



Can you feel the rhythm?



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The lively beat of percussion instruments can be heard around the world. Bongos, maracas, tambourines, and gongs—let’s discover more about their music and the people who use them.



Pat the Conga

(Tumbadora)

This tall and narrow drum is called a conga. You can often hear the sounds of the conga in conga and rumba music. These drums are traditionally made of a **hollow** shell made of wood and topped with leather.



WHERE DO CONGAS COME FROM?

Congas come from Africa and the country of Cuba. Today, conga drums are heard all around the world and in all types of music.

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WHAT MAKES A CONGA A CONGA?

Congas have tall sides and are barrel-shaped. They are often wider at the top and more narrow at the bottom. There is only one drum head on a conga, which is attached to the side of the body with metal **tuning lugs**.

- Tall Sides
- Barrel-shaped
- Single Drum

TALL SIDES



SINGLE DRUM



BARREL-SHAPED



HOW DO YOU PLAY A CONGA?

A conga is played by using your fingers and palms to strike the drum in different ways. The **tuning lugs** can be tightened or loosened to change the pitch of the sound.

Although they look the same, there are three different types of conga: the *quinto* (keen-toh) is the lead drum that makes the highest tone, the *tres dos* (tres-doce) makes a medium tone, and the *tumba* (toom-bah) makes the deepest tone.

Hit the Gong



This Chinese percussion instrument is called a gong. Gongs range widely in size, from the largest gong being over 16 feet wide to smaller gongs that may only be a few inches wide. Gongs can be made of metals like brass or bronze.



WHERE DO GONGS COME FROM?

Gongs are originally from the country of China and are commonly used all around Asia. In the past, gongs were played to announce important people or in special ceremonies. Today, gongs are also used in orchestras around the world.



THREE TYPES OF GONGS

There are three different types of gongs: suspension gongs, bowl gongs, and bossed gongs, which have a dome in the middle. Each of these types of gongs is played by striking it with a **mallet**.



Suspended Gong



Bowl Gong



Bossed Gong

HOW ARE GONGS PLAYED?

Suspension gongs are hung, or *suspended*, from a frame. Large, fabric-covered mallets called hammers are used to strike the gong.

Bossed gongs are also played by striking the gong with wooden mallets.

Bowl gongs are metal bowls that are played with wooden mallets. Instead of striking this gong, the bowl gong is played by rubbing the inside of the bowl.



Play the Piano

This percussion instrument looks very different from the others! Pianos are usually made of heavy wood and can be either grand or upright. Grand pianos are long and have a lid to direct the sound. Upright pianos are shorter and wider.

WHERE DO PIANOS COME FROM?

Pianos were first made in the country of Italy. The word *piano* means to play an instrument softly in Italian. The piano is able to play both very soft sounds and also very loud sounds!



DIFFERENT KEYS FOR DIFFERENT SOUNDS

The black and white **keys** that make up the keyboard each play a different *note*, or sound. These keys can be played one at a time or several together to play a new sound, called a **chord**.

SHARPS AND FLATS

The white keys play the **natural notes**, and the black keys play the *sharp* and *flat* notes. Sharp notes sound a bit higher than the natural note, and flat notes sound a bit lower than the natural note.

b Sharps **#** Flats

HOW IS A PIANO PLAYED?

When you press a key on the keyboard, a tiny hammer is released and strikes a string in the body of the piano to play the note. Because pianos have both strings and hammers that strike, they are actually a combination of a string instrument and a percussion instrument!



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Click the Castanets

Castanets are small, usually wooden percussion instruments played with each hand. They are made of two shell-shaped pieces connected by a cord. When the two shells are clicked together, they make a fun clacking sound.



WHERE DO CASTANETS COME FROM?

No one really knows where the castanet comes from. However, they are used in music and dances from countries like Spain and Portugal. *Castanet* comes from the Spanish word *castaña*, which means *chestnut*. This is because the instrument looks like a chestnut!

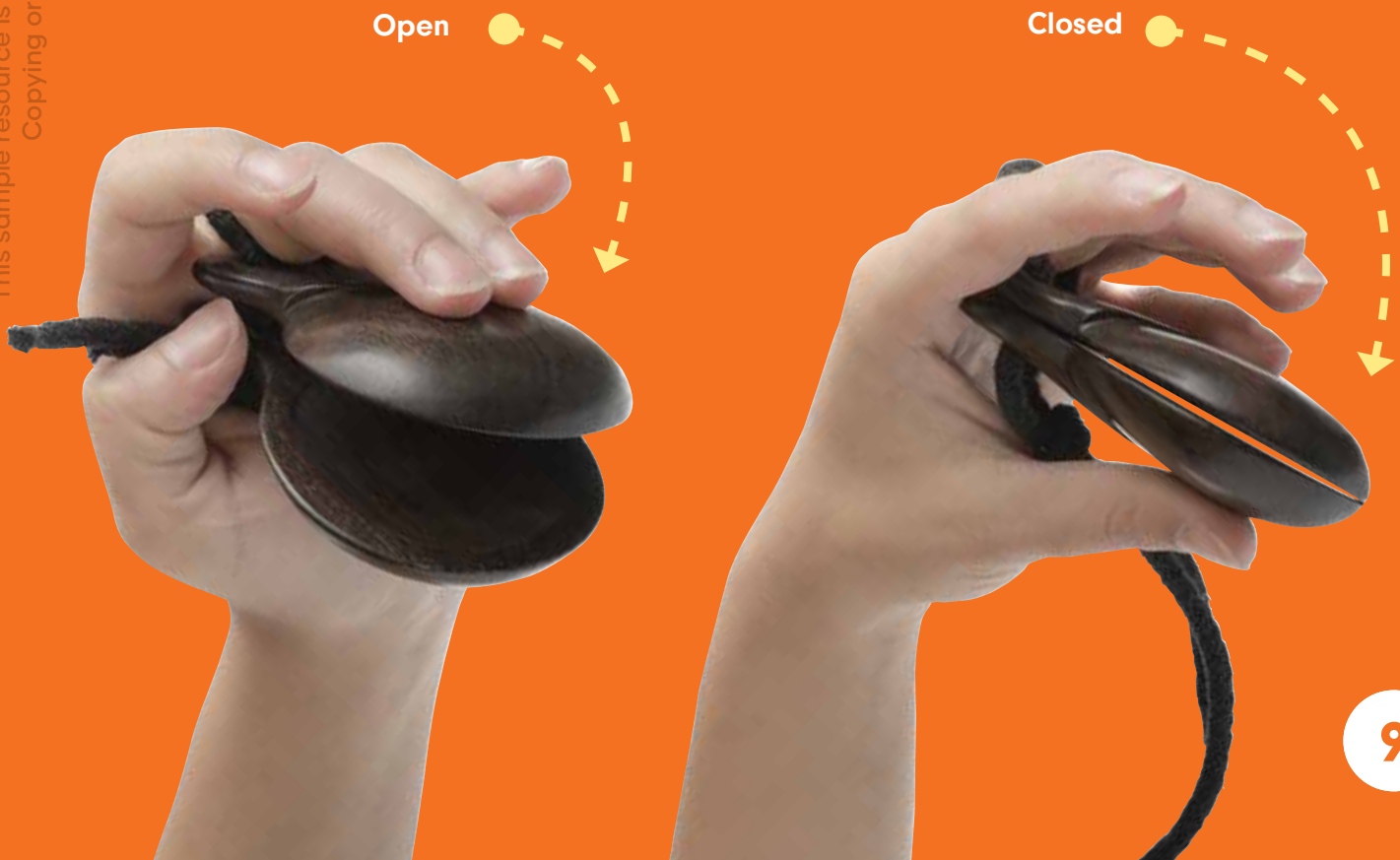


TWO TYPES OF CASTANETS

Though the castanets played in each hand look the same, they actually play slightly different sounds. The castanet played with the right hand is called the *maja* (mah-ha), which is a Spanish word for *woman*. The castanet played with the left hand is called the *macho* (mah-cho), which is a Spanish word for *man*. The *maja* plays a slightly higher pitched tone than the *macho*.

HOW ARE CASTANETS PLAYED?

Castanets are held in the palm with the cord around one or two fingers. The fingers are used to snap the shells closed, making the clacking sound.



Shake the Maracas



Maracas are some of the most common percussion instruments in classrooms! Shaking a maraca makes a sound like *shh-shh* that adds interesting sound and rhythm to almost any kind of music.



WHERE DO MARACAS COME FROM?

Maracas come from South America. Many years ago, people in the countries of Venezuela, Brazil, and Puerto Rico used maracas in music and special ceremonies. Today, maracas are played all around the world!

DIFFERENT SHAPES AND COLORS

Maracas were originally made of dried fruits, seeds, or vegetables, but today they are made of leather, wood, or plastic! They can be round **spheres** or egg-shaped. Maracas are made in all kinds of colors and often decorated with lively, bright patterns. Some maracas are small and held in your hand, while others have handles to move the maraca freely.



HOW DO YOU PLAY MARACAS?

Hold a maraca in each hand and snap your hands back and forth so the seeds or pebbles inside the maracas can hit each other and the sides of the maracas. The amount of seeds or pebbles inside the maraca determines the sound. Some maracas have deeper tones, and some have higher tones!

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Tap the Bongos

Bongos are a pair of small, connected drums that make a high-pitched sound when played. Like congas, they are usually shaped like a barrel, made of wood, and covered in leather. But bongos are tiny compared to the larger congas!



Bongos



Conga



WHERE DO BONGOS COME FROM?

Bongos are very popular in the country of Cuba, but many believe they originally came from Africa. Today, they are used in salsa, mambo, and rumba music all around South America.



Smaller Drum
(Macho)

Larger Drum
(Hembra)



DIFFERENT SIZES, DIFFERENT SOUNDS

Like castanets, which are also played in pairs, each drum is a little different in size. The larger drum is called the *hembra* (em-brah), a Spanish word for *woman*, and the smaller drum is called the *macho* (mah-cho), a Spanish word for *man*. The larger *hembra* makes a slightly deeper tone, while the smaller *macho* makes a slightly higher tone.

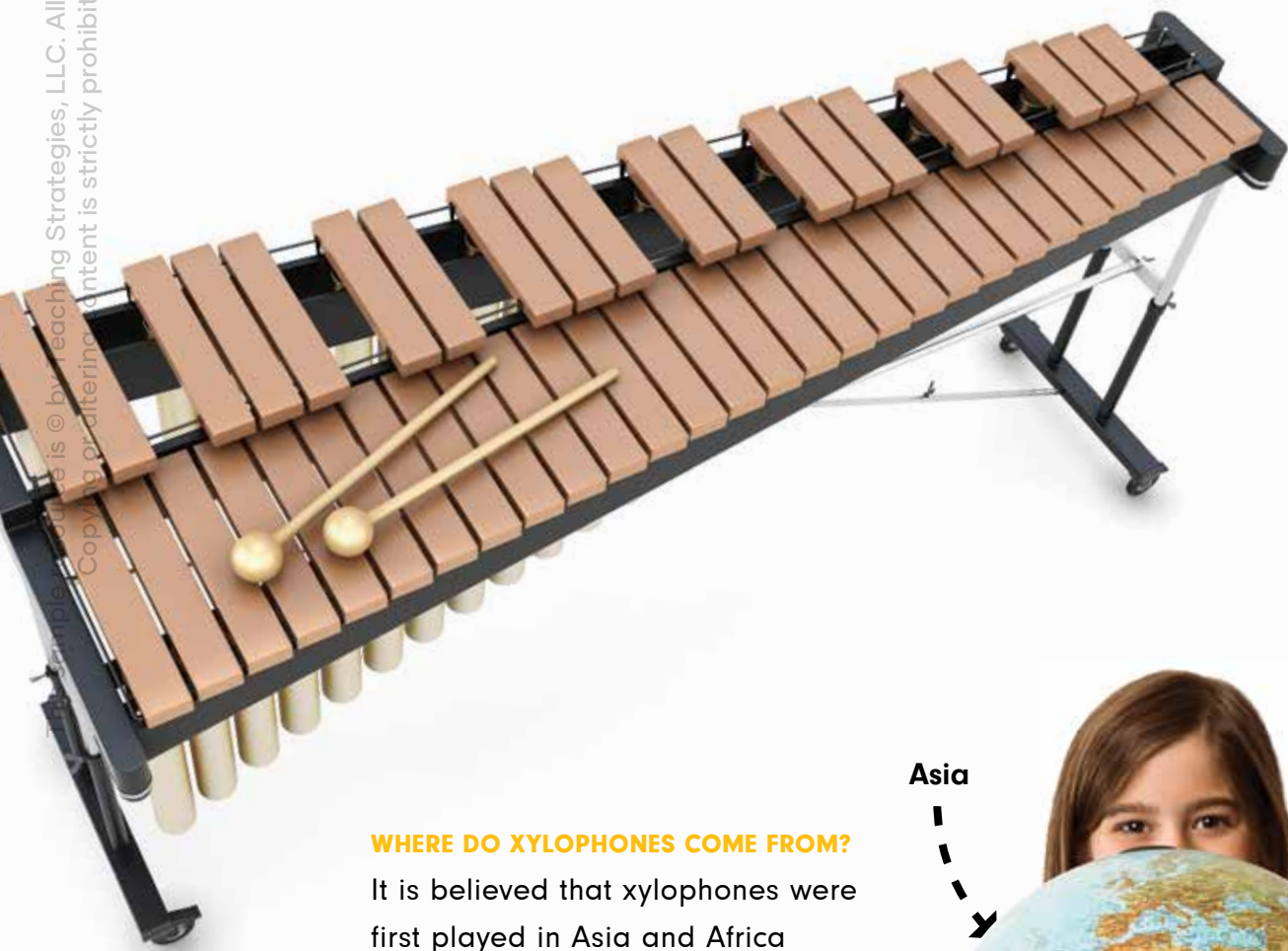
HOW DO YOU PLAY THE BONGOS?

First, hold the bongos between your knees so your hands are free. Use the tips of your fingers and the **heel of your hand** to tap the bongos. Notice how different sounds can be played by tapping on the edge or by tapping in the center of the drum!



Strike the Xylophone

Like pianos, xylophones are percussion instruments that make different notes. Xylophones are made of thick wood or plastic blocks. These blocks are loosely attached to a frame and can be arranged from longest block to shortest block or arranged like a piano keyboard.



WHERE DO XYLOPHONES COME FROM?

It is believed that xylophones were first played in Asia and Africa to make music for dancing and celebrations. Today, the xylophone is a popular instrument all over the world.



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IS THAT A XYLOPHONE?

Did you know that there is another kind of percussion instrument that looks like a tiny metal xylophone? This is actually a different instrument called a glockenspiel (glocken-shpeel).

Glockenspiel
(metal bars)



Xylophone
(wooden bars)

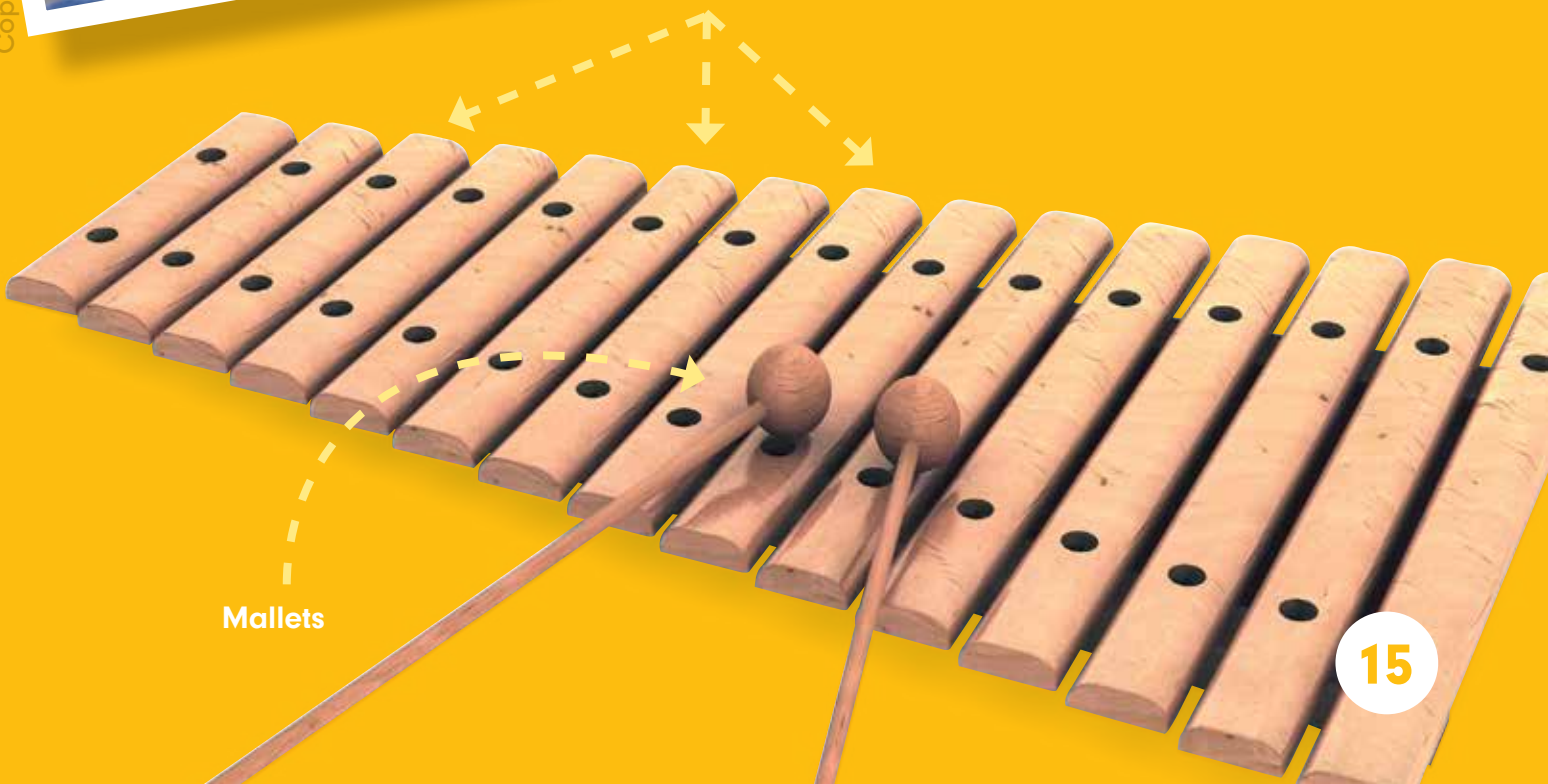


HOW DO YOU PLAY THE XYLOPHONE?

Xylophones are played with mallets. Wooden or plastic mallets are used to make louder, brighter sounds. For softer sounds, mallets covered in yarn or thin fabric are used. Hold a mallet in each hand and quickly strike the center of the block. Notice how the blocks seem to bounce when you strike them. This helps make a rich sound!



Bars (idiophones)



Mallets

Jingle the Tambourine

A tambourine is a fun percussion instrument that makes interesting jingly sounds when moved or struck. Tambourines are usually made of a round frame that holds pairs of tiny **disks** called **zils** that hit each other when shaken. Many tambourines also have a leather drum head on the top of the frame.

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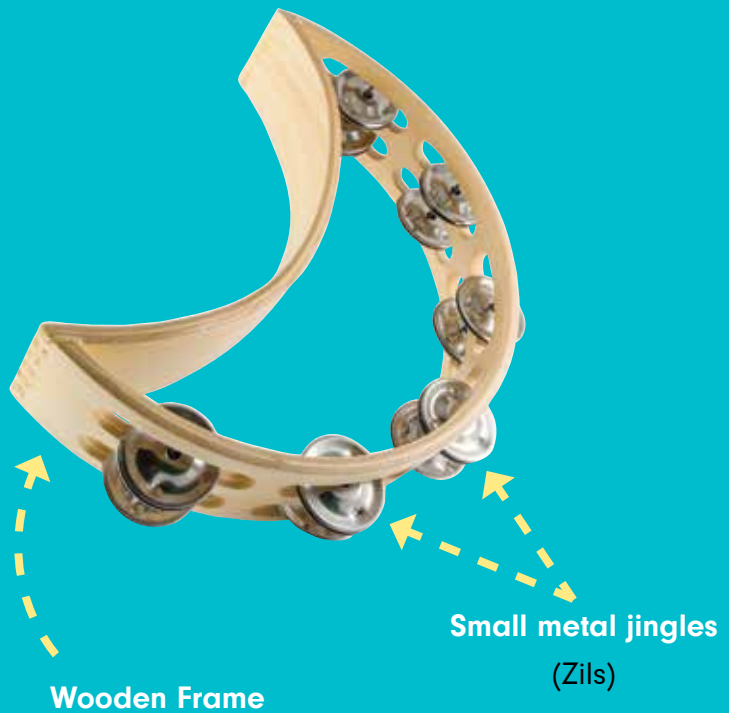
WHERE DOES THE TAMBOURINE COME FROM?

Different kinds of tambourines have been played in countries all around the Mediterranean Sea, including Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, for thousands of years!



DO ALL TAMBOURINES HAVE A DRUM?

Some tambourines are open, and others have a drum. The drums give tambourines a deeper sound to go along with the high jingly sound.



HOW DO YOU PLAY THE TAMBOURINE?

There are a few different ways to play the tambourine. You can hold the frame and shake your wrist to jingle the **zils** or strike the drum head with your fingertips, a small mallet, or your palm. Each **technique** makes a different sound.

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Glossary

Chord: three or more musical notes played at the same time to create a new sound

Disk: a round, flat, thin object

Heel of the hand: the part of the hand just above the wrist

Hollow: empty or with open sides

Keys: the blocks pressed on a piano keyboard to play notes

Mallet: a special stick with a large head attached to one end

Natural note: a note that is neither flat nor sharp

Note: a musical sound

Sphere: shaped like a ball

Technique: a way to do something

Tuning lug: a part of some drums that holds the drum head to the body, which can be tightened or loosened to make different sounds

Zils: small metal disks attached in pairs on a tambourine; also called jingles