

African Drum Class Syllabus

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This class is an introduction to playing hand drums. It is designed for a group of 10-15 beginners to progress to playing full arrangements by the end of the semester. We will explore the world of the Djembe drum, which comes from the rich tradition of the Malinke ethnic group in West Africa (Mali, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Senegal).

We will learn about the Malinke culture and how they use music for ceremonial occasions and everyday occurrences. We will meet the instruments of the typical performance ensemble and see the differences between traditional and modern performances. Other African cultures may be included if the students raise interest.

Each rhythm is introduced as it is taught in Africa: oral transmission. I play, you listen. Now we play together. This call-and-response system allows students to quickly play along with the instructor. While repetition breeds familiarity and brings these parts into memory, we will explore proper djembe technique. The students will gain a greater understanding of this music by learning how to properly count rhythm. This will progress to reading and writing drum tablature for each rhythm. Each page of tablature will become the student's folder for the class.

This leads us to exploring modern tools for creating and understanding rhythm using a drum machine and videos posted online. These tools give the student the opportunity to hear the music and see how the tablature matches. A series of short videos facilitate practice outside of class.

Each student will choose or be assigned a part to play for each rhythm to recreate the orchestration inherent in Malinke music. We will rehearse these rhythms and perform them for the recital at the end of each semester. This performance is mandatory.

Attendance:

Missing more than three classes may result in a lower grade. If there are extenuating circumstances regarding attendance, or if you need to miss a class, please contact the PWHS office. Illness and absence do not excuse the student from completing major assignments on time. The student can request an Extension ahead of time or complete assignments early.

Grading:

The grade for this course will be a combination of scores based on attendance, class participation, weekly assignments, preparation of assignments and personal skill improvement. The assignments each week will be primarily hands-on i.e. - practicing an exercise or song to be played during the next class. Tablature and videos will be given the week before each test or in class exam. No late work will be accepted after the last day of this course.

Sample weekly topics:

1. Introduction: Welcome to the drum circle!
2. African music: an introduction to Malinke culture
3. Tablature: reading and writing rhythm
4. Introducing modern tools: drum machine and videos
5. Djembe technique + rudiments
6. Dundun technique + rudiments
7. Rhythm 1
8. Rhythm 1
9. Rhythm 2
10. Rhythm 2
11. Rhythm 3
12. Rhythm 3
13. Rehearsals
14. Continue
15. Until
16. Recital

Sample Quiz Schedule:

Quiz 1 – Where’s the pulse? - Play samples of (African) music and ask the student to clap on the pulse.

Quiz 2 – Where’s the upbeat? – Play samples of (African) music and ask the student to clap on the upbeat.

Quiz 3 – drum names

Quiz 4 – tablature

Quiz 5 – performance evaluation #1 – djembe technique

Quiz 6 – performance evaluation #2 – dundun technique

Quiz 7 - 10 – performance evaluation #3 – rhythm recall