

MIDWEST
CENTER
FOR THE
ARTS

DRUM TAO



STUDY GUIDE

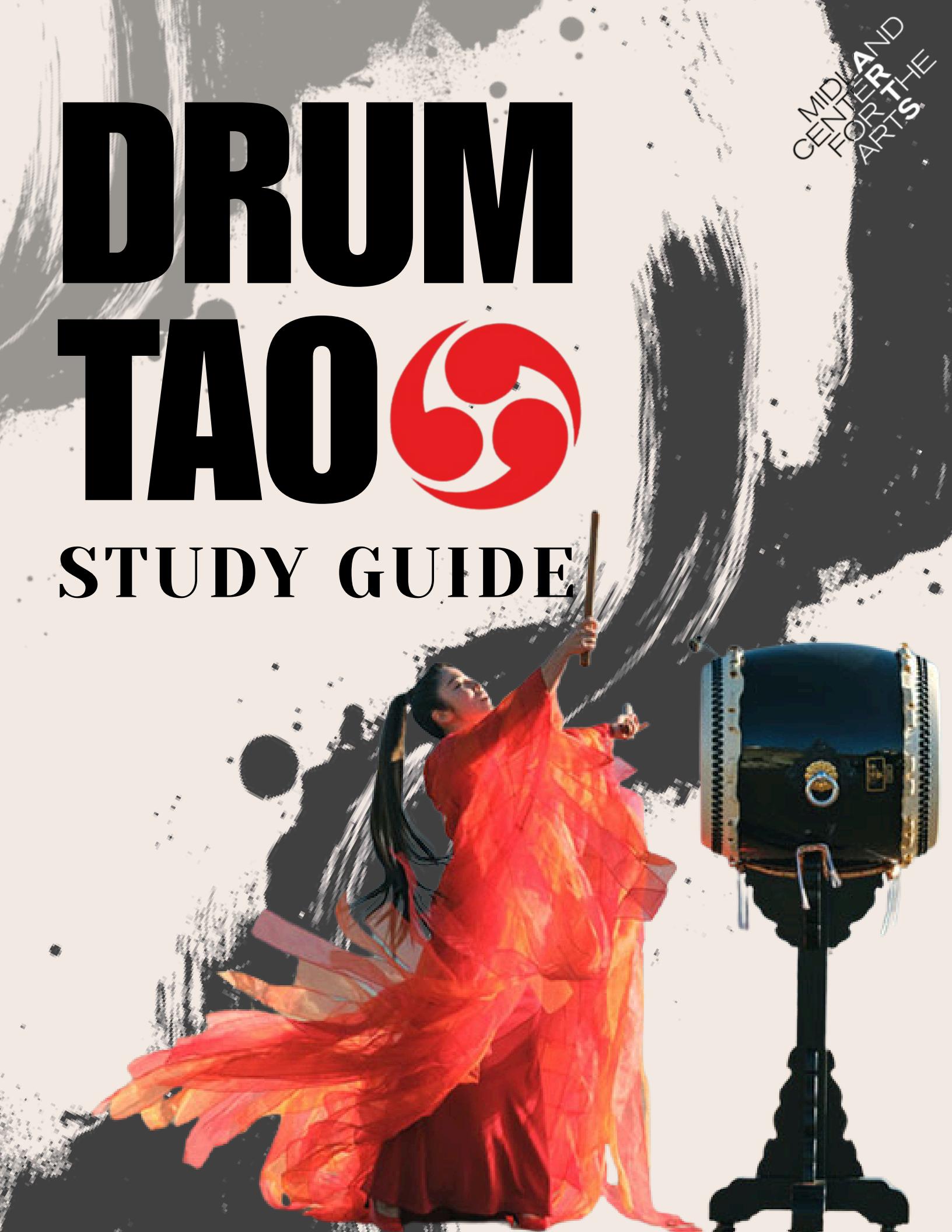


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DRUM TAO

Established in 1993, DRUM TAO has been seen 10 million spectators from all over the world.

This phenomenal troupe from Oita, Japan uses vibrant costumes, martial arts, dance, and a variety of traditional Japanese instruments like flutes, harps, and taiko drums to bring an electrifying performance wherever they go!

In the center of their performances are the “Wadaiko-drums” that they use to shake the very foundation of the stage.

Though their music and movement find deep roots in Japanese practices, there are also Korean, Maori, Indonesian, and even reggae influences that can be found.



TAO Cultural Foundation

DRUM TAO has founded the TAO Cultural Foundation, which was formed with three major goals:



The Founding of Japan's first Taiko Academy

Creating an environment where students can learn Japanese drumming as well as traditional instruments such as shinobue, shamisen, and koto, while also gaining knowledge in dance and performance instruction, music, composition, and production. Established in the Kuju Plateau, TAO's home base.

Management of an art village with an outdoor theater

Located in the Aso Kuju National Park, the TAO Nature Theater was established in August 2020 includes an outdoor stage; the “TAO HOUSE” artist museum; the “LIVE HALL” video room; and a cafe.

Contributing to the promotion of local tourism and culture

Utilizing the cultural, artistic power, and popularity of DRUM TAO, the Foundation works with the city of Taketa to bring more people to the region. They work to attract artists and creators from all over the world to contribute to the regional revitalization project. They hope to bring in more tourists to not only bring more people, but to showcase the rich culture of the region to local students.



TAO-no-Oka

The "Skyward Stage" is the home of DRUM TAO. Sitting at an elevation of 1,036 meters (3399 feet), TAO-no-Oka overlooks the grasslands and mountains of Aso.

Performances at the Skyward Stage highlight the linkage between traditional Japanese culture and the natural world.

Shows are done from March until November, where visitors can witness a once-in-a-lifetime experience as the sky, the earth, and sound become one.



TAOの丘
TAO NATURE THEATER
Elevation 1,036m



Regions of Japan

Japan is composed of 4 major islands, which are then divided into 8 regions. The regions have environmental, cultural, and dialect variations.

These regions are then broken further into 47 prefectures. Each prefecture has its own governor and unicameral assembly.



Chūgoku

Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima

Kansai

Mie
Shiga
Kyoto
Osaka
Hyogo
Nara
Wakayama

Kyūshū

Fukuoka
Miyazaki
Nagasaki
Kumamoto
Saga
Oita

Okinawa

Okinawa

Chūbu

Niigata
Toyama
Ishikawa
Fukui
Yamanashi
Nagano
Gifu
Shizuoka
Aichi

Shikoku

Tokushima
Kagawa
Ehime
Kochi

Honshū

(The big island)

Hokkaidō

Hokkaidō

Tōhoku

Aomori
Iwate
Miyagi
Akita
Yamagata
Fukushima

Kantō

Ibaraki
Tochigi
Gunma
Saitama
Chiba
Tokyo
Kanagawa



Aso Kujū National Park

DRUM TAO's nature theater is situated in the Aso Kuju National Park. Situated in the heart of the island of Kyushu.

It is named after Mount Aso, the largest active volcano in Japan. Along with Mount Aso, Mount Kuju is the highest mountain on the island, at 5,876 feet.

Just down the mountain from the Sky Theater is the Kuju Flower Park, where there are 49 acres of land with more than 500 different varieties of plants and flowers that bloom for most of the year.

The geothermal heat from Mount Aso creates natural hot springs. Onsen, traditional bathing facilities that are made from the hot springs that also have inns around them, can be found around the island. Natural spring water can also be collected from the Shirakawa River, the same water the irrigates the rice and vegetable farms in Kumamoto.

Hiking, biking, horseback riding, and camping are also popular activities to participate in at the park.

The island of Kyushu, the southwesternmost of Japan's main island, is known for its active volcanoes, beaches, and natural hot springs.



Mount Aso



Kuju Flower Park



Hot springs



Taiko

Taiko refers to a broad range of Japanese percussion instruments, but the word can also refer to the performance of music, dance, and athletics. Another name for these drums is **wadaiko**.

Taiko drums differ based on how they are constructed or the context in which they are used.

There are two main kinds of taiko drums: **byō-uchi-daiko** and **shime-daiko**.

Taiko are made from a variety of woods, but the best one is from Japanese zelkova (**Keyaki**). They are also made from ash (**Tamo**) and kalopanax (**Sen**).

The sticks used for playing **taiko** are called **bachi**. They are made in various sizes and from different woods, like white oak, bamboo, and Japanese magnolia.

Byō-uchi-daiko



Bachi

Shime-daiko



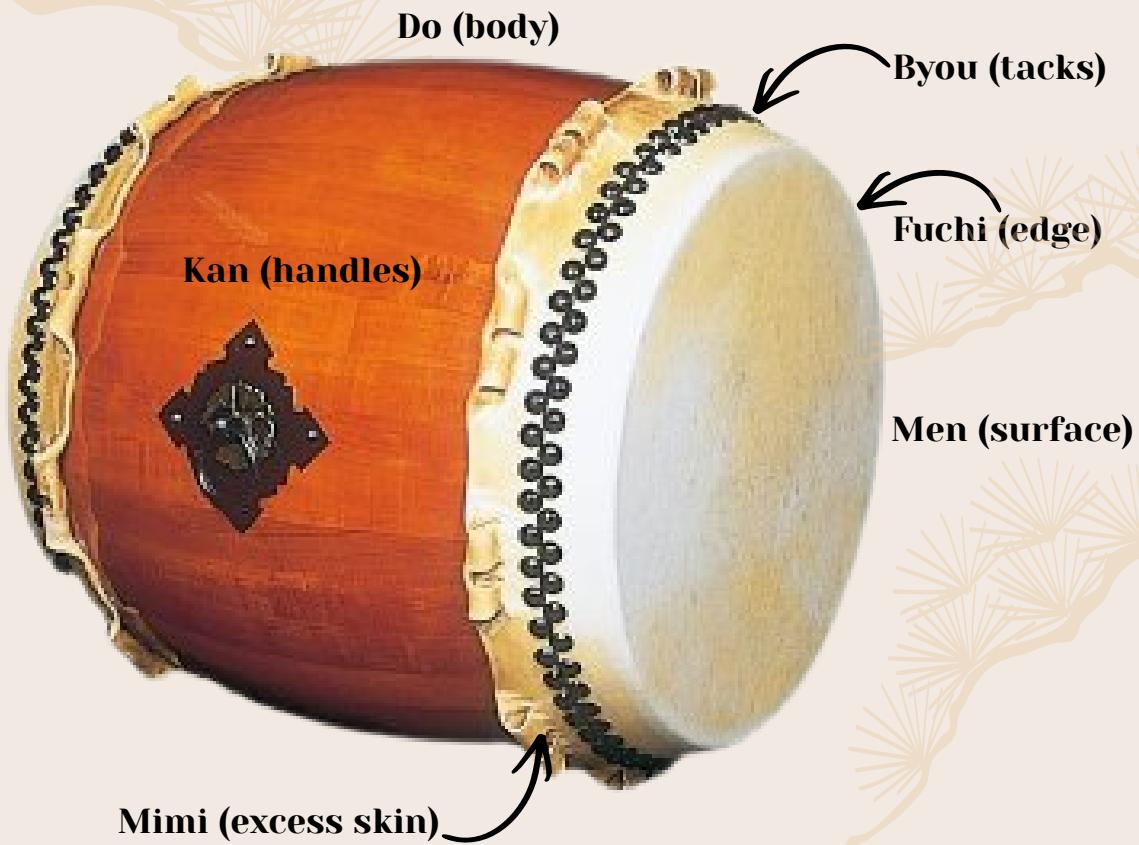
Byō-uchi-daiko

Byō-uchi-daiko is where the drumhead is nailed to the body. Historically made with a singular piece of wood, but some are made with staves.

The typical **byō-uchi-daiko** is the **nagadō-daiko**, and elongated drum the shape of a wine barrel.

They are available in a variety of sizes. The smallest one is the **ko-daiko**. Then there is the **chū-daiko**, a medium size that weighs about 27 kilograms (60 pounds). Finally, the **Ō-Daiki** refers to the largest drum for a given ensemble.

The other type of **byō-uchi-daiko** is called the **hira-daiko** and refers to any drum with a head diameter greater than the length of the body.



Shime-daiko

Shime-daiko is where the skin is placed over an iron or steel ring, which is tightened by a ropes. Unlike the **byō-uchi-daiko**, shime-daiko can be tuned by tightening the rope. Not every shime-daiko uses rope, some use a bolt or turnbuckle systems.



Nagauta shime-daiko have thinner heads than other kinds of shime-daiko.

Tsukeshime-daiko is a heavier type of shime-daiko. They are available in sizes 1-5, and names according to their number: **namitsuke** (1), **nichō-gakke** (2), **sachō-gakke** (3), **yonchō-gakke** (4), and **gochō-gakke** (5). The **namitsuke** has the thinnest skins and the shortest body height that increases towards the **gochō-gakke**.

Uchiwa-daiko is a type of racket-shaped Japanese drum. It is the only Japanese traditional drum without a sound box and only one skin. It is played with a drumstick while hanging it with the other hand.



Okedō-daiko or simply **okedō**, are a type of shime-daiko that are stave-constructed using narrower strips of wood, and have a tube-shaped frame. Okedō can be played using the same drumsticks (bachi) as shime-daiko, but can also be hand-played.



Making a Taiko

Taiko construction has several stages, including the making and shaping of the drum body (or shell), preparing the drum skin, and tuning the skin to the drumhead. Variations in the construction process occur depending on the type of drum or the techniques used by different companies. This process can take years to make a singular drum.

To make a *byō-uchi-daiko*, the trunk of a Japanese zelkova tree is dried out over years to prevent splitting. A master carpenter then carves out the rough shape of the drum with a chisel. Some companies put the drumheads in a smoke-filled warehouse to speed up the drying process. After drying, the inside of the drum is worked with a chisel and sanded down. Then the handles of the drum are placed on. For smaller drums, they are used to carry them, but on larger drums they are ornamental.

The skins, or heads, of taiko are generally made from cowhide aged about three or four years. The thinner skins are used for smaller taiko while thicker ones are used for the larger drums. Before the skin is fitted onto the drum, the hair is removed from the hide by soaking it in a river or stream for about a month, preferably in the winter months as the colder temperatures remove the hair better.



In order to properly stretch the skin over the drum, the skin is fastened down using hydraulic jacks, rope, or cords to stretch the skin incrementally to precisely apply tension across the drumhead. Particularly large drumheads sometimes require workers, clad in stockings, to hop around rhythmically atop it.

After the skin has dried, tacks (*byō*) are added to the *byō-uchi-daiko* to secure the skin to the body, with some requiring about 300 *byō* on each side. The excess skin can be cut off or kept.

For a *shime-daiko*, the skin is wrapped around and secured to a metal ring which is then fastened to the body with rope.

Taiko Playing Styles

Tachinuchi

hitting while standing

Yokomenuchi

hitting horizontally

Nanamenuchi

hitting at a diagonal style

Suwariuchi

hitting while in a sitting position

Katsugi okedo

strap held okedo daiko

Kumi Daiko

two meanings: ensemble drumming
or one person playing many drums



Japanese Instruments

Shakuhachi



a Japanese longitudinal, end-blown flute made of bamboo. It is held vertically instead of horizontally. Named after its length of one shaku and eight (hachi) sun. Was used in ensembles but was phased out because it could not be heard over the other instruments.

a Japanese transverse flute or *fue* that has a high-pitched sound. Named after the bamboo called *shinodake*. The instrument was popular among the ordinary people, especially compared to the *ryuteki*, which was used by nobility.

Koto



a Japanese plucked half-tube zither and national instrument of Japan. The most common type has 13 strings strung over movable bridges used for tuning. The strings are generally plucked using three fingerpicks, worn on the first three fingers of the right hand.

a three-stringed traditional Japanese instrument, played with a plectrum called a *bachi*. There are three types depending on the size of their neck and the body. Once considered an instrument of the lower class, it would eventually become part of Japanese theater.



Gong

a percussion instrument originating from southeast Asia and used widely in Southeast Asia and East Asia. Made of a circular, flat piece of metal that makes a crashing noise when struck with a mallet.

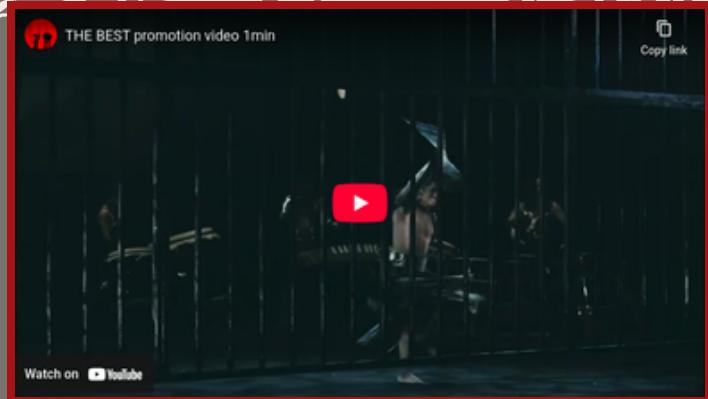
Shinobue



Shamisen



Videos



Den-Den Daiko

Supplies per person

- Two small paper or foam plates
- 2 pieces of ribbon (about 10 cm in length)
- Beads (4-8)
- Wooden dowel
- Hot glue gun and glue
- Stapler
- Markers for decoration



1. **Decorate the bottom of the plates (these will be the outside of the drum)**
2. **Tie one bead to the ends of each ribbon and place the other beads so that they are flush with the one tied to the end, making sure that each ribbon has the same number of beads**
3. **Hot glue the wooden dowel to the inside of one of the plates**
4. **Hot glue the ends of the ribbon that do not have the beads to the inside of the plate so that they are across from each other and perpendicular to the dowel**
5. **Staple the other plate to the first plate around the edge so that the bottoms of both plates are facing outwards.**
6. **Hot glue the dowel to the other plate, where you can**
7. **Once the plates are dry and stable, you are ready to drum! Spin the drum in your hands and follow the beat!**



Shaku

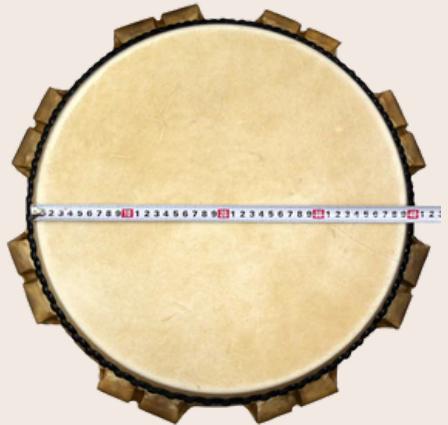
Shaku (Japanese foot) is a Japanese unit of length originally based upon the distance measured by a human hand from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the forefinger or the distance between the nodes of bamboo.

A **shaku** today is about 30.3 cm and can be further divided into **sun** (~3.03 cm). There are 10 **sun** in every 1 **shaku**.

Shaku is still used today in traditional Japanese arts like carpentry, kimono construction, and instrument construction. The **shakuhachi** ("shaku" and "eight") derives its name from its length of one **shaku** and 8 **sun**.

Byō-uchi-daike are measured based on the diameter of their head while **shime-daike** are measured based on the thickness of their head and have the same diameter.

Shaku
(sha-ku)



Using multiplication and addition, figure out how many centimeters wide each of the drums listed below is. Remember, one **shaku** is about 30.3, and a **sun** is about 3.03.

Ko-daike **1 shaku** _____ cm

Nagadō-daike **1 shaku 5 sun** _____ cm

Chū- daiko **1 shaku 7 sun** _____ cm

Ō-Daiko **6 shaku** _____ cm

Shime-daike **9 sun** _____ cm

Shaku Key

Ko-daiko	1 shaku	30.3	cm
Nagadō-daiko	1 shaku 5 sun	45.45	cm
Chū- daiko	1 shaku 7 sun	51.51	cm
Ō-Daiko	6 shaku	181.8	cm
Shime-daiko	9 sun	27.27	cm

