

Djembe workshop June 2025 – Zero to Hero!

*Underlined titles are hyperlinked to Youtube videos.
Numbers refer to the rhythm grids in the Resources pack*

INTRODUCING THE DJEMBE

[Intro to djembe](#) – Ghana, mango wood and goat skin

How to hold – Sit towards the edge of the chair, pull drum towards you and tilt it slightly away from you to allow air out of the bottom. Ensure that if it falls, it will fall towards you, not to the floor! Grip it between your knees.

FOLLOWING A LEADER

[Make some noise!](#) On signal, children play the drums any way they like. Leader begins to play a steady beat. See how long it takes before everyone realises and joins in. Extension: Leader uses arms/body to indicate louder / softer / faster slower and big jump for a final stop!

Stop signal – practise stopping on leader's jump (as feet hit the floor) or with an arm signal.

[Rolling ball](#) – play drums in time to the motions of a bouncing ball.

[Let's all play our DRUM](#) – children play their drums only on the word 'drum'.

BASS AND TONE TAPS

[Intro to Bass and Tone](#) – copy rhythms using one hand on bass and other on tone, then try alternating hands. Say 'bass' and 'tone' as you play.

Copy cat – copy leader's rhythms. Extension: Don't play this one back.

Hand pattern exercises R L R L R L R L R R L L R R L L R L R R L R L L

[This is what it sounds like](#) – great call and response rhythm song by Rosie Adediran, available on Singup.

ESTABLISHING A STEADY PULSE

One banana (1) – play bass on the numbers only. Extension: add in 'banana' on tone in the other hand.

Lemon Lime (2) – split class into 2 groups – rhythm and pulse.

Djembe song (4)

Akwa abba (5)

[Shabuya](#) – name game based around a steady pulse, available on Singup

Shabuya! Ha! Ha!

Shabuya! Woah!

Shabuya! Ha! Ha!

Shabuya! Woah!

My name is Joe. Yeah? X2

I like to sing. Yeah?

I like my cat. Woah!

RHYTHMS TO WORDS

One Banana (1)

HELLO (3)

[I love apple pie](#) (from Sweet Easy Beats for Drum Circles)

Breakfast Bap Rap (6) (bacon in a bread roll...)

How are you (7)

RHYTHMS IN CANON

Jabba jabba djembe (9)

[Orbit](#) – pass a rhythm round the circle. Extension: leader starts off a second or third rhythm.

[Echo](#) – pass a rhythm from group to group.

LAYERING DIFFERENT RHYTHMS

Bacon in a Bread Roll / Pour some ketchup on (6)

Cow Chicken Cow / Half past 3, have a cup of tea / Pineapple (10)

Kuku – Oompa Loompa / I want some chocolate cake / double double one one (11)

CALL AND RESPONSE INTROS / BREAKS

Kuku (11)

SINGING TO AN OSTINATO

It's easiest if you split the class in 2 initially so they can focus on either the rhythm or the singing.
More able can do both.

Akwa Abba (5)

Kelele (8)

Elephant (12)

Senwa Dedende (13)

A typical 1Term2Learn presentation could include:

- **HELLO** – vocal warm up
- **Rhythm card** activity
- **Introduction to bass and tone**
- **1 banana** – playing in time and coming off together
- **HELLO** – copy rhythms on drums
- **I can play my DRUM** – watching and internalising
- **Djembe song** – playing in time together and changing rhythms on hand signal
- **Breakfast Bap Rap** – layering up rhythms

More able classes could include the following too:

- **How are you? OK** – playing syncopated rhythms and internalising the beat in the rests.
- **Kuku** – call and response into one of the rhythms. A more able class could layer 2 rhythms. This is great one to finish with because it goes out with a bang!

How much of this you cover will very much depend on the ability of your class, so don't worry if you can't get through it all! And feel free to swap in or add different pieces from the resource bank if there are any you find work better.

Top tips for djembe lessons

- Establishing a steady pulse is key to everything you do. It might help to have another member of staff (or a metronome!) to keep a pulse while the class play the rhythms.
- When teaching a new rhythm, say it → say *and* play → play (internalise the words)
- If a rhythm doesn't have words with it, make some up together! Using hand actions can also help with pitching the notes eg. arms up for Tone and arms down for Bass.
- Try building up a rhythm gradually, starting with the first note and internalising the others. Gradually add in the next few beats until you're playing the whole rhythm. See **Elephant (11)** as an example of how to do this.
- When rhythms get more complex, offer an easier option for those who can't keep up eg. just playing the bass notes, or the notes on the beat. If you have another adult in the room, they could lead the easier part.
- In layered pieces, give clear hand signals to signal moving to the next rhythm. Eg. hold arm in the air to signal that something is about to happen, and if necessary use a count down 4 3 2 1 (vocally, or with fingers)
- When singing songs to drum ostinato, split into two groups initially. More able can sing and drum.
- Be prepared to take things S L O W L Y if necessary. Use lots of repetition within lessons and from week to week. Don't get disheartened – it will come together eventually!