

Super Fun Bucket Drumming!

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Materials:

A class set of buckets in three sizes: 10 large (bass) “Rubber Maid” plastic garbage cans

10 medium (alto) 5 gal. buckets – food grade is best

10 small (soprano) 2 gallon buckets (donated by local deli)

A class set of drum sticks in 5A or 5B size – wood tip like banger bashers – note: sticks that are too big will break the buckets more often and sticks that are too soft will shred and fray quickly

Optional: Earplugs (for the teacher), music stands for group work

Grade range: I teach bucket drumming to grades 6/7 and sometimes grade 5. You can teach it to younger students however they find the buckets hard to hold so you may need to modify expectations and have students either put their buckets on chairs (a bit slippery) and stand to use them or on the floor which can make it tricky to do some of the patterns.

At the beginning of the year I allow the students to choose any bucket size they want, and I encourage them to try all the different sizes. Some will prefer the smaller buckets, and some will like the big buckets. I have each class for two 30 minute classes a week. For the first couple weeks we work on posture, stick handling, music reading basics and my drumming management cues.

Posture: To hold drums between your legs (alto and sop) sit on the edge of your chair with your feet out from your body and heels close. What also helps is to put the ridges of the bucket on your calf or at your knee area. For the larger garbage cans, the students can sit back more in their seat, but I don't let them put their feet on the drum. The tops of the buckets should be parallel to the ground.

Sticking: Hold the sticks match grip like **riding a bicycle** with sticks held mostly between the thumb and index finger and the other fingers loosely gripping the end of the stick. The stick should be hanging out of your hands by about 2-3cm on the bottom. Hands should be parallel to the ground and elbows and shoulders relaxed. I have students playing the garbage cans use the sticks backwards as I find it makes a deeper sound and reduces the wear on the big buckets. Tip: if you say “riding a bicycle” it will help the students to tuck their index fingers around the stick instead of on top. It also encourages them to grip between their thumb and first knuckle.

Drumming Talk: I use my sticks in an X in front of me to get the student's attention and I ask them to put their sticks in an X as well to show me when they are ready to listen (show me you're ready). Sometimes I add a count to that like 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. When we are practicing rhythms I use “me first and then you” echo playing but I allow them to play the rhythm after me quite a few times so they can practice the sticking, listen to each other (and me) and

develop some muscle memory. When I want them to stop I say “**last time**” on beat 4 and they play the rhythm one more time and we stop together. I use “last time” for xylophones too and longer patterns. I say it on the last beat of the pattern they are repeating and then they know to play the whole pattern one more time and stop.

This can become a really fun “**Elimination Game**” where the teacher plays a rhythm and waits an unspecified number of patterns and says “last time” and the people who don’t stop on time are eliminated. This works particularly well for classes who have control or listening issues because it sounds really cool when they get it right and they will want to play it all the time!

When it is time to play drum set patterns I am the only one who counts them in by clicking my sticks. Their job is to: **1)** have their sticks in an X, **2)** listen to the beat **3)** internalize the beat, **4)** start on time.

The first couple months:

In the first couple months I work on reading rhythms. I always have them up on the board and refer to them by number as we practice. I use solfege and number counting as well since they are both useful to know. I am also very particular about using proper sticking as in left and right hands for three reasons: first the proper technique directly transfers to a real drum set, drummers need to learn to use both hands equally and interchangeably and finally I like my students to look unified like a team when they all drum the same way. One other reason might also be for safety as one student’s stick may hit another’s hand when it is in an unexpected place.

I introduce playing the **drum set** rhythms in about the second week. This can be a frustrating process for some, but I use a couple guidelines that I have found really help reduce stress in students. I start by introducing the left hand rhythm first and they put their right hand down at their side. The left hand plays: middle, edge, middle-middle, edge and we play that quite a bit until it is unified across the class. We then work on the right hand and put the left down. The right hand plays the ride cymbal part of 1+2+3+4+ on the side of the bucket. We also play that until they are listening to each other and can play somewhat together. I often nod my head to the beat or count out loud as I am playing with my hands so I don’t conduct. When it is time to put it together we start with one hand and get it steady then add the other hand. I usually start with the left hand but we do try starting with either pattern.

If you mess up you need to: **1)** stop playing, **2)** listen to the pattern **3)** join in again with one hand and add the other when you are ready

This really helps students to try and keep trying the drum set even though they may not get it for quite a while. I insist that my students are always trying to do something and they only practice it correctly even if with just one hand.

The next step is to put the rhythms and the drum set together. I talk a bit about how drummers support the band and singers but the end of a phrase is often a little solo called a **fill**. Then we take the drum set pattern and play it three times and end the phrase with a fill pattern from the

rhythm bank. We practice with just one fill pattern quite a bit until they get the 4 bar phrase and transitions fairly comfortable.

Their **first assignment** is to play in a group of 4, a 4 phrase piece with 4 different fill patterns from the rhythm bank. This is the evaluation outline I give students:

Drumming Test /10

Have correct posture, stick and drum position

Start and end with sticks in an X

Be a leader in rhythm not just a follower

Know and play the correct rhythms!

Accent the first beat of sixteenth notes and the last beat of the piece

Work together and listen to each other

Marks are based on individual work and performance
(not a group mark)

Work Hard and Have Fun!

After this assignment students are ready to begin playing fills from the board as I call them out and improvising their own 4 beat fills. I also use this pattern as a good warm up and way to continue introducing new rhythmic material to the class.

I usually move on to teaching a piece of music from one of Oliver Cutz' books: *Bucket Music*, *Learning to the Beat of a Different Drum* or his second book *More Bucket Music*.

I have adapted most of his arrangements to suit my groups and what I find is needed most are more repeats and a few more places where it works to have a layered start rather than all buckets in at the same time. We also use choreography and our voices in some sections so there aren't many quiet moments.

Here are some videos I use in class as well:

Stickstoff <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arKMUNfq7pQ>

Harvard Thud Bucket Drumming with Throwing https://youtu.be/KY_gcQHtGH8

Blast! Intermission https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XuqTipBWss

For further information see: *Bucket Music*, *Learning to the Beat of a Different Drum* by Oliver Cutz (www.talkingdrum.ca) . This book has all the information you will need to start and 7 pieces to play on the buckets.

Rhythm Bank #1

Olivier Cutz

Drum Set

1 2 3

R L R L R L R L R R L R R L R

D. S.

4 5 6

R R L R L R R L R L R L R R R R L R

D. S.

7 8 9

R L R R L R R R L R L R R L R L R L R

D. S.

10 11 12

R L R L R L R R L R L R R R R L R L R R L R

D. S.

13 14 15

R L R L R L R L R L R R L R R L R L R L R L R L R L R

D. S.

16 17 18

R L R L R L R L R L R R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R

D. S.

19 20 21

R L R L R L R L R L R R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R