



EduTrend Contents

W4C · MULTICULTURAL ARTS · PRIMARY

West African Drumming

Learn djembe sounds and call and response

Ages 8–11

Level: Developing

60 minutes

Whole class and
groups of 5

Activity 02

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 pupil worksheets · assessment checklist

ACTIVITY 02 · AT A GLANCE

West African Drumming

Pupils learn about the djembe, a goblet-shaped drum from West Africa, and practise its bass, tone and slap sounds on drums or tables. They play call-and-response patterns, layer three rhythms into a polyrhythm and perform a group piece with a leader.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session pupils can:

- describe the djembe and its cultural context;
- play bass, tone and slap sounds;
- perform call-and-response patterns;
- keep a part within layered rhythms.

KEY WORDS

djembe · bass · tone · slap · call and response · polyrhythm · ensemble · West Africa

CURRICULUM LINKS

Music: rhythm, ensemble and world music. Geography: West Africa. PSHE: teamwork.

1**DISCOVER**

Meet the tradition

2**LISTEN**

Hear its people and meanings

3**EXPLORE**

Try the technique

4**CREATE**

Make your response

5**REFLECT**

Respect and connect

6**SHARE**

Present with credit

Materials

- Djembes or other hand drums (tables or buckets can substitute)
- Images and audio of West African drumming from reputable sources
- A map of West Africa
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Learn the three sounds yourself.
- Prepare three simple rhythm patterns.
- Arrange drums in a circle.
- Find a recording of a djembe ensemble.

SAFETY

Play with relaxed hands; avoid hitting the rim hard. Protect hearing: keep sessions short and use quiet signals.

ACTIVITY 02 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

Teach by ear first, just as drumming is often learned in West Africa, then show the patterns written down.

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Hook	Listen to a djembe ensemble and locate West Africa on a map.	<i>"How many different parts can you hear?"</i>
10–20 min Sounds	Learn bass (centre), tone (edge, fingers together) and slap (edge, relaxed fingers).	<i>"Can you hear the difference?"</i>
20–30 min Call and response	Leader plays a call; the group answers.	<i>"How does the group know when to come in?"</i>
30–50 min Polyrhythm	Groups learn three patterns and layer them.	<i>"Can you keep your part while others play theirs?"</i>
50–60 min Perform	Perform with a pupil leader signalling start and stop.	<i>"What makes an ensemble sound tight?"</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Perform a layered rhythm piece using bass, tone and slap sounds, with call-and-response signals led by a pupil.

ACTIVITY 02 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The culture and craft in brief

The djembe is a goblet-shaped drum played with bare hands, strongly associated with the Mandinka peoples of West Africa, in countries including Mali and Guinea. Players produce three main sounds: a deep bass in the centre, a clear tone near the edge and a sharp slap at the edge.

West African drumming often uses call and response, where a lead drummer plays a call and the group answers. Polyrythm layers different rhythms at the same time so they interlock. Drumming traditionally accompanies dance, celebrations and community events, and skills are often passed on by listening and copying.

Common ideas to listen for

- “Africa has one kind of music.” The continent has thousands of musical traditions.
- “Hitting harder sounds better.” Technique, not force, makes a clear sound.
- “Rhythms must all be the same.” Different interlocking parts create the texture.

Adapting the activity

Support

Play only bass and tone, and keep the beat while others add patterns.

Stretch

Lead the call-and-response section or compose a new pattern that fits.

WORKSHEET 1

Djembe sounds

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Describe each sound.

Sounds

Sound	Where on the drum	What it sounds like
Bass		
Tone		
Slap		

WORKSHEET 2

Our patterns

Write your group’s pattern.

Pattern (B = bass, T = tone, S = slap, - = rest)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Pattern 1							
Pattern 2							

WORKSHEET 3

Performance reflection

Think about the ensemble.

What I learned about West African drumming

How we stayed together

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight pupils; copy as needed.

Pupil	Plays three sounds	Responds to calls	Keeps part in polyrhythm

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

West African Drumming is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents W4C Multicultural Arts programme (primary, level: developing). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at edutrend.org.

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