



Greater Good in Education  
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

## IN HARMONY WITH SOUND

*"Music is an all-embracing, universal language. Music has a unifying effect on the peoples of the world, because they all understand and love it. In music they find common meeting ground. And when they find themselves enjoying and loving the same music, they find themselves loving one another... Music has a great role to play in establishing the brotherhood of man."*

—Julia Perry

### OVERVIEW

Students experiment with listening and collectively creating sounds that can be awe-inducing.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To nurture positive social behavior
- To cultivate a greater sense of well-being
- At the beginning of the school year or semester to build a sense of community

#### TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College

#### MATERIALS

- A choice of two videos:
  - [THE PERCUSSION SHOW Presents : Body Percussion](#)
  - [The Great African Take Away: Body Percussion](#)

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Experiment with listening to and creating rhythmic sounds and body movements that can evoke [awe](#) and [collective effervescence](#).
- Notice bodily sensations and emotional responses to the cocreation of sound/music
- Reflect on the individual/collective experience of creative musical expression

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Appreciation of beauty and excellence
- Empathy
- Creativity
- Awe

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

## MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused Attention
- Open Awareness
- Non-judgment

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Think of a time when you participated in making or listening to music with others like attending a concert, celebrating a family/friend's birthday, singing around a campfire, joining in a choir practice, or performing karaoke.
- Can you recall the sensations you felt? Maybe goosebumps, a sense of [awe](#), or even of connection with the people around you? This is collective effervescence—that feeling of being energetically connected to others.

- Watch one or both of the videos that illustrate how body parts (hands, feet, fingers, and mouth) can be used to produce rhythmic sounds:  
[THE PERCUSSION SHOW Presents : Body Percussion](#)  
[The Great African Take Away: Body Percussion](#)
- Notice and reflect on how the video(s) made you feel.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### OVERVIEW

- Tell students:
  - *It is important for us to live in harmony. Listening to music and/or making a rhythm together can be powerful. It has united people throughout history.*
  - *Together we will use our bodies (hands, feet, fingers, and mouth) to create a rhythmic sound.*
  - *Listening to and/or making music together may also send chills down our spine or give us goosebumps.*
  - *Let's watch a short video of people creating rhythmic sounds together.*
- Play one of the videos explaining that it is one example of body percussion activity:
  - [THE PERCUSSION SHOW Presents : Body Percussion](#) (Note: at 1:07 and 2:06 a woman is excluded from joining the group, providing the opportunity for a class discussion on inclusiveness.)
  - [The Great African Take Away: Body Percussion](#)
- Next, instruct students:
  - *Standing in a circle we will engage in our own version of a body percussion activity. We will create rhythmic sounds using different parts of our bodies.*
  - *Consider clapping hands, stomping feet, snapping fingers, patting thighs, humming, whistling, etc. Express yourself!*
  - *We will ask a volunteer to start us off by creating an initial beat. On the teacher's cue, the person standing to the right will join with their own beat. We will repeat these actions until everyone has joined the percussion.*
  - *Please listen carefully as you play. When you pay attention to the sounds, you'll be better able to fit your rhythm in the groove.*
  - *Play at the same volume as the rest of the group so our contributions are equal.*
  - *Pay attention to sensations and emotions that you feel as we come together in harmony with sound.*

### CLOSURE

- In a whole class discussion, encourage students to share sensations and/or emotions they felt during the creative sound/music expression activity.

### ACTIVITY VARIATIONS

- Invite students to choose when they join in the rhythm, rather than on the teacher's cue.

- Ask students to bring in their own objects that can be used to create sounds.
- Consider using musical instruments if available.

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Consider what worked or did not work to gauge how it may be modified for next time.
- Seek informal student feedback to learn from their individual and collective experiences.
- Have you noticed any shifts in how students related to each other following this practice?
- Did the students appear to enjoy the practice?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research shows that chanting, drumming or dancing together has a unifying effect on people. [One study](#) investigated the relationship between interpersonal synchrony created through drumming and prosocial behavior. In the experiment, 18 female volunteers (ranging from 19 to 30 years old) with no formal musical training performed a task of accurately playing the rhythm they were taught. Participants were told that two experimenters would take turns drumming with them one at a time. One of the co-drumming experimenters was in synchrony with the participants' rhythm and the other was not.

Following the drumming session, participants were given the opportunity to help an experimenter pick up pencils she "accidentally" dropped in front of them. Researchers found that participants collected more pencils when the experimenter had been a synchronous drum partner compared with when the experimenter had been an asynchronous drum partner.

[Another study](#) points to the association between music and its beneficial effects. Researchers found that performing music (such as drumming, singing, and dancing) when compared to listening to music alone resulted in performers having higher pain thresholds and greater levels of positive emotion.

Finally, music was found to be a source of awe among a large sample of [study](#) participants from two distinct cultural backgrounds (the United States and China) who were asked to identify feelings for each of 2,168 music samples.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Rhythm in music has the power to bring people together, helping to increase [prosocial behavior](#) and a sense of community. When young people listen to music with their peers, [a sense of belonging and connection](#) is higher among peer groups—a significant contributor to students' [academic achievement](#) and [resilience](#).

Listening to or creating music with students may lead to a more empathetic and cooperative classroom environment. For example, a group of primary-school-aged children exposed to musical games one hour a week during an academic year significantly [increased their empathy scores](#). Thus, the more we bring music into the classroom, the greater opportunities we have to [cultivate empathy](#) and nurture cooperative [engagement](#), helping to enrich the learning experience of all students.

## SOURCE

Keltner, D. (2023). [\*Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How it Can Transform Your Life\*](#). Penguin Press