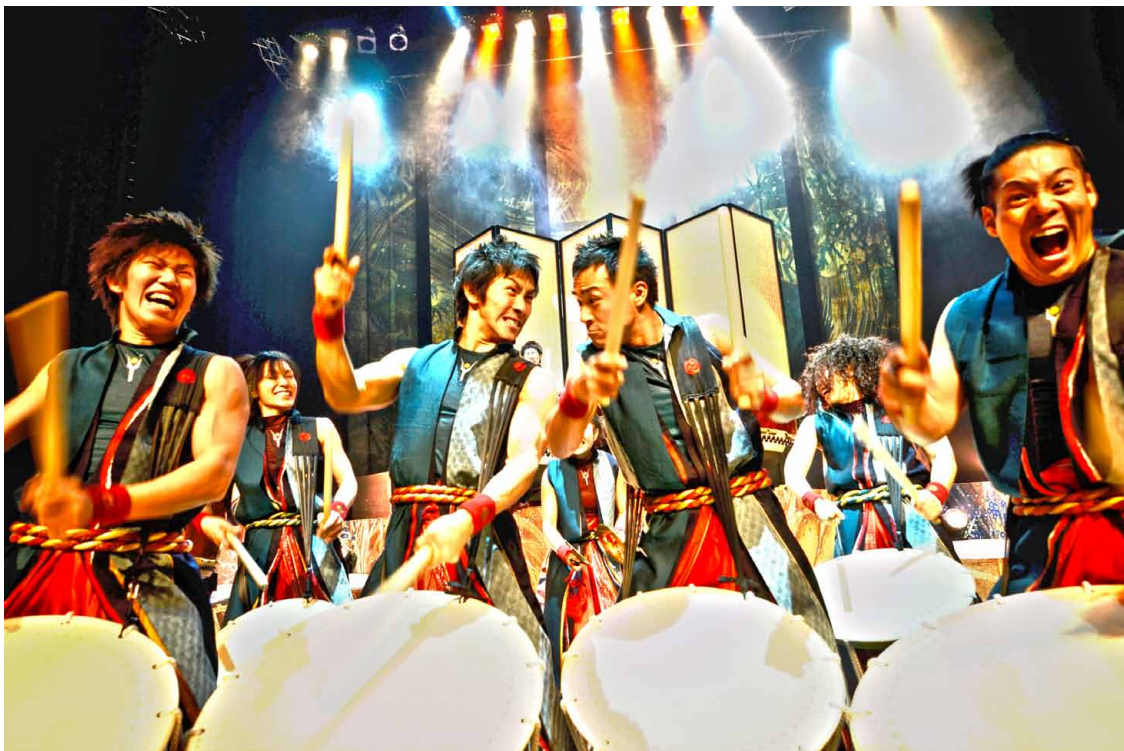
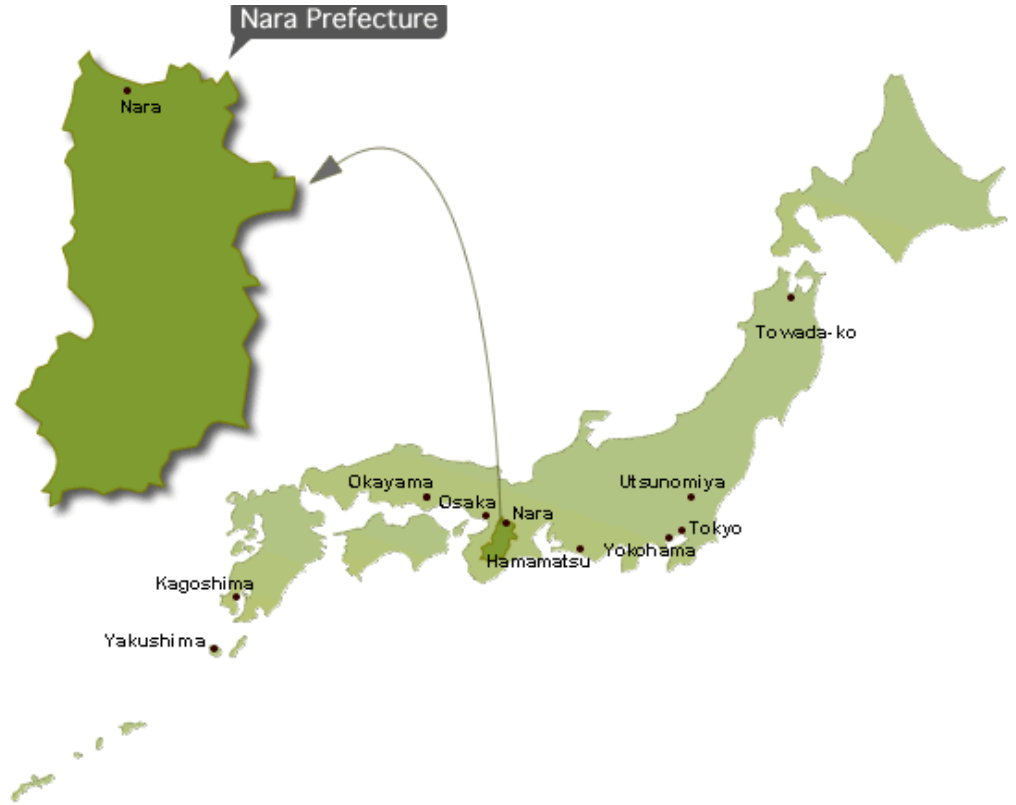


ABOUT YAMATO, THE DRUMMERS OF JAPAN

Yamato was founded in 1993 in Nara **Prefecture** in the Kansai region, island of Honshu, Japan. The name "Yamato" has special significance: in the eighth century, Japan was known as Yamato, and Nara (also the name of the capital city of the Nara Prefecture) is the city where Japanese culture is believed to have started. Based in these ancient roots, Yamato combines traditional Japanese musical forms with modern rhythms and themes.

WHAT IS TAIKO?

The Japanese word *taiko* translates to "drum," so the word can refer to both the art form (capitalized "Taiko") and the actual drums (lowercase "taiko"). Taiko performances incorporate several different styles of drums as well as string, woodwind and percussion instruments. Taiko is a very physical form of musical performance. The musicians use large arm movements, jumping, running and vocalizing. Because the art form is so active, the performers not only rehearse their instruments for precision in their playing, but they also train with physical exercises to maintain fitness and focus.



EEEE-YAH!!

The shouts you hear from the Taiko performers are called *kiai* (key-AYE). These shouts and calls are used in martial arts such as karate and judo to startle an opponent or celebrate victory. Taiko drummers use *kiai* to enhance and accent the music, to signal shifts in rhythm and to encourage each other to play with energy and gusto.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND: HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF TAIKO

MUSIC

Many Japanese musical forms were **imported** from China by way of Korea more than one thousand years ago. Over the years, the forms changed into distinctive styles of expression. One early form of Japanese music is *gagaku*, which began during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) and traveled the **Silk Road** to Japan. *Gagaku* was performed in the Imperial Palace for members of the royal court on instruments such as the *tsuridaiko* (drum), the *biwa* (lute) and the *shoko* (gong). Over time, the music of the court became the music of the people, used in village celebrations and, starting in the 14th century CE, the Japanese theater forms of **kabuki** and **Nō** often utilized taiko drums and other instruments. Taiko continued to develop in Japan and crossed over into the United States in the 1950s and '60s. Traditionally, Taiko utilized only male drummers, though modern Taiko groups are open to both men and women, as well as musicians of all races and ethnic backgrounds.



biwa



Dated to the 6th century CE, the statue on the left depicts a figure using a stick on a barrel-shaped drum, representing the earliest evidence of taiko in Japan.



Image of Taiko being used in battle

MYTH

The origins of Taiko are linked to the mythology of Japan's **Shinto** religion. Upset by the storm god, the sun goddess hides away in a cave, plunging the world into darkness. Fed up with the dark, a tiny, elderly goddess empties a **sake** barrel, turns it upside down and dances on it as loudly as she can. Her enthusiasm and energy are infectious, and soon all the gods and goddesses are dancing, singing and laughing. The sun goddess peeks out to see what is going on. Overcome with the joy of the others, she emerges from the cave and returns light to the Earth. This is why Taiko—though loud—is considered happy and celebratory.

MILITARY

Another origin of taiko drumming was the battlefields of Japan. Drums were used to intimidate and frighten the enemy as well as to encourage the **samurai** who were fighting. Taiko were also used in battle to send commands and coordinate movements: the taiko were the only thing that could be heard across the vast battleground.

ABOUT THE INSTRUMENTS

In Japan, the bodies of many taiko are carved from a single log, which means that making a large taiko requires a very large and usually very old tree. The traditional wood for taiko is Japanese elm or the *keyaki* tree. Other types of taiko drums are made from staves, sections of wood that fit together to form a round shape, like a barrel. The drum heads (the tops of the drums) are made of animal skin, typically cow hide. For the largest taiko, the skins of water buffalo may be used. Modern taiko drums are sometimes made with a **synthetic** fabric covering. In addition to drums, Taiko performers play a variety of woodwind and stringed instruments from Japan.

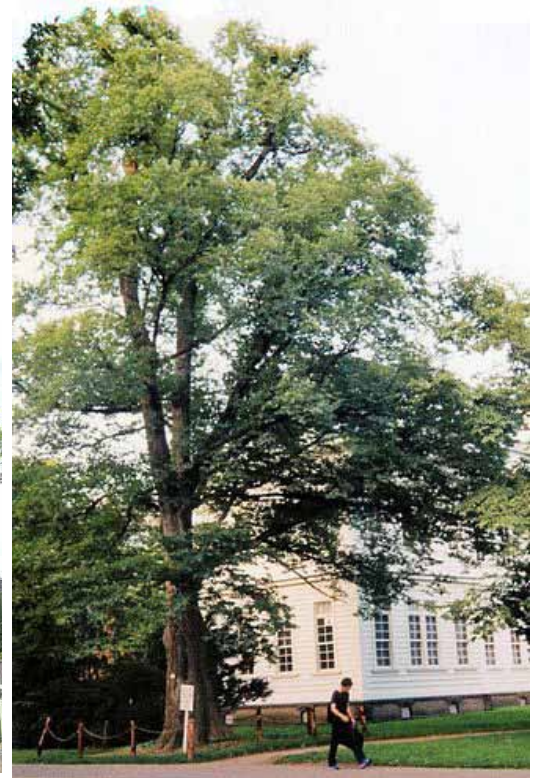
DRUMS

Nagado-daiko (NAH-gah-doh DIE-koh)

This long-bodied drum has a round, barrel-shaped appearance. This is the drum most often associated with taiko drumming.



Keyaki tree



Japanese elm tree



Hirado-daiko (hear-AH-doh DIE-koh)

General term for a drum that is wider than it is deep (literally means "flat drum").



Odaiko (oh-DIE-koh)
Refers to a drum of any type that is larger than 33 inches in diameter. In Japanese, placing an "O" in front of a word indicates something is "great," so *odaiko* translates to "great drum." Yamato's odaiko is made from a 400-year-old tree.



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FUN FACT

"-daiko" (DIE-koh) is a suffix used to indicate a type of drum, a Taiko group or a style of taiko playing. When used in a compound word, the "t" sound in "taiko" changes to a "d" sound.

ABOUT THE INSTRUMENTS: (CONT.)

DRUMS



Okedo-daiko
(o-KEH-doh DIE-koh)
A drum constructed from staves, like a barrel. It is often placed horizontally on a tall stand and can be played by two drummers at the same time.

Bachi (BAH-chee)

Drumsticks made from a variety of hard woods. Drummers use different sizes, shapes and weights of bachi, depending on the drum. In Japan, Japanese oak is most often used to make *bachi* because it has a long straight **grain** which prevents small pieces from chipping off when the drum is played very hard.



Uchiwa-daiko
(oo-CHI-wah DIE-koh)
A small, hand-held drum; skin is stretched over a hoop and a handle is attached.



Shime-daiko (SHE-may DIE-koh)
Short and wide, this drum produces the highest pitched sound of all the drums.

WOODWINDS

Shinobue

(shee NOH Boy)
A bamboo flute, or *fue*, with seven holes; also known as *hayashi-bue*, *takebue* or *yokobue*. It is played horizontally like a Western flute.



Shakuhachi

(shah-koo-hah-shee)
Similar to the *shinobue*, the *shakuhachi* is a bamboo flute with four holes. It is played vertically like a Western recorder.

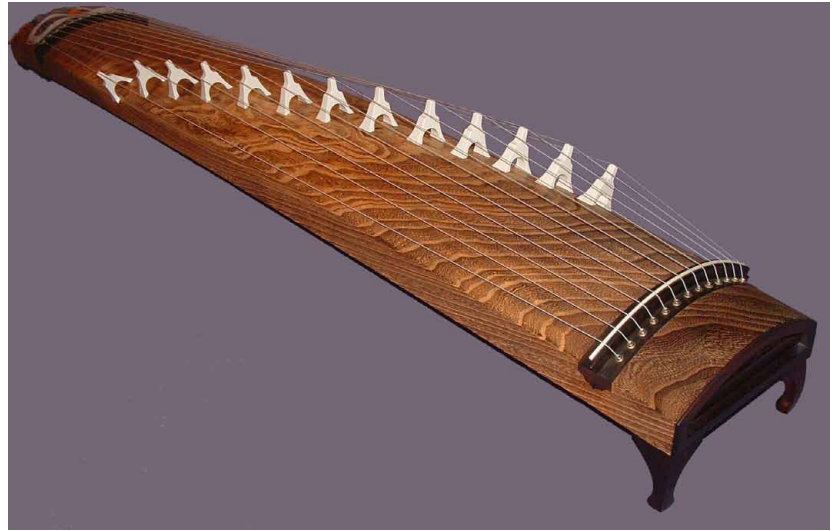


ABOUT THE INSTRUMENTS: (CONT.)

STRINGS



Shamisen (SHA-mee-sen)
The *shamisen* is a banjo-like instrument with three strings, a long, thin neck and a small, rectangular body covered with skin. The strings are plucked with a large triangular pick. This instrument dates back to the Muromachi period (1336-1573 CE).



Koto (KOH-toe)
A Japanese **zither** that usually has thirteen strings, the *koto* is played with picks worn on the fingers, similar to those used in playing the guitar.

OTHER PERCUSSION

Hyoshigi (hi-oh-SHEE-gee)
Originally used to provide sound effects during fight scenes in *No* theater, *hyoshigi* are hard wood clappers played at the beginning of *Taiko* performances.



Chappa (CHAH-pah)
Small hand cymbals, also called *tebyoushi*.



Dora (door-uh)
The *dora* is a gong shaped like a shallow plate, made from copper alloy.



Chanchiki (CHAN-chee-kee)
A hand gong often used to keep time. It is held in the hand or suspended by a cord and struck with a deer-horn mallet called a *shumoku*.



ABOUT THE COSTUMES

Taiko grew, in part, from the need for music at festivals and celebrations in ancient Japanese village life. All of the people in the village were included in these celebrations, from farmers to carpenters and fishermen. When they played, they often wore the clothes they worked in. Over time these work clothes developed into the costumes worn today.

The *hachimaki* (headband) was originally used by farmers and fishermen as a towel to wipe away sweat. Today it is worn by anyone who intends to work hard. Japanese children sometimes wear *hachimaki* when studying.

The coat or shirt worn by taiko players is called the *happi* coat. It is believed that this style developed from a coat designed by the fire brigades of Tokyo in the Edo period (1603-1868 CE). It is meant to be simple, colorful and provide for freedom of movement. “Happi” comes from the Chinese word for a chair covering it resembles.

The *mune ate* has many pockets for tools, nails, and rulers—it was originally a piece of clothing used by carpenters. Drummers often use the pockets of the *mune ate* to hold the *bachi* while preparing for the next song.

The traditional pants for Taiko performers are *mata hiki*. They tie around the waist. Yamato’s drummers wear looser pants, similar to the fuller *hakama* pants worn by samurai from the 7th century CE up until the nineteenth century.

Tekkou (wristbands) are worn to keep the wrists warm and limber. They also prevent sweat from running onto the hands and making the *bachi* slippery.



Members of Burlington Taiko from Burlington, VT wear *hachimaki*, *tekkou* and *mune ate* when they perform.



PRE PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What do you know about Japanese culture? What aspects of Japanese culture do you think you'll recognize in Yamato's performance? What things might be unfamiliar?
- What activities do you do, both in school and out, that require teamwork? What makes a good team?
- Think about music you enjoy. What is it about that music that makes it exciting to listen to? Do you think other cultures might enjoy the same music or something different? Do you enjoy music from other cultures? Why do you think Taiko developed in Japan?

LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

NAME THAT DRUM (GRADES 1-2):

In the picture of Yamato to the right, identify all the different drums. Can you find the one non-drum instrument? Can you identify any traditional clothing? What words would you use to describe this picture?

DESIGN-A-DRUM (GRADES 1-3):

Taiko drums are designed to make specific sounds, but their decoration and overall beauty are also taken into account. Modern drum makers often decorate their creations with unique paint jobs or use exotic materials when building them. Using whatever art supplies you prefer and the pictures in the study guide, draw an outline of your favorite taiko drum style. After the outline has been drawn, think about how your drum would look

if you designed it to represent you. What color would it be? Would it have a pattern or image on it? Use scratch paper to doodle out your ideas. When ready, transfer them to your outline to create your personalized drum. After designing your drum, write a short paragraph about it. Why did you pick that style? What does it sound like when it is played? What purpose does your drum serve (ceremonial, celebratory, military, etc.)?

WE'VE GOT THE BEAT (GRADES 4-6):

Working in pairs or trios, have students create a pattern of stomps and claps. Use an A (stomps) B (claps) pattern. Have each group share their rhythm, repeating ABABABAB. Combine two groups together and have them learn each other's rhythm, then incorporate all the sounds into one, larger rhythm (ABCD). Have groups share their repeating rhythms again. What did the listeners hear in each rhythm? How were they the same? How were they different? Was the group able to work together to create the rhythm and keep it going? What was fun about working together? What was challenging?

EXTENDER: Repeat your rhythm, but increase your energy and physical movement. Find places to lift the knees, jump, swing your arms while keeping the rhythm. Add in *kiai*. Does movement change the rhythm? Why or why not? Was it easy or difficult to know where and when to move and make sounds?

TELLING TALES (GRADES 7-9):

Part of taiko's heritage comes from the mythological stories from the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) and *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), books derived from oral tradition about the gods and goddesses who created Japan and how their descendants became Japan's emperors. Many cultures of the world have their own a creation story. Select a culture and research its creation story. Are there historical facts to back up the mythology? Are there similarities between this myth and those of other cultures? Why or why not? How old is the myth? Why has it remained part of the culture for that time? Read the creation myth from Japan at <http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/CS/CSJapan.html>. Write a short paper or create a presentation to share your findings with the class.

EXTENDER: Research the music traditions of the culture to see if there are connections to the creation myth or other myths of the culture—instruments, vocal techniques, etc. If not music, are there other art forms that connect to the mythology of the culture? Theater? Dance?

