

# Drumming Core Concepts in the Elementary Classroom

or

## How to Teach Anything Using Beat, Rhythm, and Words

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### Objective:

Create a drumming piece based on information you want your students to learn, repeat, and remember.

### Beat and Drumming:

Drumming is based on a steady beat. Beat is the basis of life. Even before we were born we heard our mother's heartbeat.

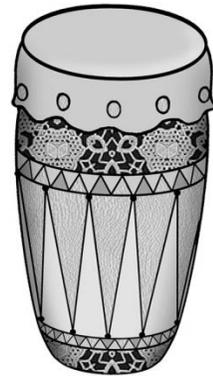
Children who can keep a beat learn to organize their behavior, their body movements, and attention. They can become more focused and less impulsive. (Dee Joy Coulter, "Music and the Making of Mind") Music helps cultivate strong "inner speech" wherein children regulate their activity through their thoughts. (Lev Vygotsky, "Thinking and Speaking")

Children who can keep a beat have better reading and language skills. (Hansen and Bernstorff) There is more and more current research showing that music skills are tied to reading proficiency. Music can also increase listening skills.

The drum is said to be man's oldest instrument. There is physical evidence of drums from Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures, but many believe that every culture and civilization has used drumming. Some species of monkeys and even some rodents "drum" using their bodies or objects.

Drums can be used for communication, celebration, and entertainment. They have been used in religious practices and rituals. Drums have also been widely used in military groups throughout the ages as a way to motivate troops, set a marching pace, relay orders and signals, to organize a soldier's day, or to create fear in the enemy.

Drumming fosters unity, yet can also provide the creative work that our children desperately need.



### PROCEDURE:

1. Choose text.
2. Practice the text using items from the **Basic Elements** menu.
3. Now experiment and add **Variations** to the **Basic Elements** you have practiced.
4. Use your favorite combination of **Basic Elements** and **Variations** to put together your final drumming piece. Write down the pattern and/or form for everyone to follow.

## Text:

Base your drumming piece on text. Poetry in iambic pentameter and lyrics to simple songs are good for beginners or younger grades.



Don't be afraid of using non-rhyming informational text, but students will need practice saying the phrases and sentences to a beat. Determine your preference for the rhythm of the words and be consistent in practicing them that way. Limit the phrases/sentences to 3-4 most important basic facts.

Try drumming lists of vocabulary words or spelling words. If the words on the list do not have the same number of letters or syllables it may be more successful in a call-response format (where the teacher spells/says and drums a word then students echo).

*(See the attached sheet for examples.)*

### Basic Elements:

play the beat and say/sing the words  
play the beat and think the words  
play and say/sing the rhythm of the words  
play the rhythm of the words without saying them aloud  
play a repeated, notated rhythm

*Once students have mastered the words, beat, and rhythm, you may want to have half the class do one element while the other half does another element simultaneously.*

### Variations:

- ◆ tempo (rate of speed)
- ◆ dynamics
  - soft, loud, medium
  - add or subtract instruments on repetitions to vary dynamics
- ◆ experiment with form/patterns
  - use combination of Basic Elements
  - solo/group
  - alternate rhythms or layer rhythms
  - alternate or combine singing, drumming, and chanting
- ◆ timbre/instrumentation
  - small drums vs. large drums
  - group drums or other instruments according to size or type
  - play with sticks or mallets vs. hands
  - use a variety of instruments or found objects
  - use body percussion (clap, stamp, snap, pat)
- ◆ add vocalizations (singing, speaking, or chanting)
- ◆ add choreographed mallet, stick or body movements
- ◆ add a drum solo or improvisation
- ◆ play with or without an accompanying music track
- ◆ play only on specific words or phrases

**Elementary Music Standards:** Some standards from USOE that can be met through this activity.

- SINGING:** differentiate between singing voice and speaking voice  
explore range of high and low pitches
- PLAYING:** experience feeling and moving to a steady beat  
recognize the difference between strong and weak beats  
practice beat accuracy  
explore sound and silence in rhythmic patterns  
practice playing strong and weak beats in patterns of 2, 3, 4  
practice playing rhythmic patterns simultaneously against beat or rhythmic patterns played by others  
build skill in playing rhythm patterns  
explore varying uses of tempo and dynamics
- LISTENING:** respond to patterns of same and different  
listen to differentiate between fast and slow (tempo), loud and soft (dynamics), and various sounds (timbre)  
learn to listen carefully to others when engaged in music activities  
recognize repeated or contrasting phrases  
identify form
- READING:** explore a variety of icons representing steady beat, pitch, and metric groupings  
understand the relationship between beat and rhythm  
use iconic symbols to represent patterns performed by the students  
recognize music icons as another example of symbols we learn to read for understanding  
practice reading iconic or traditional notation while singing or playing
- CREATING:** create vocal characterizations as part of a story or song  
create new words and rhymes for favorite classroom songs  
create simple beat and rhythm patterns  
create simple iconic representation of beat, meter, rhythm and pitch  
create simple rhythmic phrases or ostinato patterns to be played against a steady beat  
create variations in tempo, dynamics, and timbre

**Evaluation Rubric:**

	1. Excellent	2. Fair	3. Needs Work
<b>Beat</b>	Consistently stayed on a steady beat.	Some variation in beat.	Did not keep a steady beat.
<b>Rhythm</b>	Rhythm was precise.	Some rhythm errors.	Did not play accurate rhythms.
<b>Reading</b>	Read icons/notation without teacher help. Eyes were on notation not on drum.	Needed some teacher prompts in reading icons/notation.	Did not follow icons/notation.
<b>Saying/Singing</b>	Spoke or sang all words.	Spoke or sang most of the words.	Did not speak or sing the words.
<b>Tempo</b>	Maintained a steady tempo without going faster or slower.	Slight variation in tempo.	Did not keep a steady tempo.
<b>Dynamics</b>	Played all prescribed dynamics.	Played most dynamics as directed.	Did not play dynamics.

**Remember:**

- ♦ Start with the basics, no matter the age of your students. Most elementary music objectives are **skill-based** rather than **age-based**.
- ♦ Take your time. Don't attempt too much too soon.
- ♦ SIMPLICITY = SUCCESS  
*"There is never any need to apologize for simple material when it is used with imagination and taste."* – Isabel Carley
- ♦ Students need practice to become proficient in drumming.
- ♦ Provide opportunities for choice, creativity, problem-solving, and variation.
- ♦ Provide clear objectives and give many opportunities for evaluation of group and self.

**GROUP PRESENTATION**

1. Choose your text: a simple rhyme or excerpt from a longer poem or song.
2. Pick three Basic Elements to use with your text. You may use two elements at the same time if you wish.
3. Now choose two variations to add.
4. Experiment and decide a pattern/form for your poem presentation. You may want to write it in ABC form, defining the parts as A=, B=, etc. Create as many parts as you would like to but keep it simple.  
*(Example: ABACA or ABCDA or AABB where A = beat, B = rhythm of words, C = beat and rhythm together)*