

Making African Instruments: the Kalimba, the shekere and the djembe.

Key Knowledge

Learn this information

Features of a good quality, functioning Kalimba:

A kalimba is often made from a hollow wooden box or bowl with a hole in the top near the keys (or tines) which acts as a resonator. This makes the sound of the instrument louder and clearer. It is played by plucking the keys with your thumbs. This is why they're also known as thumb pianos. The keys are the parts which vibrate, creating the sound. The keys are attached securely and strongly to the base so they are slightly raised. This makes them easier to play but also allows them to vibrate in the right way. The length of the keys is selected carefully to tune the instrument to have different pitches or notes.



Features of a good quality, functioning Djembe:

Traditional djembe drums are carved from a single log to make a hollow trunk. This large hollow is important as it acts as a resonator. Patterns and pictures can also be carved into the sides for decoration. The skin is usually a treated animal skin stretched tightly over the drum and secured with rope. It is important to have a tight drum skin to aid vibration.



Features of a good quality, functioning Shekere:

Shekeres (shay-ker-ays) make their sound when they are hit or shaken by the musician. The beads, seeds or shells knock or scrape along the hollow gourd to make the sound. The beads need to be loosely fitted in order to knock the instrument but not so loose they fall off!



Possible ways to reinforce self-made Kalimba, shekere and djembe.:

- Folding
- Layering
- Scaffolding
- Using different types of adhesive
- Papier mâché

Keys Skills

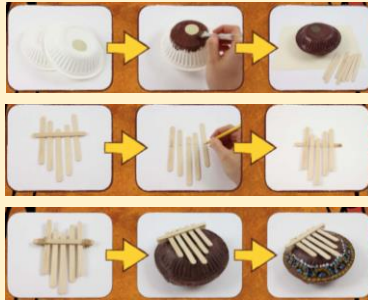
Practice and perform these skills

Analyse **existing products** to identify good, bad and preferred materials.

Sketch and **annotate** both an existing product and own design using knowledge of what makes a good quality kalimba, shekere and djembe.

Apply knowledge to design and make a good quality, functioning kalimbas and djembes or shekere.

Possible method of assembly for a kalimba:



Possible method of assembly for a djembe base:



Possible method of assembly for a shekere base:



Key Vocabulary

Understand these keywords

Kalimba – A kalimba is a lamellophone, which dates back to 1000 BC, and originated in central Africa.

Lamellophone - a class of musical instruments whose sound is generated by plucking flexible tuned tongues of metal, wood, cane, or other material attached at one end to a small board or resonator.

Djembe (jem-bay) – a drum. It is popular in African music because of its volume and changeable sounds

Shekere (shay-ker-ay) - a common instrument in West Africa. It is played by shaking, slapping and twisting the instrument so the beads move across and hit the main body of the instrument

Percussion instruments - are usually played by either hitting, scraping or shaking the instrument or a combination of all three.

Pitch – the highness or lowness of sound.

Volume (dynamics) – the loudness or quietness of a sound.

Polyrhythmic music - layering patterns and rhythms on top of one another which are not chosen to harmonise with each other and keep to the same rhythm or pattern.

Resonator – the body of the musical instrument that amplifies vibrations.

Vibration – continuous quick, slight shaking movement.

Pluck – to quickly or suddenly pick a musical instrument – with thumbs or fingers - to create a vibration.

Reinforced – to strengthen or support an object with additional material.

Papier mâché - a malleable mixture of paper and glue that becomes hard when dry.

Malleable – to be pressed into shape without breaking or cracking.