

Teacher Guide

Cue Sheet

YAMATO – The Drummers of Japan

Friday, April 23, 2027
10:15am

Questions to ask students **BEFORE** the performance

- Taiko companies play many different drums. Guess what sizes the drums might be. Are they the size of desks, backpacks, or doors?
- Do you study martial arts such as Karate or Jiu Jitsu? If so, can you demonstrate a little of what you know?
- Yamato drummers exercise daily to keep in shape. Why do you think they would need to exercise so much to play the drums?

Questions to ask students **AFTER** the performance

- What was the most impressive thing about the show?
- You heard the music from the drums. How many of you felt the music? What did that feel like?
- All the musicians seemed to be in very good shape. How might that be important for what they were doing?



About the Performance

Yamato is a Japanese Taiko drumming group based in Japan. They have performed more than 4,700 shows across 55 countries around the world since their formation in 1993. On stage, they stand with more than 40 different Taiko. For example, their largest drum called “Odaiko,” produced from a huge tree over 400 years old, is more than six feet in diameter and weighs over 1,000 pounds. Other Taiko drums come in different sizes, each producing a unique sound.

The members of the group have trained their bodies to the limit to beat these massive Taiko drums. They do not simply make their Taiko drums explode with sound; they also produce delicate music that provides the listener with a palette of meticulously crafted beats. This is why Yamato’s original performances are known as “Physical music.” Yamato songs range from intense and sad to comforting and comical on stage.

For the performers, the audience is more than a group of bystanders at their performances. The audience is engulfed in the sound of the Taiko; they become one with the performers. All types of people gather around the sound of the Taiko, interweaving their lives and feeling the power of being together in that moment, in that sound.



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Vocabulary

bachi (BAH-chee) - drum sticks

chudaiko (choo-DYE-koh) - medium-sized drum, the one most commonly found in a kumidaiko

daiko (DYE-koh) - has the same meaning as taiko (drum) but is spelled this way when combined with other words or syllables, like kumidaiko or odaiko.

dojo (DOH-zhoh) - literally, place of the Way; a space for studying, especially for immersive or experiential learning; also, a place for meditation

don (dohn, though the last "n" is more of a nasal sound than one completed by closing the sound with the tongue on the hard palate) - a single loud beat to the center of the drum

hachimaki (hah-chee-MAH-kee) - a headband worn folded or twisted, which may be part of a taiko group's uniform

hara (HAH-rah) - center of the head of the drum

kumidaiko (KOO-me-die-koh) - a group ensemble of taiko

ji (jee) - the underlying rhythm of a taiko

kata (KAH-tah) - form; posture and movement used in taiko; similar to kata in martial arts where kata is used as a means to teach

kiai (KEE-eye) - an impulsive yell, showing energy or support for fellow players

odaiko (oh-DYE-koh) - a large drum

rhythm (RIH-thum) - a pattern of sounds set to the established tempo. The rhythm of a march is different than a Latin rhythm, though they may have the same tempo.

shimedaiko (she-may-DYE-koh) - drumheads held in place by ropes, which can be loosened or tightened to change the pitch of the drum

taiko (TYE-koh) - drum; also refers to the Japanese style of ensemble drumming

tempo (TEM-poh) - the pace or rate of speed for the beats in a song



Additional Resources

Click here to learn more about taiko from the Taiko Community Alliance.

Interactive PDF
Click here to visit link.

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Beyond the Show

Use these activities before or after the performance to extend the production's themes and concepts into the classroom.

Beginning Taiko

Taiko, like all drumming, works with tempos and rhythms. One thing that sets taiko apart is the poses drummers assume while they play. To prepare for students learning a simple taiko sequence, gather items you and your students can use as bachi, or drumsticks: empty paper towel rolls, pool noodles, gift-wrap paper tubes, or foil or plastic wrap cores, cut to about 10 inches long. Then, using desks or tabletops as drums, have the students watch this video to learn about basic Taiko drumming strokes.

Our Pulse, Our Beat

Drums often set and maintain the tempo for whatever music is being played. That tempo often matches our heart rate or our breathing. See if your students can feel their pulse on their wrists or necks, then tap their feet to the rhythm they feel. The reverse can happen, too, where the tempo performed on drums can alter our pulses. Play some dance music that has a faster tempo than most heart rates. See if your students' heart rates increase to match that.

Take a Breath

Ask your students to sit in their chairs with their feet on the floor or cross-legged or kneeling on the floor. Have them place their hands on their knees and close their eyes and mouths. Have them pay attention to their breathing. Many will likely have small, shallow breaths. Now have everyone slowly breathe in, then back out. They should feel their bellies expand as they breathe in. Their ribcages should expand. After a minute or two, ask them to open their eyes and explain how they felt after the deeper breathing. They might be calmer, more focused, and happier. Ask if anyone feels like they have more energy, then explain that taiko drummers start with their breath so they can focus and bring more energy and attention to their drumming.