

Teaching the Djembe

Materials

The djembe is a rope-tuned instrument
It is carved from hardwood
The head is usually goatskin

Origins

It is from Western Africa
The word "djembe" comes from the phrase "Anke djé, anke bé" which means "everyone gather together in peace"

How is it played?

The djembe is a hand drum – you hit it with your hand!

Have a look underneath the djembe. You can see a hole (the hollow of the drum). This is where much of the sound comes from. Playing the djembe with the hole flat on the ground, you can hear that the sound is quite muted. If you tilt the djembe slightly, so that the hole is exposed, you will notice that the sound has a much greater depth to it.

For an adult, tilting the djembe or sitting on a chair/stool with a djembe between your legs is quite easy. Tilting the djembe will give you a much more rewarding sound. For a child, tilting can be more difficult. There are a couple of solutions to this problem. The first – an adult can tilt the drum for a child. This is obviously very easy to do, however I would recommend placing the djembe on it's side and have the child sit on the drum as they would a horse. That way the children can reach forward and play the djembe's head quite comfortably and the hole is exposed.

There are two main sounds that you can get out of the djembe. If you strike the middle of the skin with your palm and flat fingers you will hear a bass sound. If you strike the edge of the drum, you will hear a higher sound.

Once your children have established those sounds, there are many options depending on what you are looking to achieve. I have written a few simple rhythms for you (titled Djembe Rhythms) that you can use alongside the Basic Rhythms sheet I have also included in this pack.

A few things to try out

- Copy Cat (one person plays a rhythm, the rest have to copy it)
- Dynamics (loud and quiet)
- Try playing written rhythms at mrtanthemusicman.com/clap-some-rhythms.html