



OMAHA SYMPHONY



Introduction to the Percussion Family

HANDOUTS

Instrument List

Percussion Matching Game

Create Your Own Instrument





Key Topics: Orchestra, Instrument, Timbre, Pitch, Identifying the Percussion Family.

Grade: K-5

Materials:

- Laptop/Projector
- Link to videos embedded in the module
- Instrument List Handout

Length: 35 min

State and Federal Music Standards:

FA 2.4.1.b, FA 2.4.1.d, FA 5.4.1.d, FA 2.4.2.a, FA 2.4.2.d, FA 5.4.2.a, FA 5.4.2.d, FA 2.4.3.a, FA 2.4.3.b, FA 2.4.3.c, FA 2.4.3.d, FA 5.4.3.a, FA 5.4.3.b, FA 5.4.3.c, FA 5.4.3.d.

Pre-Teaching Overview

Open **Meet the Percussion Family** video and listen to your Omaha Symphony play and describe the various percussion instruments. Tell the students to listen for the following:

- Pitch—which instruments are pitched and which are non-pitched?
- Where the instruments are seated within the orchestra.
- Differences in timbre—sound and tone color.

Learning Objective

Students will be able to identify and describe the physical makeup, sound, and function for each instrument from the percussion family within an Orchestra and abroad.

Meet the Orchestra

Open the interactive Orchestra Map, and explore the instruments from the handout with the students. Discuss the following:

- Why do they think the Orchestra is set up this way?
- What types of instruments are at the front, middle, and back of the Orchestra?
- Are the instruments grouped together by family? (string, brass, wind, percussion)
- Which section has the most players?
- Which section do you think is the loudest? Softest?



Meet the Percussion Family

Meet the Percussion Family and learn about its different members. The percussion family is the largest instrument family in the orchestra, and it's full of exciting sounds. Percussion instruments make music when you strike, shake, or scrape them. Some are loud and powerful, while others are soft and shimmering. Fun fact—the word percussion means “to strike,” which is exactly how these instruments create sound.

Percussion instruments can be divided into two groups: pitched and unpitched. Pitched percussion instruments can play one or more musical notes, which means they can play melodies. Examples include the xylophone, marimba, glockenspiel, timpani, handbells, steelpan, wind chimes, and even the piano! Unpitched percussion instruments don't play specific notes. Instead, they create interesting sounds and rhythms. Examples of unpitched percussion include the snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, castanets, rainstick, and slapstick.

In the orchestra, the percussion section is usually found in the back. That's because many percussion instruments are big and loud, and they need space to be played safely. Percussionists often stand while they play and may be responsible for playing several instruments in just one concert—or even in a single piece of music! This family helps keep the beat and adds rhythm and texture to the music, helping the whole orchestra stay together.

Percussion instruments are played using different tools, such as hands, drumsticks, mallets, or even feet. Some instruments are tapped gently, while others are hit with force to make a strong sound. And don't forget—your body can be a percussion instrument too! Clapping, snapping, stomping, and patting are all forms of body percussion, and they're a fun way to explore rhythm and keep a steady beat.

This resource **Meet the Percussion Family** demonstrates how percussion instruments make sound and how the pitched ones change pitch. Examples are provided for each instrument.

Discussion Questions

After completing all of the activities utilize these questions to reflect on learning.

- What are the four groups of instruments in an orchestra and what are they called or referred to as?
- Who leads the orchestra and what are their duties?
- What role would you like to have in an orchestra and why?
- Which percussion instruments are pitched, and which are non-pitched?
- Why are the percussion instruments always in the back of the orchestra?
- How do percussion instruments make sound?
- Use your body (hands or feet) as a percussion instrument to play a rhythm.



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Percussion Family

Xylophone [pitched]



Meet the Xylophone! The xylophone is a fun and colorful member of the percussion family—and it's full of music and melody! The word xylophone means "wood sound." It has a row of wooden bars that are each a different length. When you strike the bars with mallets, they make musical notes—just like playing a song on the piano! That means the xylophone is a pitched percussion instrument, because it can play notes and melodies.

Each bar makes a different sound: short bars make high sounds, and long bars make low sounds. Underneath each bar is a tube (called a resonator) that helps make the sound louder and brighter. You'll often hear the xylophone in orchestras, bands, and even cartoons! It can sound bouncy, sparkly, or playful.

Timpani [pitched]

Meet the Timpani! The timpani (also called kettledrums) are big, round drums that belong to the percussion family. They have a deep, powerful sound—like thunder or a heartbeat! Timpani are special because they can play different musical notes, which makes them part of the pitched percussion group. You might hear them boom out a dramatic rhythm or quietly rumble to add excitement to the music.

Soft or hard mallets are used to strike the drumhead. Timpani have pedals at the bottom that change the pitch of the drum higher or lower. You'll usually find four or more timpani in the back of the orchestra. They help keep the beat and add drama, excitement, and rhythm to the music.



Snare Drum [non-pitched]



Meet the Snare Drum! The snare drum is one of the most popular instruments in the percussion family. It's known for its crisp, sharp sound—kind of like a "rat-a-tat-tat"! You've probably heard it in marching bands, parades, and even pop and rock music. The snare drum is a non-pitched percussion instrument, which means it doesn't play notes or melodies.

Instead, it's used for exciting rhythms.

What makes the snare drum special is the snare wires—a set of thin metal wires stretched across the bottom of the drum. When you hit the top with drumsticks, the wires vibrate and make that classic snappy sound. Snare drums can play soft and sneaky or loud and powerful. In the orchestra, the snare drum adds rhythm, energy, and even sound effects—like the patter of rain or marching footsteps.

Piano [pitched]



Meet the Piano! The piano is one of the most popular instruments in the world! It has 88 black and white keys which we see the pianist play, and lots of strings on the inside under the lid. The piano is actually part of the percussion family because when you press a key, a tiny hammer inside the piano strikes a string to make the sound.

The piano is a pitched percussion instrument because it can play lots of different notes and melodies. You can play low, deep sounds on the left side of the keyboard, and high, twinkly sounds on the right. One of the best things about the piano is that you can play both melody and harmony at the same time—that means you can play the tune *and* the chords together! At the bottom of the piano, you'll see pedals—those are the foot levers that help change the sound. Most pianos have two or three pedals which are used to add emotion and color to the music.

Orchestra



A modern Orchestra is a large instrumental ensemble that combines instruments from different families. Today, we're focusing on the percussion family, but don't forget the Strings, Wind, and Brass section!

An Orchestra may be called a "Symphony Orchestra" or "Philharmonic Orchestra" depending on location.

Orchestras are led by a conductor that directs the performance with hand movements and baton gestures.

Most Orchestras also have a Concert Master that is the first chair violin player that leads the musicians in tuning at the top of a concert as well as playing passages together.



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Brass Family Matching Game

Draw a line from the words to the instrument they describe.

- Unpitched & has thin wires
- Led by a conductor
- Has 88 keys & lots of strings inside
- Also known as kettledrums
- Popular with a crisp, sharp sound
- Deep & powerful sounding
- It's name means "wood sound"
- Your favorite instrument
- A large group of musicians

TIMPANI

SNARE DRUM

XYLOPHONE

PIANO

ORCHESTRA



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Brass Family Matching Game

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- TIMPANI
- SNARE DRUM
- XYLOPHONE
- PIANO
- ORCHESTRA
-



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Create Your Own Percussion Instrument

Use this sheet to imagine and draw your own percussion instrument.

Things to consider:

- 1) Is it pitched or unpitched?
- 2) How is it played (struck, shook, scraped)?
- 3) What materials is it made from (wood, metal, plastic, recycled items, nature)?

Give your new, percussion instrument a name: