

TAO | DRUM HEART



 STATE THEATRE
NEW JERSEY

KEYNOTES



State Theatre New Jersey welcomes you to our school-day performance of *TAO: Drum Heart*. The Broadway-style production brings together the Japanese art of taiko drumming with choreography, costumes, music, and puppetry to tell a story of a young boy overcoming adversity. The show was created by the team behind the Tony Award-nominated Broadway revival of the Stephen Sondheim musical, *Pacific Overtures*: director Amon Miyamoto, costume designer Junko Koshino, and set designer Rumi Matsui.

These *Keynotes* provide information, discussion topics, activities, and resources to use both before and after the performance. The materials are designed to help you integrate the show with learning objectives in many areas of the curriculum.

We look forward to seeing you and your students at the State Theatre!

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State Theatre New Jersey—creating extraordinary experiences through the power of live performance.



DRUM HEART: THE STORY

A thunderous volcanic eruption devastates the countryside. One of the few survivors, a young boy, begins the effort to rebuild his village. He is attacked by neighboring villagers, who see an opportunity to seize the land for themselves. A heavenly spirit appears and persuades the people to work together to restore the land instead of fighting each other over it. They exchange their weapons for drumsticks and come together to make harmonious music.

The name TAO comes from a Chinese word that can mean 'path', 'road', 'choose', 'key,' or 'principle.'

THE COMPANY

TAO is a Japanese drum and dance company that has created an international, modern take on Japanese traditions. They have entertained some 6.5 million people in 22 countries, highlighted by their performance at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, Canada.

Founded in 1993 in Aichi, Japan, TAO established a permanent home in Aso-Kuju National Park on the island of Kyushu. There, in a remote location set among rolling hills, they created a complex, called 'Grandioso,' that includes a theater, training rooms, a gym, spa, residences, guesthouse, and more.

Every year, more than 100 people apply to join the company. Following rigorous tests of their physical and mental endurance, drumming skills, and ability to live with the others, only two or three are accepted. Trainees must agree to give up money, girlfriends or boyfriends, drinking, and smoking.

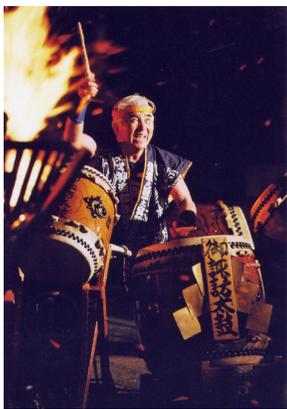
THE PERFORMERS

TAO is made up of 32 members, aged 18-44. They are both highly trained athletes and highly-expressive artists. They begin each day before dawn with a ritual to greet the sun. The team then goes on a 12-mile run on the lower slopes of nearby Mount Kuju. After making their traditional Japanese breakfast, and cleaning up, they do two hours of muscle training—200 push-ups, 200 sit-ups and 200 squats—and martial arts, followed by 10 hours of drum and choreography rehearsal.

At 10pm, after finishing household chores and taking a communal bath (separate baths for men and women), the Tao team finally sit down for supper. At midnight the kitchen is still busy with the clatter of washing up and preparations for the breakfast they will eat after another 5am start.

In Japanese, taiko literally means ‘drum.’ Outside of Japan, however, the term has also come to refer to the art of Japanese ensemble drumming, also known as kumi-daiko, meaning ‘set of drums.’ The word is pronounced TIE-KOH, with no accent on either syllable.

No one knows for certain, but many believe that taiko originated in ancient India, and came to Japan through China and Korea. Archaeological evidence shows that these types of drums were used in Japan as early as the sixth century. Over time, taiko came to be used for communication, and in warfare, festivals, theater, religious ceremonies, and other purposes. Even today, taiko still play an important role in Japanese religion and culture.



Daihachi Oguchi

The art of kumi-daiko was created in 1951 by jazz drummer Daihachi Oguchi. Given an old sheet of taiko music, he came up with the idea of taking the simple, ancient rhythm and arranging it for an ensemble. Inspired by his jazz playing, he had musicians play different rhythms on drums of different sizes. Basically, Oguchi had his taiko ensemble function like a Western drum set. He also added his own jazz-influenced rhythms.

Along with its dynamic playing style—loud, hard, and fast—taiko is known for its tightly choreographed movements, which many identify with Japanese martial arts. The music and movements are equally important; just watch the drummers “dance” their sticks from drum to drum.

Who plays taiko? Everyone! People as young as two and as old as 102, and both men and women play taiko. There are thousands of taiko groups in Japan, and thousands more around the world—an estimated 200+ ensembles in the U.S. alone. There are even university taiko ensembles, who participate in collegiate competitions.



TAIKO IN THE U.S.

Taiko was brought to the U.S. in the early 20th century by Japanese immigrants, who used the drums in traditional festivals and religious observances. When Japan declared war on America, however, Japanese-Americans were sent to internment camps during World War II. When the war ended, Japanese Americans were urged to assimilate into Western culture, giving up their language and traditions—including taiko drumming. With the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, some Japanese-Americans wanted to reclaim their heritage, including taiko. The first taiko group in the U.S. was the San Francisco Taiko Dojo, founded in 1968. Now, fifty years later, there are hundreds of professional, amateur, and collegiate taiko ensembles across the country.



San Francisco Taiko Dojo founder Seiichi Tanaka (right)

WOMEN IN TAIKO

Before the 1980s, it was unusual for Japanese women to perform on traditional instruments, including taiko. Their participation was systematically restricted. The exception was San Francisco Taiko Dojo, under the guidance of Grand master Seiichi Tanaka, who was the first to admit females to the art form. Female participation in kumi-daiko started to rise dramatically, and by the 1990s, there were as many—possibly even more—women as men playing taiko.

There are many different types of taiko drums. Each has its own sound and a specific function in the taiko ensemble. Taiko drums are divided into two main categories, depending on how they are made.

Taiko drums are played using wooden sticks called **BACHI**.



BYŌ-UCHI-DAIKO

- Two-headed drum made from a single hollowed-out tree trunk.
- Drum heads, made of animal hide, are stretched onto the body and tacked in place.
- Pitch of the drum depends on how tightly the hide is stretched. The pitch can't be changed once the drum head is attached.

Some types of byō-uchi-daiko

- **NAGADŌ-DAIKO** ('long drum') - A barrel-shaped drum that comes in different sizes, from the **KO-DAIKO** (small), to the **CHŪ-DAIKO** (medium), and the **O-DAIKO** (large). Can be played in a variety of positions: vertically, horizontally, or on a slant; on the floor or on a stand.
- **HIRA-DAIKO** ('flat drum') - Shorter than the nagadō-daiko. It is sometimes played in a vertical position on a hanging stand, like a gong.

SHIME-DAIKO

- Two-headed drum that can be made from a single piece of wood or from wooden staves (strips of wood).
- Drum heads, made of animal hide, are sewn over steel rings and laced to the body with a rope. Another rope is wound around the lacings of the first rope.
- Pitch of the drum can be changed by adjusting the tension of the second rope.

Some types of shime-daiko

- **TSUKESHIME-DAIKO** - Made from a single piece of wood. This type of drum can produce a wide range of pitches, depending on its size and proportions.
- **OKEDŌ-DAIKO** ('bucket-shaped drum') - A tube-shaped drum built out of staves (wood strips) rather than one piece of wood. It can be played in a number of positions: horizontally, vertically, on a stand, or hanging from the player's neck using a sling.



NAGADŌ-DAIKO



HIRA-DAIKO



SHIME-DAIKO



OKEDŌ-DAIKO

The o-daiko is the biggest, loudest taiko drum. It can weigh in at over three tons, with a diameter of over six feet! It is played horizontally on a raised stand.



Japan is an archipelago: a group of 6,852 islands located in the Pacific Ocean, off the eastern coast of mainland Asia. It is made up of four main islands (Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu) and numerous smaller islands to the north and south. The country's total land area makes it slightly smaller than the state of California. West of the country, across the Sea of Japan, are Russia, North Korea, South Korea, and China. In the Japanese language, the country is called *Nippon* or *Nihon*. It means "land where the sun begins."

Japan can be a dangerous place to live. There are over 100 active volcanoes, more than almost any other country. There are also a LOT of earthquakes—around 1,500 every year! Most are very small, but there have also been some really big ones. On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 quake triggered a tsunami that killed an estimated 16,000 people. It was the largest earthquake ever recorded in Japan.



JAPAN: FACTS AND FIGURES

- Japan is a world leader in science and technology, especially in consumer electronics, robotics, and the automotive industry. They are the largest automobile producer in the world.
- At 83.7 years, Japan has the highest life expectancy in the world—about four years longer than in the U.S.
- One of the reasons the Japanese live so long is probably their diet. Every Japanese meal includes some form of rice. They also eat lots of fish, soy products, vegetables, soup, pickles, and...seaweed! Food is eaten with chopsticks.
- Speaking of food, Japanese treats come in some interesting flavors. Would you like to try some eel-flavored ice cream? How about baked potato, grilled corn, hot chili pepper, or soy sauce Kit-Kats? (They have chocolate ones, too.)



- Almost all cellphones in Japan are waterproof, because people are so attached to them, they even bring them into the shower!



- In Japan, customs and manners are very important. For example: greet people by bowing to one another, not shaking hands; take off your shoes when you enter someone's home; at meals, don't pass food from your chopsticks directly to someone else's chopsticks.
- Japanese students go to school six days a week. Most of their schools don't have janitors. Instead, students and teachers come together to wash their cafeteria dishes and clean their classrooms.
- Baseball is the most popular sport in Japan, which has two professional leagues. Even high school games are broadcast on national TV.
- In Japan, black cats are believed to bring good luck.



- Among the many things Japan has given the world are: LED lights, 3-D printing, PlayStation, instant noodles, karate, the aircraft carrier, emoji, manga, Pokemon, karaoke, Sudoku, Hello Kitty, and the square watermelon.



EVERYBODY DRUMS!

Drums are most likely the world's oldest instrument, dating back to when humans first learned to keep rhythm. They have been used by every civilization for many purposes: military operations, traditional celebrations, religious ceremonies, and long-distance communication. And of course, drums have been an essential part of making music, from classical orchestras to rock bands.

Discuss with students:

- Why do you think drums are part of every culture?
- How are drums and other percussion instruments used today? Compare and contrast their use in our culture today with their historical uses in other cultures.



EXPLORING RHYTHM WITH HOMEMADE DRUMS

Have students make their own drums, using everyday materials. For the body of the instruments, you can use large juice or oatmeal boxes, coffee cans, paint cans, milk jugs, etc. Materials for the drum 'skin' might include balloons, heavy paper bags, or paper plates (or your container might come with a removable lid). You can use tape or rubber bands to affix the skin to the body. Students can decorate their drums using paint, markers, construction paper, felt, beads, feathers, etc. Pencils make good drumsticks, or students can play the drums with their hands.



SYLLABLES AND LETTERS: Ask students to name their favorite pet, superhero, movie, or friend. Have them play the rhythm on their drum while saying the name, matching the rhythm of the drum to the syllables of the words. You can also have students spell out the word, accompanying each word with a drumbeat. This activity is also great for working on vocabulary words.

SLOWEST DRUMMER IN THE WORLD

The natural tendency of most children is to speed up while playing. But to master anything, our bodies and minds need to absorb new information slowly before we can expect to perform it fast. Hold a competition with your students to see who can be "The Slowest Drummer in the World." Give your students a repeated rhythm, and challenge them to play the new pattern ten or more times, as slowly as possible. You can use a metronome to set the tempo, and a stopwatch to time the performance. This can be a group activity, or students can compete against each other.

MOVEMENT MEMORIES

After the performance, invite each student to choose one particular movement from the show that stands out in their memory. Remind them of the different types of moves they saw and ask for volunteers

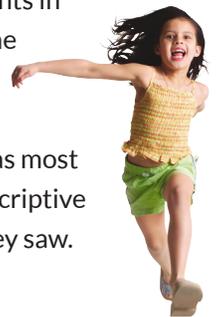


to demonstrate the movements as best they remember them.

As each volunteer performs a movement, have the rest of the class mirror the movement.



Then break the class into small groups. Ask each group to select 3-4 of the movements and use them to create a short movement sequence (dance). Have the groups present their dances to the rest of the class. (Hint: use the lights in your room to cue the start and end of the "performances.") After each group's performance, ask the class to talk about what they observed, and what was most memorable. Encourage them to use descriptive language and be specific about what they saw.



OBSERVATION BEGINNERS:

- "I noticed..."
- "I thought it was really interesting when..."
- "I was surprised when/by..."
- "I wonder..."





photo: Jason Paddock

BE A GOOD AUDIENCE MEMBER

Going to see a show at the theater is not the same as going to a movie or watching TV. The performers will be right there with you and the rest of the audience, which makes it very exciting! It also means you have a special responsibility to respect the performers and the rest of the audience so that everyone can enjoy the show. Make sure to follow these rules:

- If you have a phone, make sure to turn it off before the show starts. Keep it off until the show is over.
- During the show, give the performers all your attention. Stay in your seat and don't talk.
- Taking pictures or recording the show is not allowed.
- Don't eat or drink in the theater. And no chewing gum, please!

WATCH AND LISTEN

During the performance, pay attention to the different theater elements used in the show. These include:

MUSIC - Pay attention to the music, and the way it helps set the mood for what's happening in the show. When does it sound exciting? Sad? Funny?

COSTUMES - Do the actors' costumes look the same or different from the way the characters look in the TV show? Do the costumes help you recognize the characters in the play?

LIGHTING - Notice how the lights on stage change during the show. They get brighter and darker, change colors, move around, and do other things.

SETS/SCENERY - Pay attention to the scenery. Does it look like the TV show? Notice how the actors move the scenery around during the show.



BOOKS

Japanese Children's Favorite Stories (60th Anniversary Edition), by Florence Sakade, illustrated by Yoshisuke Kurosaki. Tuttle Publishing, 2014. Grades 3-8.

Natsumi!, by Susan Lendroth, illustrated by Priscilla Burris. G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, 2018. Natsumi, a small girl with big energy, discovers her talent for taiko drumming. Grades Pre-K-3.

The Way of Taiko, by Heidi Varian. Stone Bridge Press, 2013. A comprehensive introduction to the history and art of taiko drumming.

MUSIC

Heartbeat - Kodo 25th Anniversary, by Kodo Drummers.

Kodama: Echoes of the Soul, by San Jose Taiko.

Rhythm Journey, by San Jose Taiko,

WEBSITES

Entertainment Nippon video feature about TAO.
www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=265&v=h07nSR0GXfc

Kid's Web Japan offers information about Japanese life and traditions.
<http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/index.html>



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