LESSON PLAN

KS1 B

TURN UP THE VOLUME

TERM ONE LESSON THREE

DRUM CIRCLE: PLAYING TOGETHER

FOCUS + GOALS

- Develop the ability to play together as a group using percussion instruments in a drum circle.
- Explore a range of percussion instruments and different ways of playing them.
- Learn and perform a simple repeating rhythmic groove together as a class.
- Practise starting and stopping together in response to a leader.
- Develop call and response skills, both following and leading rhythmic ideas.
- Build confidence taking on a leadership role within a group performance.

MATERIALS

- A variety of percussion instruments (drums, tambourines, shakers, claves, woodblocks, or similar) - one per pupil where possible.
- Alternative sound sources (chairs, tables) for pupils without access to instruments.
- Open space arranged in a circle.
- Access to the Mic Check 'Rhythm Roulette' activity (optional extension).

ACTIVITIES

1. Introduction and Recap 5 minutes

Recap:

- Over recent sessions, pupils have worked on keeping a steady pulse together.

Introduce: "Today you are going to use those pulse skills to play together in a new way: by creating a drum circle."

Explain: "A drum circle is a group of people making rhythm together using drums and percussion. You don't all need the same instrument. You could use drums, tambourines, shakers, claves, woodblocks or whatever percussion is available in the classroom."

If instruments aren't available, you can stand and use the backs of chairs or tables.

Explain: "The important thing is that you can listen to each other and play together as one group."

Today they will learn a drum circle groove, practise starting and stopping together, and then take over and lead the music themselves.



2. Get To Know Your Instruments 5 minutes

Ask pupils to get into a circle and choose their instruments.

Before playing together, give pupils a couple of minutes to explore the sounds their instruments can make.

Prompt pupils to try:

- Playing a short sound.
- Playing a long sound.
- Playing quietly.
- Playing loudly.
- Finding two different ways of playing the same instrument.

After a couple of minutes, bring pupils back together to build their first groove.



3. Learn The Groove 10 minutes

Explain: "The whole drum circle is going to play together, starting with a simple rhythm."

Demonstrate a simple one-bar, four-beat rhythm, displaying it visually using simple symbols or notation.

Count pupils in ("1, 2, 3, 4") and ask them to listen first, then repeat the rhythm back.

Repeat this a couple of times.

Once pupils can repeat the rhythm, ask them to keep it looping rather than playing it once.

Join in for the first few repeats, then let pupils continue the groove without support.

Encourage: "Try not to speed up and to listen to those around them. Try the groove a few times and see if each repeat sounds tighter than the last."

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ACTIVITIES CONTINUED

4. Start and Start Together 10 minutes

Explain: “In ensemble playing, knowing when not to play is just as important as knowing when to play.”

You become the drum circle leader.

Demonstrate: “on the count of "1, 2, 3, 4", everyone starts the groove together; on a clear stop signal (e.g. a raised hand), everyone stops.”

Practise this together as a class a couple of times, including a less predictable stopping point, and ask pupils whether they stopped on the signal.

Hand control over to pupils:

In small groups or as a whole class, see if pupils can start and stop together using an agreed leader and stop signal.

Once confident, encourage pupils to make their stops less predictable, requiring the group to keep watching the leader closely while playing.

5. Call and Response 10 minutes

Explain: “The drum circle is now going to become a musical conversation using call and response: th teacher or leader plays a short rhythm (the call), and pupils play it back together (the response).”

Demonstrate a simple rhythm and ask pupils to listen and repeat it.

Repeat with a second rhythm, then a slightly trickier third rhythm, each time giving pupils space to respond.

Explain: “This is called call and response.”

Hand challenge over to pupils:

Ask pupils to choose someone in their circle to be the first Drum Circle Leader - that pupil plays a short rhythm; the whole circle listens and copies it back.

Encourage pupils to keep their first calls short.

Then, choose a new leader and repeat, giving as many pupils as possible the chance to lead a call.

6. Build Your Own Drum Circle Jam 10 minutes

Explain: “You now have everything you need to build your own drum circle jam: a groove, the ability to start and stop together, the ability to listen to a leader, and call and response.”

Give pupils an example structure they could use:

- groove – stop – call – response – new groove.

Make clear that pupils don’t have to copy this exactly.

They can:

- try different leaders and calls
- decide how long their groove plays before switching things up
- use two or three different leaders within the same jam

Give pupils time to experiment in their groups and build their own drum circle performance, reminding them that the important thing is listening and playing together.

7. Performance Challenge 5 minutes

Ask pupils to choose one person to be their first leader and decide how their jam will begin.

Remind pupils of everything they’ve practised:

- keeping the pulse steady
- listening to each other
- watching their leader
- starting and stopping together
- giving clear signals if they are leading

Ask pupils to perform their whole drum circle jam without any teacher support.

Optional extension: Go to the Mic Check! Sessions activity - 'Rhythm Roulette', where the class keeps their drum circle groove going while not knowing who will be chosen to play a solo.

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ACTIVITIES CONTINUED

8. Reflect Like a Drum Circle 5 minutes

Explain: "You just created their own drum circle, not just playing percussion instruments, but listening to other musicians, keeping a groove going, following musical signals, using call and response, and in some cases leading the whole group."

Discussion:

- What helped your drum circle stay together?
- Was it harder to lead or to follow?
- What happened when different people became the leader?
- Which call and response did you enjoy the most?

Reinforce: "The brilliant thing about a drum circle is that no one person has to make all the musical decisions, the group can listen, respond, share ideas and build the music together."

REFLECTION

Today we...

- Created our own drum circle using percussion instruments.
- Learned and performed a repeating rhythmic groove together.
- Practised starting and stopping together as an ensemble.
- Used call and response, both following and leading rhythms.
- Took turns leading our own drum circle jam.

Reflection questions:

- What helped your drum circle stay together?
- Was it harder to lead or to follow?
- Which call and response did you enjoy the most?

WRAP UP

"Today, you created your own drum circle. You didn't just play percussion instruments, you listened to other musicians, kept a groove going, followed musical signals, used call and response, and some of you even took responsibility for leading the whole group.
Next time, the focus moves to rhythms in more detail. You will need to listen carefully, remember what they hear, and copy it back accurately."

NATIONAL CURRICULUM

- use their voices expressively and creatively by singing songs and speaking chants and rhymes
- play tuned and untuned instruments musically
- listen with concentration and understanding to a range of high-quality live and recorded music
- experiment with, create, select and combine sounds using the inter-related dimensions of music

CROSS CURRICULAR IDEAS

PE

- Practise moving in time with music through marching, stepping and freezing.

PSHE

- Develop listening skills, patience and turn-taking through partner discussion and games.

DIFFERENTIATION

Support:

- Pair pupils who need extra support with a confident peer within the circle.
- Model the groove slowly and repeat it several times before asking pupils to join in.

Stretch:

- Challenge pupils to make their stop signals less predictable and see if the group can still respond confidently.
- Encourage pupils to lead a call and response themselves, extending the length or complexity of their rhythm.

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SAMPLE