



# The Djembe Drum

Reference: Wikipedia.com

## Origins

The djembe drum is found in all of West Africa, where it is one of the most common instruments. There is general agreement that the origin of the djembe is associated with a class of Mandinka/Susu blacksmiths known as Numu. The wide dispersion of the djembe drums throughout West Africa may be due to Numu migrations dating from the first millennium A.D.

## The Name

The name Djembe comes from the Bamana peoples saying in Mali, "Anke dje, anke be" which literally translates to "everyone gather together", and defines the drum's purpose. "Dje" is the verb for "gather" in Bamanakan, and "be" translates as "everyone".



## Construction

Properly crafted djembe drums are carved in one single piece from hollowed out trees such as Dimba (bush mango). Well made drums are not smooth on the interior but have a series of teardrop shaped divots inside that enhances the tonal qualities. The drumheads are typically made from goatskin, but more rarely can be antelope, zebra, deer, camel or calf. In all cases the female is preferred and adult cow is never used.

## Tuning

Djembe drums are tuned by evenly pulling the vertical ropes very tightly so that a system of metal rings binding the skin down over the drum shell.

## Spiritual Connections

The djembe is said to contain three spirits: the spirit of the tree, the spirit of the animal of which the drum head is made, and the spirit of the instrument maker. Drums made from slats or segments of wood glued together are considered by traditionalists to have no soul of the tree. There do not appear to be hereditary restrictions upon who can play the djembe as occurs with some other African instruments.

## Learning to Play

The key is to either focus or disperse the hand's energy, and position the hand in the correct place. The bass and tone notes require focused energy (a beginner will have the most success by holding their fingers firmly together); while the slap requires dispersed energy (fingers are relaxed). Learning to play the djembe generally involves finding a master drummer and having a couple of private lessons or lessons for small groups of people. Players generally need no less than 2 months to achieve a meaningful sound and no less than 2 years to achieve a sound that is at least comparable to master drummers. A masterful djembe player may be referred to as a "djembefola" -- "the one who makes the djembe speak."



Prepared by HOZA!

[www.hoza.ca](http://www.hoza.ca)

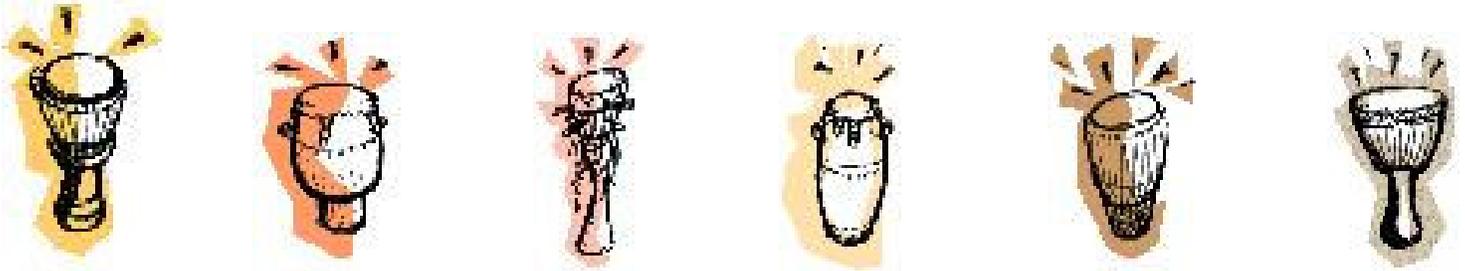
# Drumming Around the World

Drums are played all around the world. It seems that every culture wants to express them selves in sound and rhythm.

During your cultural research you may want to ask:

- What drums are played here?
- What are the drums made of?
- Who plays them?
- When and where are these drums played?
- Is the instrument associated with any myths, legends, traditions or spiritual beliefs?
- What are the names of some of the ancient traditional rhythms played on this kind of drum?
- Is the instrument considered to be male or female?
- Are you able to see a performance or collect a sound clip?

Here are a few starting points. What cultures are represented in your classroom community?



Brazil:

Renowned for its street festivals were the drums are often played.

India:

Known for the unique sound of the Tabla. The Tabla is a set of two drums that are played together. They are often heard at religious festivals and weddings.

China:

During the Chinese Dragon Boat festival a drummer helps the rowers keep time.

South Africa:

Drums are the principle instrument accompanying tribal dance. Drums are also used to send messages to tribes within hearing distance. That tribe then passes on the news to the next tribe like a telegraph system.

England:

The British used to have a drummer boys who would march with the soldiers into battle. The sound of the drums beating was as much to make their men feel brave as it was to frighten their enemy.

Canada:

First nation's people use drums to accompany dances during a Pow-Wow.