

Instrument Families: Percussion

Percussion instruments are some of the oldest instruments, aside from using voices. They are instruments that are either hit, shaken, or scraped. They are made from a variety of materials, such as wood, metal, plastic, plants (example: gourds), and animal skins.

Types of Percussion Instruments

Pitched



Instruments that make sounds that can be tuned to or make multiple pitches/notes. These include instruments such as xylophone, steel drum, or tubular bells.

Unpitched



Instruments that make sounds that don't tune to or make multiple pitches/notes. These include instruments such as maraca, tambourine, or bass drum.

[Fun Fact: Some instruments can be used in both roles. An individual cow bell is unpitched- but a set of tuned cowbells are pitched.]

Questions to Ask Your Child

Use these questions to guide your child through their inquiry of percussion instruments.

“What instruments do you think are percussion instruments?”

Brainstorm a list of instruments they think could fit in this musical family. You can facilitate a child who feels stuck by asking “What are instruments we hit/shake/scrape?” Listen to your child’s favorite music- can you hear any percussion instruments? What could they be?

“What does the sound of ____ remind you of?”

Watch the first video, listening and observing different types of percussion instruments. Think about how any of them might be familiar or sound like something they’ve heard before. [Example: Sometimes children think of things such as thunder when hearing bass drums.] What instruments do they like? Why? Which do they not like- and why not?

Videos

Percussion Instruments for Kids- Kiddopedia

This video features a wide variety of percussion instruments to listen to and enjoy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIZk0ihiARI>

Louisville Leopard Percussionists

A performance by a wonderful non-profit organization that offers extracurricular music programs to children in their area. Their videos feature children of multiple ages playing a large variety of percussion instruments.

<https://youtu.be/LwzJM-wo7s0>