<a href="http://www.taikoinfo.org">www.taikoinfo.org</a>	More information on taiko drums and music.

TAIKOPROJECT  
School Show, Kyrene Pueblo  
Elementary School, Arizona

Bombu Taiko  
Japanese Village Plaza,  
Los Angeles

TAIKOPROJECT cast  
photo by Edward Ikuta

## TAIKO GROUP WEBSITES

<a href="http://www.TAIKOPROJECT.com">www.TAIKOPROJECT.com</a>	The TAIKOPROJECT’s website! Check it out!
<a href="http://www.taikodojo.org">www.taikodojo.org</a>	San Francisco Taiko Dojo, first group to form in the U.S.
<a href="http://www.taiko.org">www.taiko.org</a>	San Jose Taiko, third group to form in the U.S.
<a href="http://www.taikoarts.com">www.taikoarts.com</a>	Kenny Endo’s website, one of America’s leading taiko drummers
<a href="http://www.onensemble.org">www.onensemble.org</a>	Contemporary taiko ensemble that Shoji, Michelle, and Masato are also members of!
<a href="http://www.senshintemple.org">www.senshintemple.org</a>	The Buddhist temple where American taiko began!

Additional resources:

- taiko playstation game
- <http://web-jpn.org/kidsweb/index.html>  
check out “Meet the Kids” and other pages from this site.
- Japanese Children’s Literature
  - The Boy of the Three-Year Nap
  - The Funny Little Women
  - The Paper Crane
  - Under the Cherry Blossom Tree
  - Chibi-A True Story from Japan
  - Crow Boy
  - The Drums of Noto Hanto
  - People and War
  - Grandpa’s Town
  - Of Nightingales that Weep
  - Baseball saved us
  - The Bracelet
  - Chopsticks from America
  - Grandfather’s Journey
  - Tea with Milk
  - Tree of Cranes
  - Hirshima No Pika
  - Cool Melons – Turn to Frogs! The Life and Poems of Issa
  - Haiku Picturebook for Children
  - Kamishibai (the bamboo princess, hats for Jizos, how the witch was eaten up, how the years were named, Kon and Pon, the Magic of Rice Paddle, The One-Inch Boy, The Peach Boy, the Story of Tanabata, The Tongue-cut Sparrow, Urashima Taro
- Curriculum ties
  - create musical instrument
  - respect for instrument
  - rhythm and pattern
  - movement
  - Japan (arts and culture)