

CITY OF SAN JOSE'S Arts Express Program Presents:

**San Jose Taiko
Teacher Guide**
Grades K-12
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About the Arts Organization

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, because of its symbolism and possibilities, was the Japanese drum, known as *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 as its philosophical basis, SJT has created a riveting percussive art form that synthesizes cross-cultural rhythms to music, theatre, athletics and dance. For SJT, the taiko evokes the beauty and harmony of the human spirit, linking the cultural past to the vitality of the present.

About the Program

This 45-minute program blends performance, dialogue and audience participation. The educational component is carefully inserted between short performances in a manner that strengthens retention and maintains student interest. Historical context for the instruments and culture as well as San Jose Taiko's unique learning philosophy are shared with students. This philosophy combines many aspects of the mind and body.

The four learning principles of San Jose Taiko are:

- 1) *ki*: energy with which we play (emotional)
- 2) attitude: having a positive and open mind (mental)
- 3) *kata*: form or stance, the choreography of how bodies are used (physical, visual)
- 4) musical technique: how to hold sticks, play the drums and learn music (aural, the sound you hear)

Historical and Cultural Context

ORIGINS OF THE TAIKO

The Tale of Amaterasu and the Cave tells of the mythological origin of the taiko (drum) and drummer in Japan. 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 to feed them. Amaterasu's crops were destroyed, and she became very angry. 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 upon the earth. Without sunshine, the earth would be dark and cold, and crops would not grow. Surely they would die. So the people prayed to the gods and goddesses to help them. Finally, Uzume, the Goddess of Mirth, came forward.

Uzume went to the cave entrance and began a joyous dance upon a hollow log (barrel). 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.

TAIKO HISTORY

The Japanese word "taiko" (tye-koh) means drum. The directness and immediacy of the drum has made it an important musical instrument in many cultures. The Japanese have used the drum for many purposes. 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 for battle as military music, to give courage to the samurai (warriors), and to intimidate the enemy. Taiko is also found in other areas of Japanese culture. It is used in various types of theater, and is one of the fundamental instruments in the music of the Imperial Court. Drums play an important part in Japanese religions. In the Shinto belief system, all natural phenomena, such as the mountains, fire, water, and animals, contain a spiritual deity. The taiko is used as a voice to call these gods to give thanks or pray to them. The Japanese believed that their music was an offering to the deities, which would bring them good luck. For this reason, the taiko was often at the center of many folk festivals. 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 harvest of fish. At other festivals, the drum is played to dispel evil spirits, ward off sickness, or give thanks for prosperity. In the Buddhist religion, the taiko is thought to be the voice of the Buddha. It is the voice of wisdom, compassion, truth, and beauty, calling out to instruct the people.

The drum is believed to have a *kami*, 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 and the heartbeat of the Japanese spirit.

Learning Objectives

Students will--

- Learn the basic history of Taiko
- Learn about taiko instruments and costume
- Understand the four principles that are the learning philosophy of San Jose Taiko

Vocabulary—

Bachi (*bah-chee*)

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

Chappa (*chahp-pah*)

Small hand cymbals made of metal. The size and nature of this instrument allows the player freedom of movement.

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

A headband, said to be derived from a strip of cloth used by warriors to secure their helmets to their heads. This developed into a simple strip of cloth, usually printed with bright color that is tied around the forehead before engaging in any kind of strenuous activity

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 a symbol called a *mon*. The *mon* is the family crest possessed by every Japanese family.

Obi (*oh-bee*)

A belt or sash. The type of obi used to hold a man's style happi in place is made of thick, stiff fabric three to four inches wide and about three to five feet long. It is tightly wrapped around the body and tied in a decorative bow.

Odaiko/Chudaiko/Josuke (*oh-dye-koh/choo-due-koh/joh-zoo-keh*)

Large bass drum/middle sized drum used as a 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 instead of cowhide.

Rhythm: The combination of long and short, even and uneven sounds, that convey a sense of movement in time.

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. Tying requires a one- or two-person pulling system. These drums must be tied each time they are played.

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.

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.

Preparation for the Program

1. Review the history of Taiko
2. Learn the four principals of the learning philosophy
3. Review the vocabulary

Curriculum Connections--CA Visual and Performing Arts Standards

Note: The California Visual and Performing Arts Standards were created based on the premise that each student is receiving comprehensive and sequential arts instruction in all four major arts disciplines. Since this is rarely the case, the following standards may not correspond to the grade levels served by the Arts Express program.

These standards are taken from the dance, music and theatre disciplines as taiko incorporates all of these art forms.

Artistic Perception

1.5 (3rd grade) Describe the way in which sound is produced on various instruments (music).

Creative Expression

2.4 (3rd grade) Create short rhythmic and melodic phrases in question-and-answer form.

Historical and Cultural Context

3.3 (2nd grade) Name and perform rhythms and music from various cultures (dance & music).

3.2 (4th grade) Identify music from diverse cultures and time periods (music).

3.2 (5th grade) Identify different/similar uses of musical elements in music from diverse cultures (music).

3.2 (5th grade) Interpret how theater/storytelling forms of various cultural groups may reflect their beliefs and traditions (theater).

3.1 (7th grade) Identify and perform dances from countries studied in the history-social studies curriculum (dance).

3.5 (7th grade) Identify instruments from a variety of cultures visually and aurally (music).

Aesthetic Valuing

4.1 (Kinder) Respond appropriately to a theatrical experience as audience members (theater).

4.1 (2nd grade) Respond to a live performance with appropriate audience behavior (music).

4.2 (6th grade) Explain how various aesthetic qualities convey images, feeling or emotion (music).

Resources

Hideo Haga. **Japanese Festivals**; Hakusha Color Book #13.

Describes and documents with beautiful photos many of the festivals in Japan.

Hiroshi Naito. **Legends of Japan**; Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1972.

Collection of classic folk tales from the Heian period.

William P. Malm. **Japanese Music and Musical Instruments**; 1959.

Academic account of the history of Japanese music.

Juliet Piggot. **Japanese Mythology**; Paul Hamlyn Publications, 1969.

Reference book of mythology with colorful illustrations.

Video Clip from SPARK on KQED coming soon: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/spark/>

Video Clip on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBPg9IRUh90>

General taiko on Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiko>

General Japanese culture: <http://www.japan-zone.com/culture/index.shtml>