

Have Fun Crafting Instruments

Young children love little more than playing instruments. This joy is compounded when they have created these instruments themselves. With a few basic supplies and a little help from you, children in your music classes and camps can have fun creating some fun musical instruments. To complete the lesson, make sure to teach them a bit about the history of the instrument and try to have an authentic sample to give them a reference point. Many websites for music teachers are full of instructions to help you plan lessons and get kids into the creative spirit. Pinterest is another great example of tips and instructions for making these and many other musical instruments.

Shaker Eggs:

1. While you can purchase empty plastic eggs nearly anywhere at Easter time, it is easy to order plain, white plastic eggs from craft and hobby websites for very little money any time of the year. Other supplies include permanent markers; stickers; rice, popcorn, or beads to fill the eggs with; and ½-duct tape in several colors.



2. To create the shakers, just fill the eggs half-way with popcorn or rice and close the two halves together. Take duct tape in chosen color and wind it several times around the middle seam to help keep the contents inside. Then color them with permanent markers or stickers if desired. Make sure children create two eggs each.

3. **Lesson:** Show an example of an authentic maraca and tell children a bit of history surrounding the instrument. First, do an echo response with different rhythm patterns (this lesson can be as simple or complex as you like, depending on the age of the children. Younger children will enjoy simple songs like “*Shake Your Shaker Eggs*” from Wee Kids Rock or Rachel Rambach’s “*Shaky Fruit*”. For slightly older children consider “*I Know a Chicken*” by Laurie Berkner or consider a lesson in pop music by playing “Bo Diddley” by the artist of the same name (make sure to teach them the clave rhythm if you use this one).

Bodhran



1. **Bodhran (Baw-run)** or Celtic drum is a fun choice that’s outside the usual, but can be really fun for kids to play and easy to create. Supplies needed include three 10 or 12-inch embroidery hoops per child; clear plastic shrink wrap; white and brightly colored duct tape; markers, and a pre-cut cardboard circle just slightly smaller than the hoop size you choose.
2. Depending on your time limit and the number of children in your class, you might want to do the first several steps on your own outside of class time or even stretch the project over a two-day period.
 - a. **Step One:** Regardless, an adult should first separate the embroidery hoops discarding the outer adjustable ring. Then using a hot glue gun, glue the three plain hoops together to make a larger frame. If class time is short, consider

wrapping the glued together hoops with shrink wrap, taping it securely to the bottom of the frame. Then using a blow dryer on high heat, shrink the plastic film until it is stretched tightly across the frame. If you have time or are doing the project in stages, you might want to help the children wrap the film around the frames and watch the heating process as it is quite fun for them to watch it shrink. In any case, if you do these first steps ahead of time, the final construction steps will go very quickly and children will soon be ready to play their drums.

- b. **Step Two:** Have the children secure strips of the white duct tape tightly across the plastic film (two layers are best) and fasten it securely to the inside ring. Then choose a colored strip of duct tape and wrap it around the side of the frame. Use a stencil to allow children to draw a shamrock pattern on the white drum head or decorate it with permanent markers. For the tipper, unsharpened pencils work well, or help the children glue a wooden bead to each end of a wooden dowel.
3. **Lesson:** As with the maracas, tell a bit of the history of the instrument. There are lots of great examples of Bodhran music and players on YouTube that are quite impressive and fun to watch. Then, do a similar echo-response with the students copying different rhythms before heading on to the music. For musical selections choose lively pieces such as “The Irish Washerwoman”, a festive Celtic reel or two, or anything by the Irish Rovers. Children will have a great time dancing and drumming along to these songs.



Guiro



1. **The Guiro (Gwi-ro)** is a percussion instrument native to Puerto Rico and Colombia. It is made of a dried and hollowed-out gourd which has notches carved into the sides. It is played with a stick called a **Pua**, which scraped along the notches to produce a loud rasping sound. For this reason, it is also called a rasp or scraper. Children can create a colorful version of this instrument from supplies that are easily found around the house. Supplies: Empty water or drink bottles with ridges along the sides (caps included); popsicle sticks; glitter, pom-poms, confetti, or other silent items to fill bottle; markers, colored ½-inch duct tape.
2. To make the instrument, simply have the children fill the bottles with confetti, glitter or pom-poms (glitter is especially fun since it sticks to the sides of the plastic bottles). Then replace the caps, tighten and cover them with the colorful duct tape. The children can then color the popsicle stick scrapers with markers and you are ready to go.



3. **Lesson:** After telling the history of the instrument do several echo and response patterns, scraping the stick along the side ridges. As with the bodhran, there are lots of examples of guiro music on YouTube; however, most of these are in Spanish and are quite long. Do a quick scroll through these examples before class to see if you can find one that fits your needs. Music selections can include the always popular La Cucaracha, La Bamba, or you can choose a samba example from the CD “Kids World Party, Samba Salad”.

Rain Sticks



1. Rain sticks imitate the soothing sound of falling rain showers and are easy to create with just a few simple supplies. Traditional rain sticks are made of dried cactus or carved bamboo and can be upwards of \$15, but making your own instrument can provide hours of fun and encourage creativity. Supplies include the following items. A cardboard mailing tube (standard paper tubes are too flimsy to last, but a sturdy tube with capped ends can be purchased at any office supply store) You can also purchase quantities of a dozen or more tubes at a very reasonable price from a shipping supply website such as Uline. A box of 1 1/2 –inch panel nails or wire nails; rice or very small beads; a rubber mallet; string, ribbon, or yarn for decorating; patterned duck tape, tissue paper or wrapping paper.



2. Using a rubber mallet, gently tap nails around the circumference of the cardboard tube. Start from the bottom up and make sure to place nails around all sides of the tube to form a criss-cross pattern. These nails will be what catch the rice or beads to slow their fall through the tube, so the more nails you use, the better the sound will be.
3. Once all the nails have been inserted, close one end of the tube with end caps if you have them or cover it securely with two layers of duck tape if you do not. Stand the tube up on its end and pour about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of rice or beans into the tube; seal the second end.



4. Cover the entire surface of the tube with a double layer of duck tape to keep the nails secure and make sure they do not poke through. I used white duck tape for this step as it is cheaper and saves on the use of the decorative tape.
5. Cover the white tape with colored duck tape, wrapping paper, tissue or whatever you like to decorate the tube. Tie ribbon, string, or yarn several inches down from the top (you can add a bead or two if you have it for extra decoration).
6. To use the finished instrument, simply hold it upright and turn it over very slowly to allow the beads/rice to fall down through the tube. For the lesson, find some fun songs about rain or use in conjunction with a purchased Thunder Stick (spring tube). You can find instructions on YouTube to help you make one, but this is more of an adult project. Instead, search the web for an inexpensive one (I found them for only \$5.99 at an online guitar store).

Thunder Tubes



- **Have fun creating your instruments and introducing children to World Music!**