



INSTRUMENT EXPLORATION: Mallet Instruments

Age Range: Elementary

Learning Objective: Students will learn about four mallet instruments.

Note to Teacher: This lesson features orchestral mallet instruments. Adapt and modify the lesson to demonstrate on Orff instruments if you have access. If not, use our mallet instrument visuals to show a picture of each instrument.

ENGAGE students

SAY. "Today we will learn about four different kinds of mallet instruments. Let's practice saying their names together." (*Familiarize students with the following words: glockenspiel, xylophone, vibraphone, and marimba.*)

EXPLORE sounds

While explaining each instrument, show students the image of that instrument or demonstrate on classroom instruments if available.

DEFINE. "Mallet instruments are a part of the percussion family. First, let's learn about the glockenspiel. The glockenspiel is also known as the 'bells.' It has thin metal bars that are different lengths. Smaller bars make higher sounds, and longer bars make lower sounds. The bars on top are organized like the black keys on a piano."

LISTEN. [Listen to the glockenspiel](#) from Mozart's opera, *The Magic Flute*. (1 min.)

DEFINE. "Xylophones have bars made of wood. Like the glockenspiel, the notes get higher as the bars get smaller. There are many different kinds of xylophones, and orchestral xylophones are different than the xylophones you might see in a music classroom."

LISTEN. [Listen to the xylophone](#) in "Fossils" from *Carnival of the Animals*. (2 min.)

DEFINE. "The vibraphone has bars made of metal. There are resonators, or tubes, underneath each bar and inside each tube is a little valve that rotates when you flip on a switch to turn the motor on. It creates a very special effect. The vibraphone also has a pedal that helps the notes ring for a very long time."

LISTEN. [Listen to the vibraphone](#) in this solo by Gary Burton. (4 min.)

DEFINE. "Like the xylophone, the bars on the marimba are made of wood. The main difference between the xylophone and the marimba is that the marimba is much bigger. Since the marimba is bigger, it plays lower sounds."

LISTEN. [Listen to the marimba](#) in *Dream of the Cherry Blossoms*, by Keiko Abe. (5 min.)



EXTEND learning

Choose one or both of the following activities to extend learning.

- PLAY. If you have access to mallet instruments, play a game of **"Follow the Feet!"** Choose one student to be leader. Other students will have mallets and instruments. The leader pretends to step on a giant, imaginary mallet instrument while others follow the leader's foot movements with their mallets. If the leader runs from left to right, others might quickly play from low to high. If the leader jumps up and down, others might bounce mallets on repeated notes. If the leader suddenly stops, students stop. If you have a limited number of instruments/mallets, students can alternate between real instruments and playing "air xylophone."
- MOVE. Listen to the first two minutes of [Clockwise in Motion](#). Ask students to respond to the dynamic changes. When the music gets softer, they can show quiet dynamics with hands close together and expand their hands wider apart as the music gets louder.