

**FAMILY**  
Activity Guide



# MUSIC FOR THE EYES

The Fine Art of  
African Musical  
Instruments



Boone Children's Gallery  
LACMA West  
Los Angeles County  
Museum of Art

# MUSIC FOR THE EYES

The Fine Art of African Musical Instruments

## Family Activity Guide

# WELCOME

elcome to *Music for the Eyes: The Fine Art of African Musical Instruments*. This exhibition was designed for you to **enjoy** with your friends and family.

You can use this activity guide in the exhibition or at home.



Some of the musical instruments in the exhibition are here for you to **play**. If you need help you may ask an adult you came with or a gallery attendant to help you. This guide will also show you how to make and decorate your **own** musical instruments at home.



*We hope you enjoy your visit!*





*In the exhibition you will see object labels that tell you about the instruments on display.*

Type or name of the object

Name of the group of people who made the object, country where the group lives, and when the object was made

What the object is made of

Name of person or place that owns the object

### **Whistle**

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**Made by the Songye peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the twentieth century**

**Made of wood**

*LACMA, gift of Dr. Matthew McKeever; AC 1998.171.1*

Code that the museum gives the object to keep track of it

## **HOW TO read a label**

*Please write or e-mail us with your thoughts and ideas:*

The Boone Children's Gallery  
Education Department  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
5905 Wilshire Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90036  
[children@lacma.org](mailto:children@lacma.org)

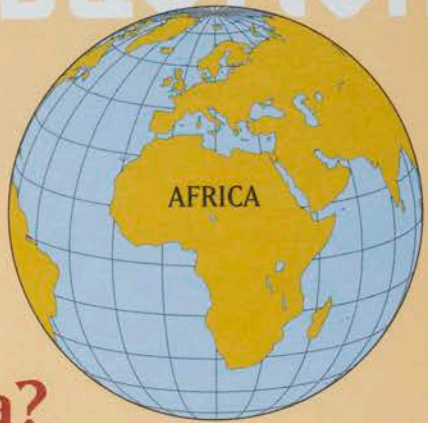


For information about upcoming events in the Boone Children's Gallery, please call the gallery information line at:

**323-857-4718**

*Thank you for joining us in this celebration of African art, music, and culture!*

# INTRODUCTION



## Where is Africa?



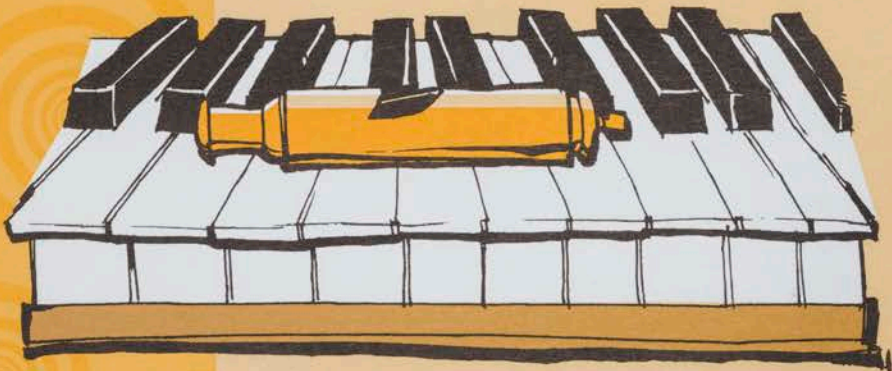
## What are musical instruments?

Musical instruments are objects that are used to make enjoyable sounds. Musical instruments come in all sizes: They can be large, like a piano, or as small as a whistle. Musical instruments can be found all around you. You can even use your own body as a musical instrument! Clapping your hands is one of the oldest musical sounds. What other musical sounds can you make with your hands and feet?



## What kinds of musical instruments are found in Africa?

Every type of instrument is found in Africa. These include skins (drums), strings, winds, and a special category that contains all the instruments that are **not** drums, strings, and winds. We call this category "everything else."







## Why do people in Africa make musical instruments?

People make musical instruments so they can play music for celebrations, ceremonies, funerals, weddings, and just for fun. These instruments are also used to talk to people far away, and to send messages to ancestors, gods, goddesses, and spirits. Some of the musical instruments in this exhibition belonged to very important people and were rarely played.



## What are African musical instruments made of?

African musicians use anything and everything to make instruments. Usually they use things that they can easily find around them. Many instruments, for example, are made of wood. An artist carves patterns, faces, and animals into the wood. They also use brightly colored paint for decoration. Metal, animal skins and bones, wire, cloth, and hair are sometimes added to make the instruments ready for playing. Can you find all of these materials on the instruments in the gallery? What materials can you find in your home and neighborhood to make musical instruments?

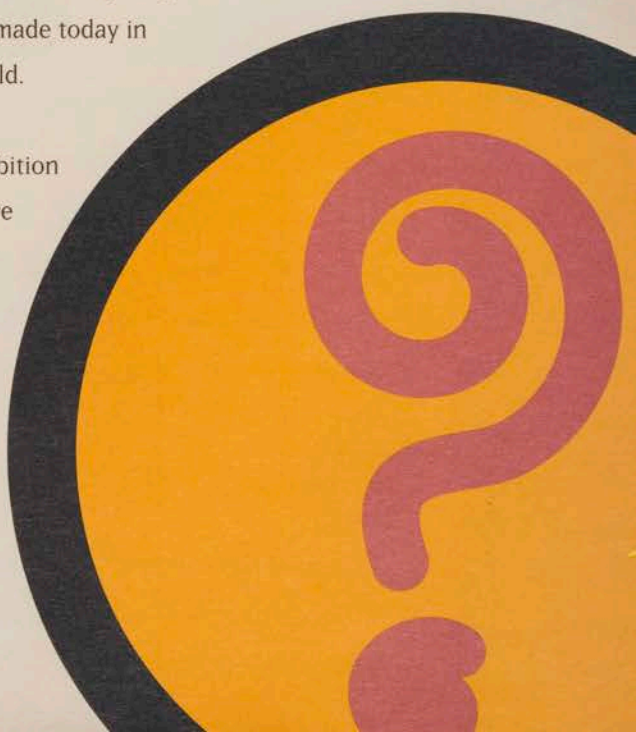


## How old are the musical instruments in this exhibition?

Some of the instruments in the exhibition are 3000 years old! These types of instruments are still made today in Africa and in places all over the world.

The musical instruments in this exhibition make wonderful sounds, and they are beautiful art objects as well. The carvings on the instruments tell us many things about how they sound and how they were used.

*Let's take a closer look:*



# SKINS

There are many different kinds of drums, but they all work the same way. The inside of a drum is hollow. A thin sheet of animal skin, cloth, or plant fiber is stretched over one or both of the ends. The drummer uses hands or sticks to hit the stretched skin on the end of the drum in order to make sounds.

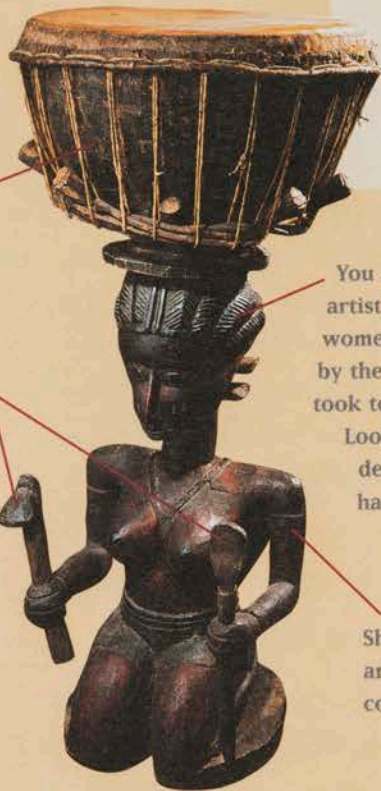
## Drum

Made by the Baga peoples of Guinea during the twentieth century  
Made of wood, hide, and pigment  
UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, gift of Helen and Dr. Robert Kuhn, X86.1911  
Photograph by Don Cole

The kneeling woman carved on the base of this drum looks like she is balancing a basket on her head.

She sits with her back straight and holds a cooking spoon and hoe in her hands. She is powerful.

The drummer could sit on the ground or on a stool to play the basket-shaped drum.



You can tell that the artist thought that women were important by the amount of work it took to make the carving.

Look at how much detail is in her hairstyle.

She wears beautiful armbands and is colored red.



Why do you think the artist carved a woman on the bottom of this drum?

The woman is carved on this drum because it is a special drum that the women of the Baga peoples play. The woman on the drum could be one of these Baga women or a special ancestor.



When do you think it was played?

The Baga women played this drum at their ceremonies. The music it made let everyone, including ancestors, gods, goddesses, spirits, and other people, know what was happening.



## Drum

Made by the Asante artist  
Nana Osei Bonsu in Ghana  
in the early 1930s  
Made of wood, hide, and pigment  
UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural  
History; gift of Donald Suggs;  
X78.136  
Photograph by Don Cole

The Royal British  
arms symbolize the  
British government  
that ruled over the  
Asante peoples in  
Ghana until 1957.

The man on the horse  
was carved beside a  
plaque that is now  
missing. The name  
of the musical band  
that played this drum  
would have been on  
the plaque.

The two crossed  
crocodiles form a  
symbol that means,  
"Each head wants the  
food to pass down his  
own throat." Though  
they share the same  
stomach, each one  
wants to enjoy  
tasting food.

The bird and the  
snake show that  
wonderful things  
can happen if you  
are patient. The  
snake was able to  
catch the bird for  
food because the  
snake was patient  
and very still.

The elephant is one  
of the most powerful  
animals in Africa and  
is used as a symbol of  
power and respect.

This drum is covered with colorful  
carvings of animals and symbols of  
royalty. The animals on the drum are  
pictures from Asante stories.



When do you think this drum was played?



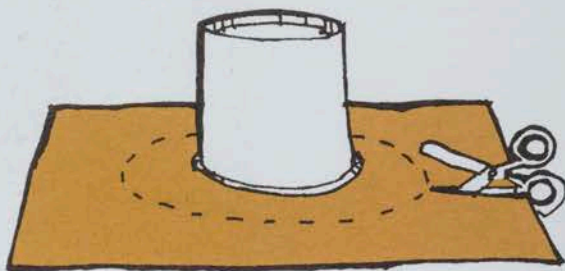
Whom do you think it was played for?

## ART ACTIVITY: Make a Drum



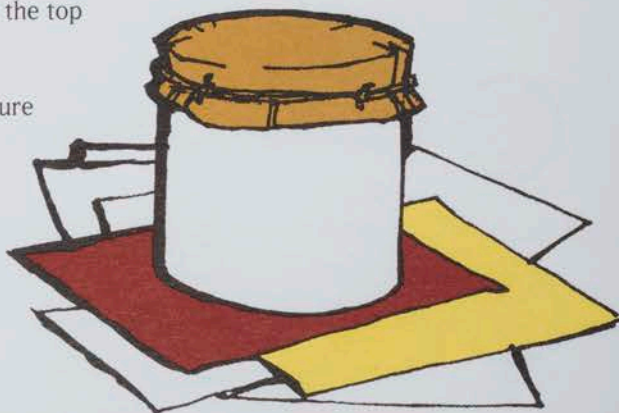
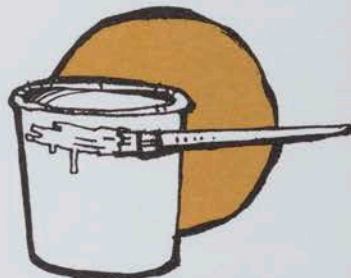
To make this drum you will need:

- 1 empty round ice-cream carton, coffee can, or bucket
- 1 yard of white butcher paper
- 1 yard of brown paper
- scissors
- 3 or 4 large rubber bands, cut and tied end to end
- white glue
- water
- 1 small bowl for mixing
- 1 paintbrush for glue



### INSTRUCTIONS:

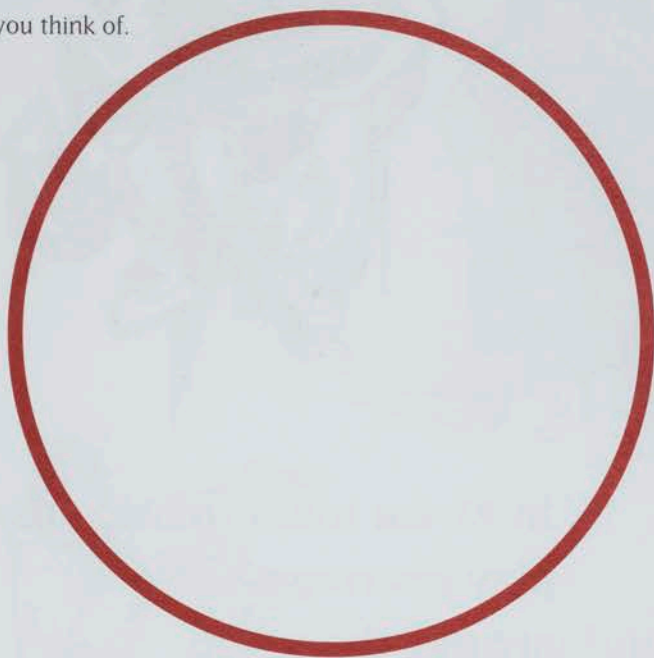
- \* Spread glue on the sides of the carton and cover it with white paper.
- \* Turn the carton upside down on the brown paper.
- \* Draw a circle on the brown paper with a diameter about 4 inches larger than the carton.
- \* Cut out the circle.
- \* Spread about 2 inches of glue around the outside of the open end of your carton.
- \* Cover the open end with the brown paper and tightly press it down over the glue.
- \* Stretch the rubber bands over the sides to keep the brown paper on the carton.
- \* In the bowl, mix two parts glue and one part water.
- \* Use your paintbrush to cover the brown paper with the glue mixture. Let the paper dry. The glue mixture will make the paper stronger.
- \* Use your fingers or pencils to hit the top of the drum for sound.
- \* Add more layers of the glue mixture if you want your drum to have a higher sound.





Close your eyes and listen to the sound of your drum while you play it.

Draw what the sound makes you think of.



Write about how the drum makes you feel.

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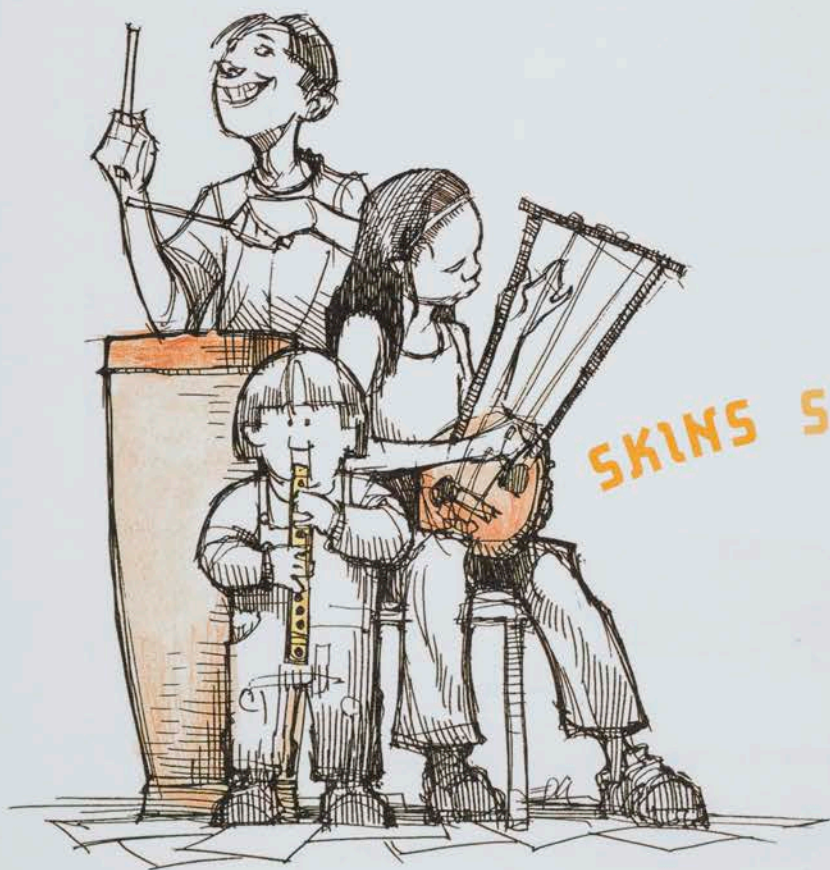
What can you draw on or attach to the sides of your drum to tell others about it?

Use crayons, colored pencils, markers, and colored paper to add decorations to your drum. Draw a pattern for your drum on the edge of this page. Cut out the strips and glue them around your drum.





In Africa today, musicians  
play instruments from  
around the world.



SKINS STRINGS





Can you find children playing instruments of the four different types—



WINDS EVERYTHING ELSE



# STRINGS

Stringed instruments make sounds when their strings vibrate.

To play a stringed instrument a musician uses fingers or a small object to pluck the strings. A long or loose string will vibrate slowly and produce a low sound. A short or tight string will vibrate quickly and produce a high sound.

The neck of this harp is carved in the shape of a woman. Some people think that this woman is Queen Nenzima. She was an important person who helped African kings make decisions for over fifty years!

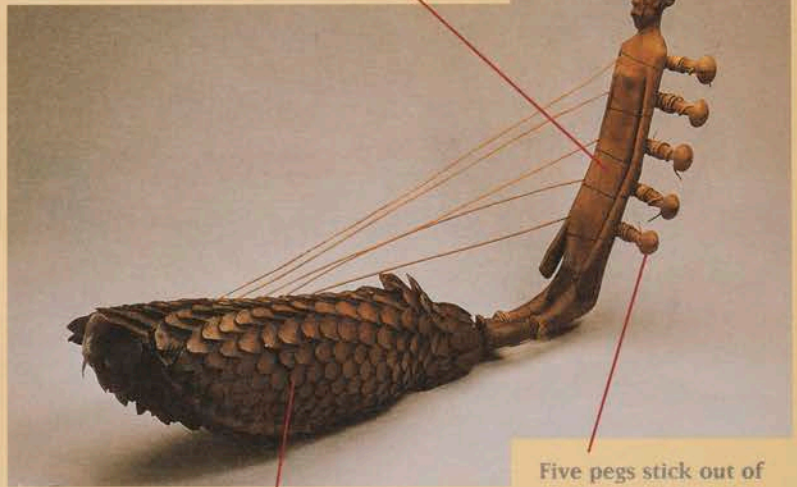
## Harp

Made by the Mangbetu peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the twentieth century

Made of wood, scaly anteater hide, and gut

American Museum of Natural History, 90.1/3969

Photograph by Lynton Gardiner



The base of the harp is very unusual. It is made from the body of a scaly anteater called a pangolin. Pangolins are rare animals that have hard scales to protect them from harm.

Five pegs stick out of the neck of the harp. The harp strings are wrapped around these pegs and then stretched to the base of the harp.



Photograph by Elisabeth L. Cameron.

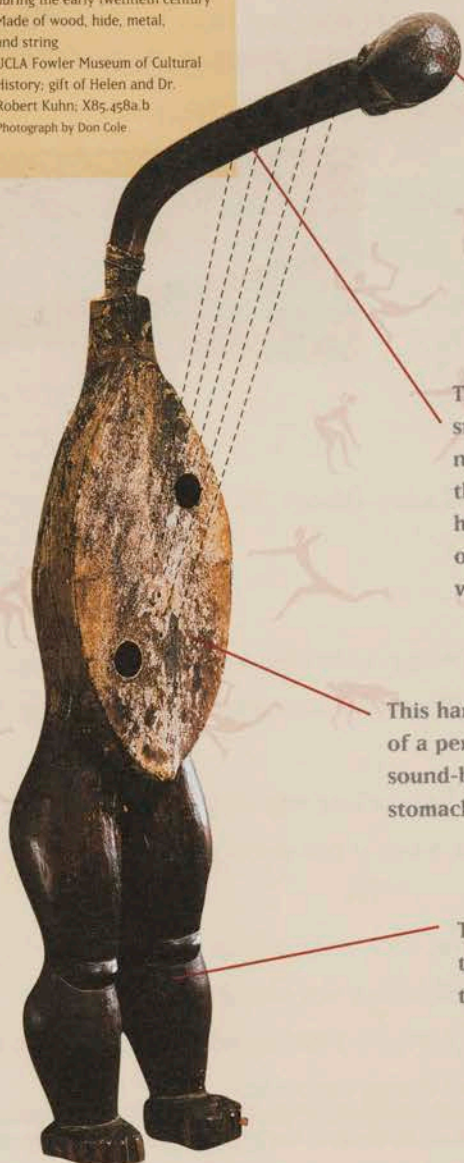
Because the harp is made of special materials, it belonged to the royal court and was not played often.

**The pangolin**  
*now an endangered species*



## Harp (called a *sati*)

Made by the Ngbaka peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the early twentieth century  
Made of wood, hide, metal, and string  
UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History; gift of Helen and Dr. Robert Kuhn; X85.458a.b  
Photograph by Don Cole



The head is carved on the end of the neck.

The harp strings would have been stretched from the body to the neck of the harp. The artist carved the harp's neck to look like a long human neck. You can see the holes on the neck for the pegs that would hold the strings.

This harp is in the shape of a person. Its hollow sound-box is where a stomach would be.

The base is carved to look like two thick legs.



Why do you think the artist carved the harp in the shape of a person?



Do you think that the sound of the harp is related to the shape it is carved in? What is the connection?

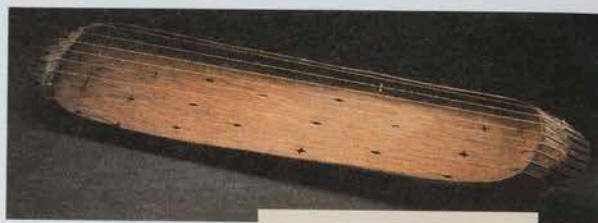
## ART ACTIVITY: Make a Zither



A zither is a stringed instrument that does not have a neck like a harp does. Instead, the strings are stretched over a flat board and attached at the top and bottom

*To make this zither you will need:*

- 1 empty tissue box
- 2 feet of white butcher paper
- scissors
- tape
- 3 or 4 large rubber bands
- 1 narrow piece of thin cardboard (about 1" x 3")

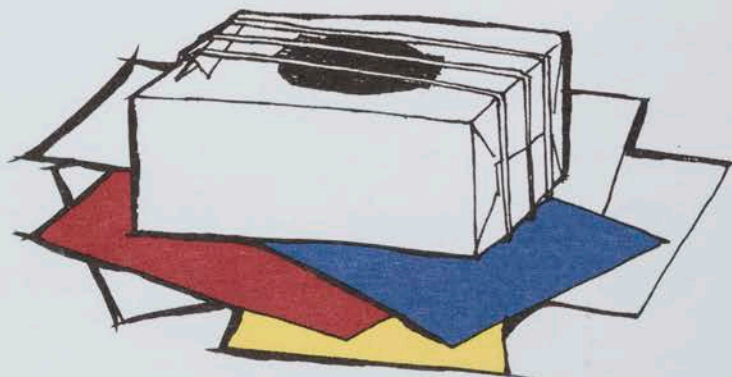


### Zither

Made by the Marundi peoples of Burundi during the twentieth century  
Made of wood and fiber  
UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History; gift of Helen and Dr. Robert Kuhn; X86.1932  
Photograph by Don Cole

### INSTRUCTIONS:

- \* Use your scissors and tape to wrap your box like a gift. Remember to leave the hole on top of the box uncovered. (If your box has a piece of plastic around the opening, tear it off.)
- \* Fold the piece of cardboard in half the long way. (Folded it should be  $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 3")
- \* Place the folded cardboard like a tent at one end of the opening. Tape it firmly in this position.
- \* Decorate your box with patterns, color, and drawings.
- \* Stretch the rubber bands around the box and over the cardboard.
- \* Pluck the rubber bands over the holes to make sound. Pushing down on the rubber bands with your other hand will change the sound.
- \* Experiment with different sizes of boxes and widths of rubber bands to make different sounds.





What does the sound of your zither make you think of? What person or thing would you choose to put on your zither? Draw pictures of these things in the box below.



I drew these pictures for my zither because

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# WINDS

Wind instruments need human breath to create sound. The instruments in this section include ivory trumpets, whistles, and flutes. Because wind instruments can be heard for a longer distance than a human voice, they are used to communicate with people far away. They are also used for hunting, healing, and dancing.

The trumpet still looks like a tusk, but the ivory carver drilled a hole in the side for the musician to blow into.

Another hole was made in the end of the trumpet. When the musician covers this hole with his thumb, the trumpet plays a higher note.

## Trumpet (called an *oliphant*)

Made in Côte d'Ivoire or Liberia during the twentieth century  
Made of ivory  
UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History; gift of Helen and Dr. Robert Kuhn; X86.1872  
Photograph by Don Cole

Look at the face carved on the tip of the trumpet. What do you think the trumpet was used for? When do you think this trumpet was used?



Ivory trumpets are also called oliphants, an old-fashioned word for elephant. They are made from elephant tusks, and when they are blown they sound like an elephant trumpeting.



What does the use of the elephant tusk tell you about the instrument? What does the elephant symbolize?



What animal would you choose to be a symbol of yourself? Why?



This whistle was used in a ceremony to heal a person with a physical or mental problem.



### Whistle

Made by the Kongo peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the early twentieth century  
Made of wood, antelope horn, and glass beads  
Indiana University Art Museum, 76.136.1  
Photograph by Michael Cavanagh, Kevin Montague

The sculpture is a lid on the end of the whistle. It represents a problem that needs to be solved. The musician removes the sculpture to play the whistle.

The whistle is made from an antelope horn.



Why do you think the artist carved the end of the whistle in the shape of a mother and child?



Whom do you think this whistle was played for?

Some whistles with an animal carved on the end are used to lure an animal to catch for food.



If you made a whistle to bring something closer to you, what would it be?



What would you want your whistle to sound like?

## ART ACTIVITY: Make a Wind Instrument



*To make this instrument you will need:*

- 2 empty clean bottles
- tissue paper
- 1 small bowl for mixing
- scissors
- 1 paintbrush about 1" wide for glue
- water
- glue
- markers or crayons

### INSTRUCTIONS:

- \* Mix two parts glue and one part water in the bowl.
- \* Cut tissue into short strips.
- \* Use your paintbrush and a small amount of your glue mixture to attach the strips to the bottles.
- \* Cover the bottles with strips the way you like.  
Add designs with markers or crayons.  
Leave the openings of the bottles uncovered.
- \* Use your paintbrush to cover the tissue paper with the glue mixture to make the surface smooth. Let it dry.
- \* Blow across the opening of one bottle until you hear a sound.
- \* Pour water into the other bottle to fill it about halfway. Blow across the opening until you hear a sound.
- \* Experiment with making different sounds by changing the amounts of water in the bottles.





Draw an animal, person, or pattern below that you think should be on your instrument.



When would you play your instrument? Who would you play it for?

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What or who is in your picture? Why did you choose this picture for your instrument?

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# EVERYTHING ELSE

Some of the most important musical instruments in Africa do not make sounds with skins, strings, or wind. These instruments include rattles, gongs, bells, and one of the most popular musical instruments, the thumb piano.

## Thumb piano

Made by the Mangbetu peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the twentieth century. Made of wood, bamboo, and fiber. Lent by the Schorr Family Collection.

This thumb piano was carved to represent a woman. It has a hollow body covered by six metal strips.

To play the thumb piano the ends of the strips are quickly pushed down and released.



Why do you think the artist carved the woman with her arms raised? What do you think she is doing?



## Bell (*omo*)

Made by the Yoruba peoples  
in the Ife kingdom of Nigeria  
during the eighteenth or  
nineteenth century  
Made of bronze  
W. and U. Horstmann  
Collection

The face markings  
and hairstyle are  
symbols of royalty.

The design on  
this pendant may  
represent the  
winding path that  
symbolizes life  
and death.



Bells with faces belong to important chiefs.  
Each chief makes a bell for the person who  
will become the chief after him.

The chief wears the bell on a sash over his  
right shoulder that hangs by his side. When  
he walks, the sound of the bell tells others  
that he is coming.



What does your hairstyle tell others  
about you?



Do you wear any symbols that tell people  
something about you?

## ART ACTIVITY: Make a Thumb Piano

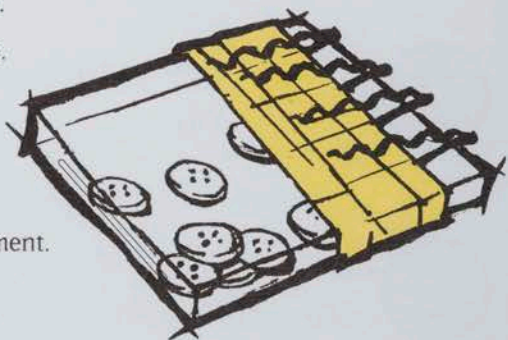


To make this instrument you will need:

- 1 small paper or plastic floppy-disk holder or a small tissue box
- 4 or 5 bobby pins
- clear tape
- colored tape
- scissors
- paint and inexpensive brushes
- a small handful of buttons, uncooked beans, or macaroni

### INSTRUCTIONS:

- \* If you are using a floppy-disk holder, cut a narrow opening about 2"-3" long in the side of your holder. Make sure the opening is smaller than the buttons, beans, or macaroni that will go inside.
- \* Put the beans, macaroni, or buttons inside the holder or box.
- \* If you are using a small tissue box, tape a piece of paper over the opening.
- \* Take a bobby pin and open it in the shape of the letter V.
- \* Open your other bobby pins to different angles, some wider and some narrower.
- \* Place your bobby pins in a row with the flat sides against the top of your box. The V of the bobby pins should be at the edge of the end of the box. Leave about 1/2" between each bobby pin.
- \* Tape the flat sides of the bobby pins securely onto the box.
- \* Use your colored tape to cover the clear tape in long even strips.
- \* Hold the box with both hands so that the end with the bobby pins is furthest away from you.
- \* Use your thumbs to quickly press down on the ends of the bobby pins until you get a sound. Shake your instrument to make it rattle.
- \* Listen to the sound that your thumb piano makes. Think about what the sound reminds you of. Use your paint to decorate your instrument.





Can you invent your own musical instrument? What materials would you use?

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Listen to the sound of your instrument. Make a pattern or draw pictures of animals, people, or objects that best describe the sound it makes.



This exhibition is part of "The Heritage of African Music," a collaborative effort with the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History and the California African-American Museum, bringing a comprehensive presentation of the music of Africa and the African diaspora to the Los Angeles community. It was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art as part of its *Arts Education Experiences at LACMA* and was supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, dedicated to expanding American understanding of history and culture. Additional funding was provided by The Ralphs/Food 4 Less Foundation. Gallery programs were sponsored by Target.

Exhibitions in the Boone Children's Gallery are made possible in part by the MaryLou and George Boone Children's Gallery Endowment Fund.

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Written by Bridget Cooks  
Brochure designed by Agnes Sixty  
Illustrations by Ed Li

# FURTHER INFORMATION

## Web Sites

**The Kennedy Center:  
African Odyssey Interactive**  
<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/aoi/resources/vpa.html>

Visit this site to learn more about Africa from museum exhibitions and African art collections around the world. Use the music link to learn more about African dance and music performances.

**African Music Encyclopedia:  
Music from Africa and  
the Diaspora**

<http://africanmusic.org>  
Search by country or by name of musical group to find information on African music today. Read a glossary of African styles of music and see musicians play African musical instruments.

**The Living Africa**

<http://hyperion.advanced.org/16645/contents.html>

Learn facts about the people, the land, and the history of Africa. The site was compiled by students and contains photographs, games, and quizzes about Africa.

**K-12 Africa Guide**

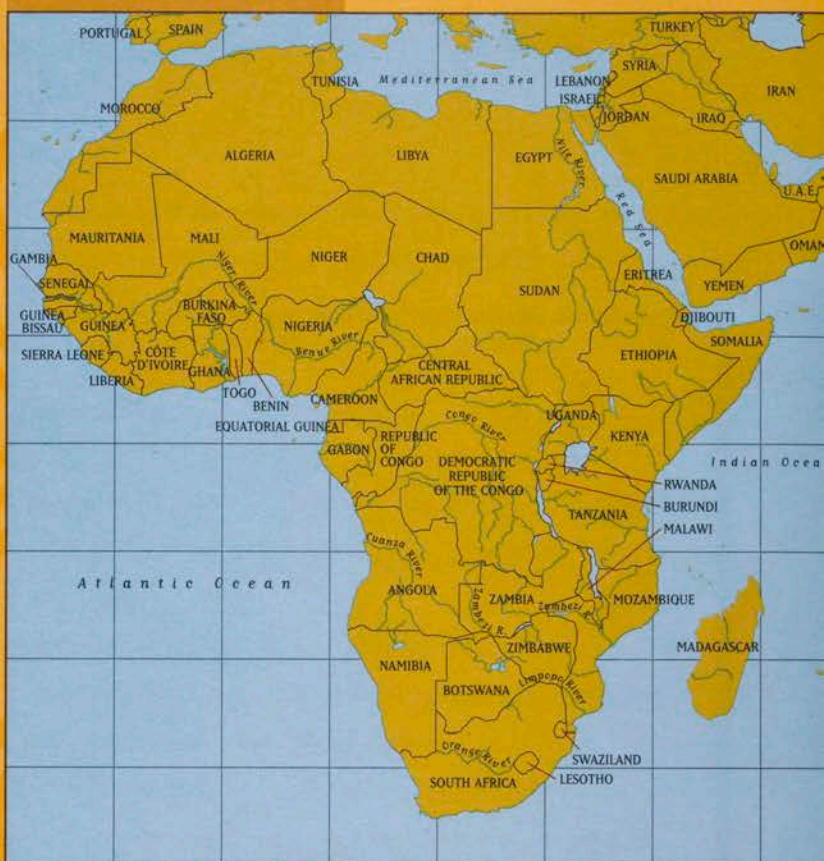
[http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African\\_Studies/Home\\_Page/AFR\\_GIDE.html](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Home_Page/AFR_GIDE.html)

This site provides detailed information about the many countries of Africa. It also lists several links to African resources on the Internet for students and teachers.

**Africa Online**

<http://www.africaonline.com>

Find out what is going on in the news of Africa today! Visit the Music and Kids Only links to learn more about Africa, its history, and its peoples. Play trivia games and submit your artwork to be exhibited in the African Art Gallery.



## Recommended Listening

- Izibani Zomgqashivo.**  
Mahotella Queens. Shanachie Records Corp., 1989.
- Gift of the Tortoise: A Musical Journey Through Southern Africa.** Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Music for Little People, 1994.
- Zimbabwe: The Soul of Mbira.** Nonesuch Records, 1973 and 1995.
- Drum Damba: Music of the Damba Festival of the Dagbamba People (Ghana).** Abubakari Lunna. White Cliffs Media, 1996.
- Kora Music from Gambia: Yan Kuba.** Yan Kuba Saho. Music of the World, 1998.

## Books

- Musical Instruments.** (New York: Scholastic, 1994).
- Danes, Emma. *The Osborne First Book of Music* (London: Usborne Publishing, 1993).
- Barlow, Sean. *Afropop: An Illustrated Guide to Contemporary African Music.* (New York: Book Sales, 1995).
- Arnott, Kathleen. *African Myths and Legends.* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- Ewens, Graeme. *Africa O-Ye!: A Celebration of African Music.* (New York: Da Capo, 1992).