

## **Speech Rhythms and Music: Let the Drums do the Talking!**

### **The Art of Teaching Poly-rhythms Using Language:**

A Five Lesson Music and Language Arts Unit for upper Elementary through High School

#### **Goal:**

The goal of this unit is to introduce students to the relationship between music and language. As they perform and compose new music, students will identify this relationship and explore the structure of traditional West African music, including the use of polyrhythm.

#### **Unit Description:**

This interdisciplinary unit will focus on the connection between language (specifically speech rhythms) and music (specifically rhythm). It will lead students to a better understanding and appreciation of traditional West African music through an introduction to [polyrhythm](#). Intended for students in upper elementary through high school, this unit is divided into five lessons, each of which contains several activities. Each lesson is designed to be flexible and open-ended and may be expanded to better fit the ages and needs of individual students and classes.

- *Lesson One: Transforming Words into Music:* This lesson will introduce students to speech rhythms through musical games involving their own names and simple sentences as well as the musical concept of "Call and Response".
- *Lesson Two: More Complicated Rhythms and Poetry:* This lesson builds on the exercises from lesson one. Longer musical rhythms are explored using simple nursery rhymes as source material.
- *Lesson Three: Composing a Percussion Ensemble Piece:* This lesson will challenge students to use excerpts from a creative writing assignment to create longer rhythms. These rhythms will be used to compose and perform a rhythmic [ostinato](#) piece for percussion ensemble.
- *Lesson Four: Polyhythm: Mary Had a Little Lamb versus Hickory Dickory Dock:* Students will begin with an introduction to polyrhythms. They will learn to alternate between [duple](#) and [triple](#) subdivisions of the [beat](#).
- *Lesson Five: Polyhythm: Shifting Meters:* Students will be introduced to a form of polyrhythm that uses [hemiola](#), where the beat changes but the rhythm stays the same. Students will hear examples of this style of polyrhythm in a traditional West African Drumming piece.

#### **Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to:**

- Compose and perform their own music pieces for percussion ensemble.
- Use their own creative writing exercises as source material.
- Perform polyrhythmic compositions.
- Identify polyrhythmic techniques in traditional African music.

- Explain two different types of polyrhythm.

### **Georgia QCCs and Performance Standards:**

Standards are listed for grade 6 in Music and Language Arts. Similar standards for other grade levels are located at the website for [Georgia Learning Connection](#).

#### *Fine Arts: Music*

##### Grade 6

#### **6.1 Artistic Skills and Knowledge: Creating, Performing, Producing**

Standard: Recognizes the major characteristics of such musical forms as: AB, ABA, and AABA, theme and variation, rondo, and suite.

#### **6.5 Artistic Skills and Knowledge: Creating, Performing, Producing**

Standard: Distinguishes and conducts among simple and compound meters: 2's, 3's, 4's, and 6's.

#### **6.6 Artistic Skills and Knowledge: Creating, Performing, Producing**

Standard: Creates individual and group compositions using a variety of sound sources.

#### **6.8 Artistic Skills and Knowledge: Creating, Performing, Producing**

Standard: Creates original instruments.

#### **6.11 Artistic Skills and Knowledge: Creating, Performing, Producing**

Standard: Demonstrates growth in knowledge of music vocabulary appropriate to the level.

#### **6.13 Connections**

Standard: Integrates many elements of music with other art forms and other curricular areas, and related use of technology.

#### **6.15 Critical analysis and Aesthetic Understanding**

Standard: Critiques music performed in class and suggests ways of improving the performance.

#### **6.20 Historical and Cultural Context**

Standard: Relates the role of music to the cultural expression of ethnic groups represented in society.

#### *Language Arts: Literature*

6.25 Standard: Recognizes common elements of poetry (rhythm, stanza, and figurative language).

6.30 Standard: Responds creatively to literature (drama, art, multi-media projects).

#### *Language Arts: Listening*

6.13 Standard: Expands listening vocabulary.

6.14 Standard: Follows oral directions and asks questions for clarification.

*Language Arts: Speaking*

6.62 Standard: Communicates effectively through oral expression.

6.66 Standard: Participates in dramatic activities such as puppetry, pantomime, plays, choral speaking, and storytelling.

6.67 Standard: Develops awareness of nonverbal communication such as gestures, body language, and facial expressions.

*Prerequisites:*

Students should have the ability to identify and tap the beat/pulse for a piece of music on a drum or percussion instrument. Students should have the ability to echo and repeat simple rhythms in simple meters. Students should be familiar with dividing words into syllables.

*Materials:*

- Notebook or paper for creative journaling
- Collection of poetry and nursery rhymes
- Non-pitched percussion instruments including drums (preferably hand drums), cowbells and shakers.
- CD "African Drums: Traditional Mandigue Rhythms" Mamady Ijalit Keita, Legacy International, 1999.
- CD "West Side Story" Stephen Sondheim, Sony, 1998.

*Instructional Resources:*

- [State of the Arts segment on West African Drumming](#)
- [Poetry Terms:](#)
- [Poetic By Way](#)
- [Info Please](#)
- [Musical terms, definition, and vocabulary words](#)
- [Music and literacy articles from MENC State Music Educators Association Journals](#)
- [Center for New Music and Audio Technologies](#)
- [Forming a Drum Circle:](#)
- [Drum Circle](#)
- [Drum Journey](#)
- [African Drumbeat](#)
- [Djembe](#)
- [Rhythm Web](#)

- [Everybody Drum](#)
- [Building Instruments:](#)
- [Crafty Music Teachers](#)
- [Homemade](#)
- [Djembe](#)
- [SBG Music](#)

**Suggested Introductory Activities:**

1. Arrange for an appearance at the school by a teaching artist, master drummer, or drumming ensemble from West Africa. Contact the state or local arts council, area arts center, or music program at nearby colleges and universities.
2. View the GPB video [State of the Arts](#) on West African Drumming
3. Listen to the CD "African Drums: Traditional Mandigue Rhythms" Mamady Ijalit Keita, Legacy International, 1999.

After the presentation/viewing/hearing, create a [KWL chart](#) based on student responses to the questions:

1. "What do you know about West African music based on your experience?"
2. "What would you like to know about West African music?"

Explain to the students that they are beginning a new unit on West African music and will be creating and performing their own musical compositions in a West African style at the culmination of the unit.

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