

ANCHORAGE MUSEUM

MUSIC: ALASKA DRUM TYPES



Box Drum

David Boxley

Cedar, acrylic paint, commercial leather, cedar bark
Anchorage Museum, 1999.002.001ac

UNIT AT A GLANCE

In this activity, students will learn more about Alaska Native drums through a close-looking activity and will investigate rhythms and sounds using non-pitched percussion instruments (i.e. shakers, skins, scrapers, metals, or wood instruments) in two lead-and-follow type activities.

STANDARDS

Alaska Arts Standards:

- MU:Cr1-Ka With guidance, explore and experience musical concepts (e.g. beat and melodic contour)
- MU:Cr1-Kb With guidance, generate musical ideas (e.g. movement)
- MU:Pr4.2-K With guidance, explore and demonstrate musical contrasts of music selected for performance (e.g. high/low, loud/soft, same/ different, and fast/slow)
- MU:Pr4.5-K With guidance, apply personal, teacher, and peer feedback to refine performances

MATERIALS

Close-Looking

- Box Drum, David Boxley, Anchorage Museum; 1999.002.001ac
- Drum, Anchorage Museum; 2002.025.301a
- Barrow, Anchorage Museum; B2017.024.1047
- Arctic Igloo - [Tikigaq Dancers 2017 Alaska Federation of Natives](#)
- Rural Alaska Community Action Program - [Yup'ik Song by Byron Nicholai of Toksook Bay](#)
- Sealaska Heritage Institute - [Tasmaay \(4th Generation Tsimshian Dancers\) at Celebration](#)

Music

- Orff instruments or simple percussion items

KEY TERMS

- Log drum** a type of drum typically constructed from a single hollow log, usually without a drum membrane
- Frame drum** a drum made by stretching the drum head over a wooden hoop with an attached handle; the drum head is usually marine mammal membrane and is secured by wrapping string cinched tightly and nestled in a notch carved around the middle of the frame
- Box drum** a type of drum in a box-like shape, sometimes has an open face
- Plank drum** a type of drum in which one strikes a suspended plank
- Hand drum** a broad term referring to a drum made by stretching the drum head over a wooden hoop; the drum head is usually animal hide and is secured tightly in the back with the use of string stretching across the diameter of the frame to hold the skin tight

CLOSE-LOOKING

- TIME FRAME** Approximately 40 minutes
- MATERIALS** Box Drum, David Boxley, Anchorage Museum; 1999.002.001ac
Drum, Anchorage Museum; 2002.025.301a
Barrow, Anchorage Museum; B2017.024.1047

Arctic Igloo - [Tikigaq Dancers 2017 Alaska Federation of Natives](#)

Rural Alaska Community Action Program - [Yup'ik Song by Byron Nicholai of Toksook Bay](#)

Sealaska Heritage Institute - [Tasmaay \(4th Generation Tsimshian Dancers\) at Celebration 2018](#)

Sealaska Heritage Institute - [Ahtna Heritage Dancers, Celebration 2012 | Sealaska Heritage](#)

DIRECTIONS

1. Begin by looking closely at provided photographs. Use the questions below to guide discussion.

[30 min.]

CLOSE-LOOKING: Look closely, quietly at the objects for a few minutes.

OBSERVE: Share your observations about each photograph.



Box Drum, David Boxley, Anchorage Museum; 1999.002.001ac

ASK: What do you notice about this object?
Describe the parts and shapes that you see in this object.
What might the images in the object be doing?
How might this object sound if you could tap on it?
How do you think this object was made?
What does this remind you of?
What more can you find?



Drum, Anchorage Museum; 2002.025.301a

ASK: What do you notice about this object?
What do you think this object is made of?
How might this object feel if you could touch it?
What does this remind you of?
What more can you find?



Barrow, Anchorage Museum; B2017.024.1047

ASK: What do you notice about this image?
Describe the objects and person that you see in this image.
Describe how it might feel if you were in the photo.
Why do you think this photo was taken?
What does this remind you of?
What more can you find?

DISCUSS: Use the [20 Questions Deck](#) for more group discussion questions about the photographs.

2. As a class, watch short segments of drumming of the following:

Arctic Igloo - [Tikigaq Dancers 2017 Alaska Federation of Natives](#)

Rural Alaska Community Action Program - [Yup'ik Song by Byron Nicholai of Toksook Bay](#)

Sealaska Heritage Institute - [Tasmaay \(4th Generation Tsimshian Dancers\) at Celebration 2018](#)

Sealaska Heritage Institute - [Ahtna Heritage Dancers, Celebration 2012 | Sealaska](#)

Heritage

Discuss the various kinds of drums that students see and hear in these clips. Ask students what makes each drum different from another one.

[10 min.]

MUSIC: FOLLOW THE DRUM LEADER

TIME FRAME	Approximately 20 minutes
MATERIALS	Orff instruments or simple percussion items
DIRECTIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gather students into a large circle and give each student a simple percussion instrument (shakers, drums, woodblocks, etc.). If there are not enough instruments for all students, invite some of the students clap, stomp, or snap for the activity. [2 min.]2. Begin by constructing a simple rhythm. Ask students to match the rhythm that you set. [1 min.]3. Let a different student begin their own rhythm for a few measures, it must be simple enough to repeat and for other students to try to match. [1 min.]4. Switch leaders every few measures to allow other students a chance to set the beat and pace for the drum circle. [8 min.]5. Once students are comfortable keeping time, allow students the option to walk or dance along to the beat that is being set by the drum leader. [3 min.]6. Let students experiment with faster or slower drumbeats to watch as their classmates adapt to the changing tempos. [5 min.]

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed based on participation in class discussion and completion of Follow the Drum Leader.

MUSIC: GUESS THE LEADER

TIME FRAME	Approximately 30 minutes
MATERIALS	Orff instruments or simple percussion items
DIRECTIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gather students into a large circle. Give each student a simple percussion instrument (shakers, drums, woodblocks, for example). If there are not enough instruments for all students, allow some of the students clap, stomp, or snap their fingers for the activity. [2 min.]2. Send one student out of the room, they will be the Guesser for the round. [2 min.]

3. Once the Guesser has left the room, select a Drum Leader for the round. The Drum Leader will establish a rhythm that all other students in the circle must match.

[2 min.]

4. Once the Drum Leader is established, bring the Guesser back into the room and place them in the center of the circle. Encourage the Drum Leader to change their patterns frequently to make the game more interesting.

[10 min.]

5. The Guesser must watch the drum circle and has three guesses as to who the Drum Leader is for that round.

[10 min.]

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed based on participation in class discussion and completion of Guess the Leader.

LEARN MORE

DRUM TYPES IN ALASKA

Alaska is home to several distinct drum types. Among the most recognizable ones are the two types of portable frame drums found across Alaska. For frame drums found in the north and western parts of Alaska, the wide shape of the drumhead contrasts with the handle, giving this style of frame drum its distinct shape. The other drum construction, which lacks a visible handle, is commonly referred to as a hand drum and appears throughout many of the world's cultures.

Less familiar to many are the drum types lacking a membrane such as box drums, plank drums, and log drums. Box drums take a familiar box shape through bentwood construction or through other means of adjoining wood planes. Like the more mainstream *cajón* box drum, playing Alaska Native box drums typically requires striking the drum with the hand, though some designs use a drumstick or mallet. Depending on region, a box drum may be suspended or played on the ground, with playing methods varying between sitting and standing.

Like box drums, log drums and plank drums found in Dena'ina culture do not use a drum membrane and comprise of one part, a log and plank respectively. For the former, hollow logs easily function as log drums though are no longer in common use. Plank drums however, still feature in potlatches and other important Dena'ina gatherings. Hand drums, similar to Dene styles across Alaska, Canada, and the continental United States feature prominently in potlatches, celebrations and other events.

WATCH:

Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center Alaska channel - [Listen & Learn SLI Yupik \(12 of 12\): Saguyak \(Drum\)](#)

Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center Alaska channel- [Listen & Learn Iñupiaq \(5 of 6\): Qiļaun, Saulyaq \(Drum\)](#)

Walk Wild - How The Yupik Drum Came to Be - [Interview with Yaari Walker, Yupik People, Western Alaska](#)

READ:

Anchorage Museum - [Drums of Alaska](#)

Theresa Arevgaq John - [YURARYARARPUP KANGIIT-LLU: OUR WAYS OF DANCE AND THEIR MEANINGS](#)