



**Lesson:** African Drum Medleys

**Grade:** 3-5, 6-8

**Subject:** African Drumming

**Topics:** Culture

## DESCRIPTION

In this lesson, students will listen to the African drum rhythms, Kassa or Balakulandjan. They will “listen in layers,” then learn or compose a medley to perform for an audience.

## OBJECTIVES

- Define the word medley.
- Describe the break in African drumming.
- Listening and analyzing layers of a dunun orchestra.
- Learn the Kassa or Balakulandjan rhythm or compose an original medley.
- Perform a medley for an audience.

## STANDARDS

### National Core Arts Standards

[Music Anchor Standard 2](#) Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

### Common Core State Standards

[ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7](#) Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

## INSTRUCTOR NOTE

Teachers should review all media and resources prior to the lesson. Dunun Drums lesson as a prerequisite for building background knowledge.

## MATERIALS

PRESENTATION: [African Drum Medleys](#)

VIDEO: [The Break: Start, Change & Stop](#) | [Balakulandjan Medley](#) | [Kassa Medley](#) | [Balakulandjan Layers](#) | [Kassa Layers](#)

## INTRODUCTION

1. Write the word “Medley” on the board. Ask students what they think the word means. Allow time for students to share what they know. Tell students that a medley is a mixture or collection of things. Often, a musical medley is a combination of songs. In this lesson, “medley” will refer to





the group of dunun drums, bells, and djembe, when played together - also known as a dunun orchestra.

2. Review information about drum names, sizes, and features of the drums in a dunun orchestra. Students can revisit the dunun drum posters they created in the previous lesson, *Dunun Drums*.

3. Display the presentation, [African Drum Medleys](#). Tell students they will be learning about a technique known as *the break*, which is one way of signaling changes in djembe orchestra music. Play [The Break: Start, Change & Stop](#). Ask students: *Why do you think it might be useful or important to have this nonverbal signal for changes in music?*

## APPLICATION

1. Split the class in half and tell them that each group will learn a different drum song as a medley and as layers. Tell students that each medley will begin with the djembe and add additional percussion instruments; this is called a dunun orchestra.

- Group A will listen to [Balakulandjan Medley](#)
- Group B will listen to [Kassa Medley](#)

2. Tell students they just watched Mr. Weedie Braimah playing an African drum medley. Ask students which drums they recognize in the medley. Reference the [medley-specific slides](#) with instrument labels on pages five and seven to help students point out the drums.

3. Tell students they will be seeing Mr. Braimah play a breakdown of the dunun orchestra and how all the drums and bells come together. Each time a new drum is added (and right before the end of the song), the djembe plays *the break* as a signal to add, change and stop.

- Group A will listen to [Balakulandjan Layers](#)
- Group B will listen to [Kassa Layers](#)

4. Introduce students to an activity called, “Listening in Layers.” Group A and Group B listen to their designated layers again, then divide a sheet of chart paper into five sections and write the drum names as headings/titles: Sangban Drum, Dununba Drum, Kenkeni Drum, Leading Djembe and Ensemble Djembe. Students will collaborate to find words to describe the tone (e.g., *bright, dark, earthy, metallic*), rhythmic density (e.g., *fast, repetitive rhythms, strong beats only, busy, sparse*), relative volume and any other observations of each drum and record their descriptions on the chart paper. Allow students time to listen to the layers and medley videos to investigate the different sounds of each drum (and/or drum and bell combination).





5. Each group will present their findings about each instrument's tone and role to the class, referencing the chart they created as a group. Ask students: *How would you compare the roles and sounds of each instrument in both the Balakulandjan Medley and the Kassa Medley?*

## EVALUATION

1. Have students learn the medley taught by Mr. Braimah or create an original medley with at least two layers.

- **Option 1 with Drums:** Have groups of students collaborate to learn one of the melodies or create layers that make up an original melody with these drums, incorporating *the break* at the beginning and before any changes.
- **Option 2 without Drums:** Substitute drums for buckets, different objects, body percussion, or drum pads. Have groups of students collaborate to learn one of the melodies or create layers that make up an original melody with their drum alternative, incorporating *the break* at the beginning and before any changes.

2. Perform a medley for the class. Have each group demonstrate a breakdown of the layers. Each student should perform their drum part individually, then the group will begin together to demonstrate how the different layers fit together to create a drum medley.

## ATTRIBUTIONS

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Weedie Braimah, African Drumming Teaching Artist  
Produced by Preservation Hall Foundation

