

African Drumming – An Extended Introduction

Basics and further reading for both teachers and
non-music specialists.

Compiled by Richard McKerron with core content from Andy Gleadhill



At Drums for Schools Ltd we appreciate that even with full support and encouragement, some of you may wish to dig a little deeper very early on in order to feel confident about teaching a particular area. You may wish to read around the subject and choose for yourself which key areas to embellish further in your lessons but not be entirely sure what information should be classed as relevant. To this end, Richard McKerron has written this introductory article which utilises information from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Books 1 and 2, as well as more in depth information from further afield. This will give you a strong starting point to read on even further, or in isolation provide you with enough information to answer the trickier questions that may be put to you within a lesson. A series of videos has also been uploaded in support of the article which will help you develop the basics with confidence, and these are embedded in the PDF document as blue hyperlinks.



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General Introduction

Music is an important part of life in Africa and fulfils many roles. Music is used in religious rituals, at ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and the birth of a child, as well as an accompaniment to day-to-day activities. There is music for working in the fields, tending cattle and collecting water as well as vastly contrasting music used for anything from lullabies to war songs.

Everyone participates in music making and there is a wonderful saying that “In African music there is no audience, only participants”. There are also professional musicians and master drummers who are highly valued. The use of music gives a cultural perspective to every aspect of daily life in Africa.

The prolific use of drums in African music demonstrates the importance of rhythm as the main ingredient in music making. African drumming is a language that can send messages, tell stories and communicate emotions. Drums in Africa come in many shapes and sizes and have many different playing styles. The drum has a high cultural status in Africa and there are many rituals that surround making, teaching and playing drums. When we play the African Drums and rhythms we are immersing ourselves in thousands of years of cultural and social history and sharing the universal joy of music making.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1, Page 3-4

What Is Special About West African Drumming And Why Should You Do It?

From a Westerner's perspective, one of the most immediate attractions to Djembe Drumming is the idea that you can take a drum, hit it and make a sound without any limitations regarding the noise that you make. It is immediately accessible to most people on a very basic level, and the moment that somebody strikes a Djembe in a pleasing pattern is the moment that they wish to develop that idea into something that pleases them further. It is a very easy instrument to gain praise as a beginner, and an average skill level can be obtained reasonably quickly. It is quicker to learn and develop than traditional orchestra instruments, and its scope for compositional development is quite high in both traditional and fusion settings.



How Could You Introduce West African Drumming To Your School?

You can either go in big with a project like this, or you can go in small.

A smaller approach would be to acquire a set of five or so Djembe and create a drumming group for lunchtimes or after-school, or with a particular performance in mind. You could spend six weeks learning and practicing a particular rhythm or two and structure a performance following some traditional ideas. The drumming group could obtain ownership of the resources by decorating the drums with ribbon and such in order to identify with the group.

A larger approach would involve rolling out Djembe Drumming as a scheme of work within your establishment. A class set of Djembe and other instruments could be used to teach students about rhythm initially and then move on to other skills such as Call and Response, polyrhythm, cross-rhythms and structure. A lunchtime club that ran through the whole year could be established and the more enthusiastic students from each class could invest their time in larger performances. You may even prepare for each end of term performance and have students from across the years actively taking part and creating a positive atmosphere at the start of end of year assemblies and so forth.





What Could You Achieve?

In a day:

- Generate an interest in other ways of making music.
- Foster an interest in other cultures and histories.
- Identify particularly good rhythm students.

In a term:

- Teach and learn an entire rhythm.
- Layer more than one rhythm together to create a new texture.
- Create a set structure for a performance.
- Delegate a leader, practice leadership skills.
- Develop listening and improvisational skills.

In a year:

- Establish a regular club.
- Develop the identity of music within the school.
- Hold/take part in several performances.
- Compose own rhythms.
- Research subject matter in further detail as a project.

In three years:

- Create a mentor system that allows older students to teach newer members of the club.
- Hand over control of performances to the students.
- Perform in the community.
- Use the resources as part of transition days, utilising the young experts.



Benefits

Investing long-term in a set of Djembe and its use is worthwhile on many levels. Done properly it will benefit the students, the teachers delivering and teaching the content, and the establishment and community on a wider level.

- **Benefit to students**

Taking part in a collaborative Djembe circle and performances can increase a student's interpersonal skills; over time they will learn to adapt to the group and respond to the gaps in the performance as well as leaving space for others. Eye contact and non-verbal communication skills will increase effectively.

Intrapersonal skills can be improved, such as independence when soloing away from the main rhythm or holding a cross-rhythm. Rehearsing rhythms in their head at home can lead to positive reinforcement of skills in isolation, in turn leading to happier and less anxious 'down time'.

An evaluative feedback process can be encouraged, as the student hears the stimulus, responds in kind attaching a value to the process and the new skill they have developed. They then better organise the information in their heads through repeated sessions, leading to them identifying with the skill and the group as part of their own identity to be proud of, with a sense of belonging and community, as well as having a valuable skill that they can share with others.

There are also several positive character traits that are encouraged through this sort of activity, including a Love of Learning, Self-Control, Curiosity, Open-Mindedness, Creativity, Gratitude, Fairness, Leadership, Modesty, Appreciation of Beauty and Spirituality.

- **Benefit to teachers**

Teachers and session leaders will benefit in exactly the same ways as the students, but there are added bonuses from an academic leader perspective.



Group collaboration can be systematically encouraged and the playing field is levelled with every student on a similar instrument. The teacher as leader has the opportunity and responsibility to model good technique and good practice to the students, which leads to a respect of their skill instead of conformity of authority – a much healthier interpersonal relationship between student and teacher.

It is easy to structure your planning to fit in line with Bloom's Taxonomy, should that be something required of you. Take this as also an opportunity for effective differentiation in the lesson plans, whilst retaining an ability to stay alongside the popular 'differentiation by outcome'. Initial activities involve remembering, comprehending and applying knowledge. Later, analysis of traditional works can be brought in to encourage synthesis in their own compositions. Musical creativity can then be encouraged for the students to fuse the music with any other concepts they choose and a feedback loop begins with their evaluation of their work either through performance or recordings, which can then be improved upon and so forth.

A group such as this can be effective with as few as four players and can accommodate as many performers as you are comfortable with. As such there are no caps on the number of members of the group and as long as you have a consistent core membership then progress can be made each week, with a sense of challenge being presented to new members, as well as praise for their quick initial progress, progress which is assisted by good modelling from more able or regular students and is aided by their performance in that the new members' errors are often hidden in the mix; the new student knows where their mistake will have been and can correct it for next time but will not have interrupted the flow of the session through dropping out and coming back in again. It really is quite an inclusive way of working and less able students can be given simple pulse based bass rhythms to work with.

- **Benefit to whole school and community**

Schools can benefit from a Djembe club at lunch times or after school. Not only does it give the individuals a sense of belonging and ownership, a consistent register of attendees can be used as evidence of the club's impact and can be



cross-referenced against their attendance in general and other statistics within the SEF as required.

As part of specific cultural weeks, or with other funding, you could consider a cross-curricular approach to the activity and invite an African Dance teacher in to collaborate with other students. Many are available as a troupe and will bring one or two musicians with them to play for the dancers. With some dialogue and forethought you could create a custom solution for your own school which would allow you to get the most from your investment in these artists.

The school as a whole can benefit from an investment in musical groups such as this as they raise a positive profile in the community if given the chance to shine publically.

With a short set routine in place, performances out and about in the community can draw attention and are quite often a good fundraising opportunity.

An investment in some decorative sashes or ribbons for the performers and their Djembe can add to the sense of identity for the group and there will be a strong visual link between the music and the school itself, increasing the perception of its standing and success.

To take things a step further, a community group or series of short workshops could be offered out to parents with members of the school group assisting and teaching. You could take the group into primary feeder schools to show the potential future students the sorts of things that they can look forward to at your school and foster interest from before day one.

Performances in care homes for the elderly and those in hospitals or similar settings and can provide an opportunity for the school (and pupils) to make a really valuable contribution to the community.



History and Cultural Background

There is a wonderful origin myth that tells us of a chimpanzee who originally had the first drum, and of a hunter who trapped the chimpanzee drummer. From that day forwards chimpanzees would beat their chests instead of the drum in anger of the theft.

Association of the Djembe is originally with the Numu, the blacksmiths, within the Mandinka tribe of West Africa and the general initial spread of the instrument was in line with the Mali Empire. Somebody who plays a Djembe is called a Djembefola and there are no historical restrictions on who could learn to play the Djembe, unlike some other instruments that were sometimes reserved for the storyteller-historians known as Griot.

The Griot and Griotte have an important role in communities as they are well versed in the histories, the songs and contemporary events. They often specialise in other instruments such as the Kora or the Balafon. Over the years it was a role that was taught specifically to individuals, often within a family, and they would usually marry with other Griots instead of outside of the acquired role. In more recent times, however, rules are relaxing and some characters like Youssou N'dour have distinct links back to a Griot approach. Internationalism has seen some griot move to other countries to spread the word and knowledge of Africa around the world, such as Papa Susso. Griot learning establishments have also appeared which allow non-Griot family individuals to become one, although many of these focus more upon musical skill than the oral histories.

- **Context and delivery**

Djembe music is ingrained into the daily life and culture of a traditional village in rural areas. Villages would drum to celebrate all sorts of things including dignitaries visiting, weddings, funerals, a successful hunt, a ritual fishing day and so forth. Everyone takes part in some respect and if you aren't drumming or singing then it is likely that you are dancing.

This sort of approach and performance in the villages is referred to as 'Rural' style as it is what they do in the more rural areas. Within the village they tend to form a big circle or square and perform within it.

As time moved on, travelling drumming troupes became an established concept and would perform for specific arranged audiences, often with a troupe of associated dancers. This is referred to as 'Ballet' style and is usually performed on a stage or at the end of a building or hall. Hotels and other establishments may also hire a troupe to entertain guests in tourist districts.

- **West Africa, tribal influences**

As a sweeping generalisation, each general tribal area will have developed its own take on performance and set rhythms according to their culture. With the spread of interest in the styles of music and freedom of travel it is likely that the lines between these will blur over time, but alongside more recent documentation of rhythms in writing and amateur video documentation it appears that different areas have some distinctions; some are more upbeat, some steady, some complex, some minimal.



Source: Public Domain image from the Library of Congress, via Wikipedia [here](#).



It isn't entirely useful to think of an area as being in line with country borders, as over time people and groups moved, spread out, blended and travelled and original tribal areas are not necessarily strictly in line with the modern borders that we see on maps today.

Different areas also favour certain drums or combinations of drums together. Other instruments such as the [Balafon](#) and [Calabash](#) may be incorporated.

- **Reasons for drumming in the villages**

Music is very important to West African villages. Every important event has designated rhythms that are to be performed. The entire village gets involved and it brings the community together.

An excellent short documentary that is worth watching is called [Foli; There is No Movement Without Rhythm](#) which gives a wonderful snapshot into life in a Malinké village and how rhythm forms both the work and the play that the people engage in daily.

- **Influences on other cultures**

West African rhythm has significantly influenced waves of music in North and South America (and consequently the rest of the world) in large part due to trafficking slaves. The one advantage of relying on a system of music that isn't written down is that the music itself is memorised, and in these new climes that the slaves found themselves in, the rhythms came out and developed in new ways.

In North America the most well-known development is Blues. Vocally, many songs that accompany the drumming have lines repeated and some follow an AAB structure that we now find common place to the blues. The swing rhythm falls in line with some of the traditional 12/8 rhythms, but swung rhythms had clearly been around in North America for years before this. [Bending notes whilst singing](#) may have also come from the African approach to singing these melodies.

Many slaves traded by Portugal ended up in Brazil, a significant amount into Rio de Janeiro. There is evidence of [Candomblé](#) being merged with Catholic Church celebrations to create carnival and other celebrations with heavy dance elements that in turn required strong 2/4 rhythms, which will have drawn influence from Western Africa again. Over time Samba and its variations were given form as we know it today.

[Afro-Cuban music](#) contains significant influence from West Africa, especially in relation to polyrhythms, cross-rhythms and the concept of performance in a social environment.

The Caribbean has also seen influence, especially in Jamaica where in particular [Nyabingi Djembe Drumming](#) sees rhythms from West Africa used and adapted to support a more syncopated feel in conjunction with Reggae-style vocals. The music is much slower than West African Djembe performances in general, but allows for lots of space between beats to allow little improvisations and additions to be thrown in. The social performance element is also retained.



The Instruments

- **Djembe**

The Djembe is an hourglass-shaped drum that originates from West Africa and has a drum head traditionally made from goat skin. The Djembe drum is simple to learn and yet it is a versatile instrument, capable of producing a wide range of sounds, and is reasonably priced and readily available.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 6



- **Dunun**

A set of Dunun drums often consists of three drums of differing sizes, usually small, medium and large called Dundunba, Sangban and Kenkeni. They are generally played with wooden sticks and often, as is the case with Ewe drumming from Ghana, also incorporate a metal Bell. They can be played horizontally by individuals (Rural style) or vertically by one performer (Ballet style).

Elements from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 6



- **Bell**

There are several variations but these were originally fashioned from the Bells attached to cattle and goats, which would sound as the animal moved, so that the worker tending the animals was able to locate them in the dense bush. They can consist of one high-pitched and one low-pitched Bell, which are forged together. The Latin American Equivalent are the Agogo Bells which are an integral part of Brazilian Samba Music.

Elements from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 7



- **Talking Drum**

The Talking Drum, or Dondo, is an hourglass-shaped drum with strips of cord, string, twine or leather connecting the drum heads at opposite ends of the drum. When the player squeezes the cords this tightens the tension of the drum. In order to achieve this, the player holds the drum horizontally under one arm, enabling them to squeeze the drum with that arm whilst striking the drum head with a curved stick held in the other hand.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 6



- **African Bongos**

The African Bongos (sometimes referred to as Ethnic Bongos) are the precursor to Latin American Bongos that are the instrument we are more used to playing today. Although the same in many ways, i.e. a pair of drums, one small and one larger, joined together by a small wooden bridge, the drum heads on the African Bongos are tensioned by stringing rather than by metal tensioning bolts and have animal hide skins rather than plastic and are always played with the hands.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 7



- **Balafon**

The Balafon is also known as an African Xylophone. It is constructed by tying graduated lengths of wood to a frame with hollowed out gourds suspended underneath each piece of wood to act as resonators. The wooden notes are tuned to a Pentatonic (five-note) ascending scale and played with rubber ended sticks.

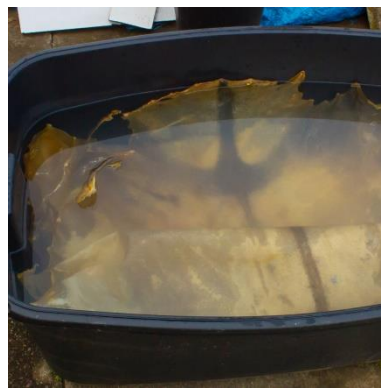
Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 7



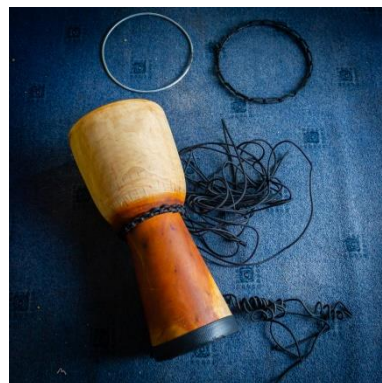
How the Instruments Are Made

Djembe drums are manufactured in a number of ways, including moulded or formed fibre glass and other mass produced ways. Whilst not 'authentic' these drums are consistent and very light weight, often with synthetic skins on them.

Traditionally a Djembe is made of wood, skin, rope and three metal rings and is classified as percussion, specifically a membranophone (an instrument that makes its primary sound by vibrating a stretched membrane).



A traditional drum will have started as a tree. It will have been cut down and allowed to dry out. The outer shape will be carved and trimmed down using a lathe and the inside of the drum will be hollowed out before the goat skin is put on. The skin will have also been cleaned, dried and treated.



The three metal rings are harnessed to the drum to accommodate the vertical ropes and the skin is held in place by the top two of these rings at the head of the shell. The goat skin tightens as the verticals are woven back and forth

through the rope loops between the top metal ring and the bottom one. It is a slow process to increase tension over time so as not to stress the skin too much initially, but over a period of a few days the verticals are tightened and tightened.



It all seems quite straight forward mechanically, but the skill and quality of the build itself, ensuring that the head is perfectly round and even and having the strength, skill and tools to correctly add tension takes some training and practice.



General Technique

- **Andy Gleadhill books**

Andy Gleadhill has produced some wonderful resources for non-specialist class teachers and these also provide very useful support for music specialists who are teaching African Drumming for the first time. *Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1* covers all the basics (culture, technique, elements of music, warm-ups) and gives a suggested ten session breakdown approach to teaching the content. Also included are ten different rhythms and teaching notes for each, which have been simplified for beginners or Primary setting. His second book is a more substantial tome and contains more advanced information about playing the djembe, as well as other traditional African percussion instruments that can extend the ensemble and contains some more in-depth scores that can in turn be re-adapted to suit your own classroom percussion content.



- **Drum Positioning for Djembe**

To obtain the best tone and range of sounds from your drum it is essential that the Djembe is raised up from the ground and not played whilst it is standing on the floor. This is to allow the air and sound waves to escape from the bottom, open end of the drum. This is easily demonstrated by holding your hand against the open end of the drum while another player strikes the drum - you can feel the escaping air. It can also be demonstrated by leaving the drum on the floor and playing a few beats and then doing the same with the drum off the ground and noting the improvement in the sound from the dead tone with the drum on the floor to the rich ringing tone of the raised drum.

When considering the best playing position to adopt you need to take account of the ages of the performers, the size of the instruments they are using, as well as the numbers in the ensemble. Generally speaking, a good playing position is to have the performers seated on the edge of a chair, to give more leg space for the drum, with backs straight and shoulders relaxed. The drum can then be placed between the thighs, just above the knee, and with the players feet crossed over on the floor around the drum. This will allow the player to have a firm grip on the drum and leave both hands free for playing.

Elements taken from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book, pages 5-6





- **Detailed technique for Djembe (Bass, Tone, Slap)**

The playing techniques of African drums vary enormously across the African continent with many different hand positions that not only change from country to country, but from village to village and each teacher will have a strongly held view as to how to play the drums 'correctly'. Others believe that so long as a good sound is produced then technique is secondary.

It is important that the Djembe is played with hands and not drums sticks, as the goat skin is relatively thin compared to cow hide and it can cause stretches or splits which will damage the drum skin.

There are three main sounds that you can make with a Djembe. Here we will explain all three, Bass, Tone and Slap, although with the music we look at we will mainly be considering the Bass and the Tone sound (labelled here as Bass Tone and Open Tone).

Elements taken from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1, Page 5

Bass Tone (Low sound, Bass)

A good Bass note will produce a full and rounded deep tone. To produce a good Bass tone, the Djembe must be struck in the middle of the drumhead with the hand slightly cupped, palm down, with the hand returning quickly from the drum. You can use your whole arm and pretend that you are bouncing a basketball and this will result in the correct action for playing good Bass tones.

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1, Page 7

Open Tone (High sound, Tone)

When playing the Open Tone the drum should be struck with the whole length of the fingers on the edge of the drum nearest to your body with your elbows



slightly raised. If you imagine the drum head to be a clock face your right hand will be on the four and your left hand on the eight. Your hands must not remain in contact with the drum once you have played the beat but should return to your natural playing position just above the drum. A good way to achieve this technique is to imagine that the drum head is very hot, like a radiator, and so you do not want to leave your hand on it any longer than necessary.

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1, page 6

Slap

The Slap is a more advanced technique that can take quite a while to master. Moreover, whilst an adequate sound for a Bass Tone or Open Tone can be created with a loosely tuned drum, it is imperative that a Djembe is correctly tightened in order to get the most out of a Slap.

The type of sound that you are aiming for is a short bright crack. Some people mistake the Djembe's natural harmonic ringing as the sound they are after, but it is more than this.

To play a slap you need to use the pads of your hand on your palm (opposite side to the palm knuckles) down onto the edge of the Djembe where the skin is being pulled onto the wooden shell. Have your fingers relaxed and slightly apart and the hand angled slightly proud. If your fingers are relaxed enough then they will continue follow through onto the skin and create the whip-crack sound of a Slap. The sound will not be muted as your pads will be not be impacting on the resonant area of the skin.

Slaps are great to throw in as Open Tones now and then to wake things up during a performance.

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Master Drummer

No doubt as the teacher or group leader in other avenues you are used to being at the front of others leading a session. In Djembe performances a Master Drummer is essential to keep things running smoothly. They will be the ones making the Calls to tell the others when and what to perform, as well as ensuring that everyone else is on track. Quite often they will be the ones playing the solos over the top of the set rhythms, but within a group such as yours this activity can be delegated around the class.



Grid Notation

Grid notation is a very efficient way of documenting African Drumming rhythms and patterns. Most rhythms are in 4/4 meaning they can be sub-divided into a grid of sixteen beats, although more or less can be created as required.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

Some rhythms are based around a swung rhythm or triplets and in these instances a grid of 12 or 24 can be constructed and sub-divided into threes instead of fours.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

The blank section underneath the numbers can be used to indicate which type of note is to be played (Bass, Tone, Slap, Low Tone, Open Tone, etc.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
L	O	H	H	O	O	L	L	L	O	H	H	O	H	L	L

They can also show which hand you should use in the rhythm, 'R' for right, 'L' for left and 'F' for Flam. Other two-handed combinations are possible for more advanced performance techniques.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
L	O	H	H	O	O	L	L	L	O	H	H	O	H	L	L
R	.	R	L	.	.	R	L	F	.	R	L	.	L	R	L

Warm-Up Exercises

Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1 contains some warm-up exercises that are great for getting people to find their way around a Djembe simply and confidently. One of the main basics of Djembe Drumming is to maintain a consistent 'right, left, right, left' pattern as this will give the performer an ample amount of fluency. If the performer is left-handed and would prefer to lead with the left, then reverse all of these instructions for them. The important aspect is their timing and their consistency of tone which can be created either way around, so long as they stick with the leading hand that they choose in the first instance.

Technique 1 – Right, left, right, left

Maintaining an even basic flow is a good starting point for all performers and will encourage an understanding of tempo and performing as a unit.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Technique 2 – Altering tempo

Moving from a 'right, left, right, left' pattern to a similar pattern with longer gaps inserted will show the underlying pulse and tempo of a piece of music as well as develop the skill of altering to a different pattern efficiently with no errors.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R	O	L	O	R	O	L	O	R	O	L	O	R	O	L	O

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.



Double speed is another aspect of tempo altering and on the first few occasions that this descends into racket can provide an excellent discussion point on where things went wrong and what performers can do to avoid this.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video which shows how both of these tempo alterations can be put together as an additional exercise.

Technique 3 – Double tapping

On rare occasions it is more efficient to use the same hand twice in a row and this warm-up does just this. It is not common practise to do this whilst Djembe Drumming but is a valid warm-up exercise.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R	R	L	L	R	R	L	L	R	R	L	L	R	R	L	L

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Technique 4 – Paradiddle

A Paradiddle is a constantly altering focus of left and right. There are many variations of a Paradiddle and with a little research you will see just how complex they can become. For now, though, this particular rudiment can be a great warm up for all, especially those unfamiliar with the concept as it gets their brains working.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R	L	R	R	L	R	L	L	R	L	R	R	L	R	L	L



[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Technique 5 – Ghost notes

For the more advanced performer you may wish to introduce the concept of ghost notes. For this, you take a rhythm which has some gaps in it and for each gap you play the Djembe as light as possible so as to create a constant rustle underneath. This helps to develop a sense of dynamic awareness as well as create a subtle click-track to keep all of the other players in line. To utilize this in a performance, however, all ghost note players need to ensure that they perform as a tight group with impeccable timing.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R	l	r	L	r	l	R	l	R	l	r	L	r	l	R	l

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Technique 6 – Highs and Lows

This warm-up exercise begins to explore the Djembe further and has performers playing Low sounds (Bass, 'L') and High sounds (Tone, 'H'). The 'right, left' technique should be retained and is scored here below the tonal information.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H
R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

We can further speed up the rhythm without altering the pulse by playing two Highs and two Lows instead of four.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
LL	HH	LL	HH	LL	HH	LL	HH	LL	HH	LL	HH	LL	HH	LL	HH
RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

We can also bring in the Paradiddle concept for the High and Low tones as well. This one can be a bit tricky at first as the hands are alternating two concepts at once – the tones are altering but the ‘right, left’ hand pattern should remain.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
L	H	L	L	H	L	H	H	L	H	L	L	H	L	H	H
R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Elements taken from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1, pages 12-15



Call and Response

Call and Response patterns (sometimes referred to as Question and Answer) are an integral part and a key characteristic of African Music. Listen to any African Music, particularly vocal music and you will notice that it is filled with examples of Call and Response, often with a vocal solo being answered by a response from the chorus.

Call and Response patterns are also a common part of communication in the natural world. Animal calls, football chants and even political speeches (the addresses of Martin Luther King are a good example), are all punctuated with calls and responses. African Drumming can be seen as a conversation between different drums with Call and Response patterns being a dialogue between the leader and the rest of the group.

The simplest Call and Response method is to play a direct repeat of what has been played by the Master Drummer.

Master Drummer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	H	O	H	H	O	H	O	H	H	O	L	L	L	O	O	O

Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	H	O	H	H	O	H	O	H	H	O	L	L	L	O	O	O

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Alternatively, and a little more impressive, are the types of Call and Response where the rest of the Djembe group play a different response to that of the leader, showing that a complex set piece or interaction has been learned.



Master Drummer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	H	O	H	H	O	H	O	H	H	O	L	L	L	O	O	O
Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	O	O	O	H	H	O	O	O

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

To make both styles of Call and Response easier, people quite often attach words to the rhythms. Spoken word does have its own natural rhythm and if you repeat a phrase over and over you will hear patterns form.

With call and Response some simple phrases can turn into really good syncopated rhythms that can be used effectively and be easy to remember.

Master Drummer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	H	H	H	O	H	H	H	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
We want you, We want you,																
Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	H	H	HH	OH	H	H	H	O
We want you as a new recruit.																

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video

Elements taken from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1, Pages 19-21



Soloing

When a rhythm has been established it is usually down to the Master Drummer to do some solo work over the top. There are many established approaches to soloing, so whichever route you take will be acceptable in a classroom environment.

A good technique to latch on to is to find the gaps in the accompanying rhythm and start your solo on one of those. The audience will be used to hearing the gap so when an instrument suddenly plays at that point and continues it draws attention to it. The soloist may not be louder than the core group, but that initial punch is enough to grab focus for people to key in to. The off-kilter or syncopated feel that this may create will also lead to an interesting polyrhythm of sorts.

Master Drummer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	B	O	H	H	O	H	H	O	B	O	H	H	H	O	H	O
Suggested Solo Starting Points	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
		X			X			X		X				X		X

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.