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# Chapter 1: The Instruments

## Gathering Your Sounds

My students often ask me what we can use for instruments in my class. My response is usually: "As long as it isn't breakable or alive, we'll use it as an instrument." The goal is to gather intriguing sounds that create great music. When any object can be considered an instrument, finding a place to begin can be overwhelming. The following instruments work well as a core ensemble: 5-gallon bucket, shaker, scratcher, and glass bottle.

When selecting instruments for the classroom, make sure they are safe. Materials found in hardware stores or scrap yards are not necessarily designed to be handled by children. Inspect all instruments thoroughly and make any necessary modifications to ensure the safety of your students. In the following section, I describe the instruments that I have used successfully in my teaching with suggestions about construction and safety. Note that the suggestions may or may not apply to your situation.



*Core Ensemble*



*5-Gallon Bucket*

### 5-Gallon Bucket

The heart of a junkyard percussion ensemble is the 5-gallon bucket. A versatile, nearly indestructible instrument, the bucket serves as the lead drum in the junkyard ensemble. The bucket is also a logical instrument: inexpensive, readily available, and durable. In a way, the bucket is to rhythm training what the recorder is to tonal training. Both are hardy, simple, and fun to play.

Musically, the bucket can provide a steady beat, articulate unison rhythms, or create a foundation for a group groove. Functioning like a hand drum in a world drumming ensemble, the bucket is versatile and can be played with hands, sticks, or mallets. Using buckets, a great percussion ensemble can be built for a fraction of the cost of other percussion ensembles.

## Technique Exercises

The previous beginning and echo activities may be enough preparation for students to become successful at playing with sticks. You could then move onto the different modes of playing and start teaching some music.

That being said, students often need continued technical development as the music becomes more difficult. Below are several exercises that use buckets and focus on technique. They can be used with students who need more readiness or for students looking to take their technique to the next level. Running through a couple of these at the beginning of every class helps warm up muscles and get the class focused.

You can teach these exercises by rote or by using notation. Play these exercises with hands on legs, then sticks on legs, and then finally, sticks on buckets. Again, have students chant out loud and move to the steady beat as they play. You'll notice that all of the exercises use the exact same rhythm (with one exception). Thus, they should all sound the same—only the sticking will change.

Step-by-step directions on how to teach these technique exercises can be found in chapter 4.

### 8 on a Hand

This is a classic drumline warm-up that uses one hand at a time, allowing students to focus their attention on either their left or right hands. Musically, it introduces the concept of playing in rhythmic unison to a steady beat. Start on the rim, and once mastered, move to the center and sides.

*Variations:* tempo, different tones, volume, change to six notes on a hand for triple meter

### Single Stroke Roll

A *Single Stroke Roll* is exactly what it sounds like: one hand plays one note, then the opposite hand plays one note, and so on (RLRLRL...). The musical goal is a rhythmically and dynamically consistent sound from each hand; the technical goal is for each hand to achieve the same height, stroke direction, and hand motion. In other words, both hands should sound and look exactly the same.

*Variations:* tempo, different tones, volume, duple or triple meter