

Ideas for Homemade Musical Instruments

Strand : Listening and responding

Strand unit: Exploring sounds – instruments

Strand : Performing

Strand unit: Playing instruments



Scrapers:

Guiro – use any empty corrugated plastic bottle (e.g. “Crisp n Dry” cooking oil). Remove label, soak to remove any oil and play by scraping with a dowel.

Sand blocks – cut out 2 pieces of sandpaper and super-glue onto wooden blocks. Play by scraping one off the other. You can try different types of sandpaper (coarse, fine etc.) to explore different sounds.

Shakers:

Shakers – Use a variety of different fillings e.g. salt, sugar, dried peas/lentils, popcorn seeds, pebbles, old crayons etc. to fill a variety of containers e.g. vitamin pill jars, plastic kinder eggs, yoghurt drink bottles, hot chocolate/ “Bisto” containers, camera film holders etc.

Maraca(s) – Blow up a balloon to required size for head of maraca. Put papier mâché (newspaper dipped in wallpaper paste) around the balloon. Let sit for a day until it has hardened. Burst balloon with a pin and remove it from the papier mâché. Fill with dried peas/lentils/rice. Place dowel or piece of wood/card into the bottom of balloon and tape onto the head as a handle. Paint the instrument.

Fruit Shakers – Select a fruit (orange, apple, banana) and cover in papier mâché. Allow to dry overnight.

When it has hardened carefully cut the fruit in half and remove it from the papier mâché. Fill the shaped papier
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mâché with seeds/rice/dried peas/lentils/popcorn and tape together again. Paint the fruit shakers appropriate colours.

Jingle Sticks - Items such as keys or buttons can be threaded onto piece of fishing gut/string. Alternatively old metal bottle tops can be threaded onto wire from a wire clothes hanger (this activity requires holes to be pierced in the bottle tops by an adult).

Rainstick- Use the cardboard tubing from a roll of tinfoil/ kitchen roll/ wrapping paper. Pierce hairgrips in through the cardboard all along the length of the tube. Paint the tube. When dry cover the protruding edges of the hairgrips with coloured/masking tape.

Strikers:

Copper Chimes - Use a pipe cutter to cut different lengths of copper piping or purchase pipe cuttings from a hardware shop/plumber (they'll be glad to get rid of them). Use an open shoe box and thread a length of fishing gut through one side of the shoe box, through a copper pipe and then through the other end of the shoe box. Tie in a knot. Try this with several more lengths of fishing gut and different lengths of copper pipes. Decorate box when finished and play using a dowel or spoon to strike.

Bottle Boomwhackers – Simply use two or three empty plastic mineral bottles of different size/shape and discover the different pitches they produce when you whack them off something!

Drum - Stretch a piece of material/plastic bag /balloon over a container and attach with tape and/or super glue. Play using hands or dowel.

Bottle Xylophone – Obtain several identical empty bottles. Remove the labels from the bottles. Place the bottles in a line. Fill each bottle with a different amount of water. Tap each bottle with a spoon and listen to the pitch of the note produced. Experiment with different levels of water in each bottle to see if you can arrange a scale of notes going from lowest to highest. Once you're satisfied with the notes, mark off the water level using the tape or marker. This will remind you how far to fill up the bottles later after water evaporates. Food colouring can be added to the water to create a different colour for each note. This will create a **rainbow piano**.

This activity can be expanded to allow children to play well known tunes or compose their own. They could record the notation using colours.



String:

Harp – This is very similar to the copper chimes. The difference is that you thread different lengths of fishing gut diagonally across a shoe box. Play by plucking the strings.

Guitar - Place elastic bands (perhaps of different thickness) across the opening of an old tissue box. Play by strumming like a guitar!

Wind:

Tube trombone – Take 2 tubes of cardboard (from wrapping paper/ tin foil etc). One of the tubes should be narrow enough to fit inside the other. Tape a sheet of paper around the end of the bottom of the larger tube to create a “loud speaker”. Paint both tubes. Place the narrow tube inside the large one. Sing / talk through the tube. Notice what happens when you make the trombone longer by pulling narrow tube out a little more.

Straw Oboe – Flatten about 2cm of the end of a drinking straw with your teeth and use scissors to cut off the flattened corners to make a point. Put about 2cm of the straw end in your mouth with your lips closed but a little loose. Blow hard into the straw. If there is no sound blow less until a sound is made. Notice what happens to the notes if the straw is made shorter by snipping a piece from the end of the straw.



Straw Panpipes - Lay seven plastic drinking straws on a table, making the ends line up evenly. Space them apart so they are 1 to 2cm apart. Place a strip of coloured tape across the straws. Flip the straws over, and place another strip of tape across the other side, binding it to the first strip of tape. Holding a pair of scissors at an angle, cut across the straws to create a straight, diagonal line. Play them by blowing lightly into the edge of the straw.

Panpipes - Use a selection of straws/narrow tubes connected together. Blow gently over the top to produce a sound. If using ½ inch PVC piping you can achieve the pentatonic scale by cutting the pipes into the following lengths:

d = 15.2cm s = 9.8cm

r = 13.8cm l = 8.7cm

m = 12.1cm

You will need to tape the openings at the bottom of the pipes using duct tape.

Comb Harmonica - Fold a small piece of tracing or tissue paper in half and place over the teeth of a small comb. Hold the comb and tissue paper against your lips and hum a tune.

Weblinks

The following websites have some useful ideas for making instruments with children

<http://www.nancymusic.com/PRINThomemade.htm>

<http://www.mudcat.org/kids/>

http://www.expertvillage.com/video-series/710_homemade-instruments.htm video series of homemade instruments

<http://www.dsokids.com/2001/hactivities.asp?Action=Search&Title=&Inst=&Type=%223%22>

<http://www.nyphilkids.org/lab/main.phtml>