

Junk percussion

Ideas for junk and recycled instruments - and some suggested activities

David Wheway

Paper: Use assorted paper to tug, rip, scrunch, flap, brush, flick, blow.

Plastic bottles: Fill with different materials (pulses, clips, sweets). Screw cap on tightly. Idea: Blow across tops of smaller bottles (e.g. miniature pop bottles) to play in flute-like fashion.

Glass wine bottles: Make bottle organ. Fill bottles with different amounts of water to create a scale. Tap with plastic beaters. Ensure adult is present at all times.

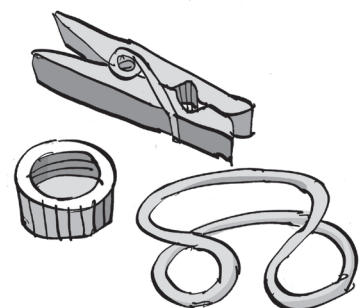
Wooden Pallet: Saw slates to create different lengths. Might be screw fixed to wall in outside area. Play like giant xylophone. Play with dowel or sawn-down broom handles.

Milk bottle guitar: Cut piece from opposite side to handle – enough to get hand in easily. Make a small hole in the bottom of the bottle using a drill or bradawl. Thread some twine or nylon cord through the bottom and open top end of the bottle. Secure string with twig or dowel stop at bottom end. Wind round twig or dowel at pouring end – to allow release and tensioning as you play. Pluck string through cut hole – using cut piece as a plectrum if desired. Investigate what happens as string is made more taught.

Bullroarer: Simply thread up to 1m twine through hole in handle end of wooden spatula. (Drill a hole if there isn't one). Secure the twine just below handle leaving most of the twine trailing. Swing bullroarer in horizontal plane above head. It doesn't need to go too fast to create a roar.

Spatula: can also be used – twanged against side of table – (like wooden rulers).

Button Spinner: A toy from childhood – made from buttons or thick card (or wood). Cut two circles of thick card (e.g. from cardboard wine box). The circles need to be about 4 inches diameter. Glue or tape together. Make two small holes close together in the centre – so it looks like a large button. Thread twine through and back (about 1 metre). Tie ends together. Spin the disk manually to twist the string as much as possible. Then pull on the string. The weight of the card should untwist – then twist the string the other way. Keep pulling and relaxing to make the disk spin back and forth. It should create a light whooshing sound.



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Tea chest Bass: Tea chests are hard to come by so I use either an old bucket or a plastic storage box. Make a hole in the bottom of the bucket/box. The hole needs to be wide enough to thread through the string/washing line/cord that you intend to use.

The line needs to be <1.5m in length. Secure one end with a thick piece of twig or dowel – then thread through the hole from inside to outside the box. Now turn the box over so it is standing upside down.

Thread the other end of the line through a hole in the top of the broom handle/dowel.

Wrap the slack round the top of the handle – place a foot on the box to stop it lifting or moving – then place the bottom end of the broom handle against the edge of the bucket/box. A walking stick ferrule can be added for extra grip.

Pull back on the top of the stick to create tension – then pluck the line.

Washing line is good – but choose the synthetic filled rather than wire.

Tin rattle (much easier than yoghurt pots): Take two empty food tins – washed thoroughly. (I avoid meat tins)

Place a small amount of filling (pulses-whatever) in one tin.

Secure both tins at their open ends with insulating tape.

Decorate if you fancy.

Rain pipe: Cut drainage down-pipe to different lengths and tap ends with slippers or flip-flops. Fix different lengths to an outside wall. Also good for singing/talking and listening through.

Hose-pipe trumpet: Cut length of hosepipe – approx 2m. Stick a trumpet mouthpiece in one end (plastic ‘Kelly’ mouthpieces good and can be left in sterilising solution). Add a funnel to the other end. Play as if blowing a raspberry. Tighten lips for higher sounds. Wrap hosepipe around outside structures for a permanent display.

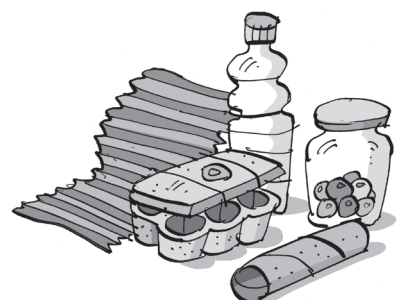
Guica: Save cups and straws from fast food joints. Rub straw up and down in top x-slit. Adding some violin resin to the straw can make for a better sound.

Other

Bubble wrap – good for popping. When twisted sounds like fireworks.

CD cases: filled and sealed for shakers

Carrier bags: good for stimulating sounds (shake, scrunch, wave – usual health warning applies)



Junk percussion

Individual mini-cereal packets and dried foods: Use as shakers – then eat contents.

Pringle tubes: whisky tubes. Empty contents then use as finger drums – or fill for shakers.

Secure lids with insulating tape.

Brushes for sweeping sounds and rhythms

VO5 shampoo: lids make good castanets.

Wooden spatulas and wooden rulers: good for twanging against table top.

Wind chimes: Ask parents to send in unwanted chimes – hang them high and play with feather dusters.

Tissue boxes or similar: Wrap with rubber bands and twang bands over aperture.

Paper and comb kazoo

Blowing bubbles through a straw (and humming)

Plumbing plungers

Corrugated card (try hanging it on a wall).

SOME SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Conducting: (Small or large group activity). Start stop sounds following a puppet/soft toy.

Child takes place of toy. Find different ways of playing when puppet dances.

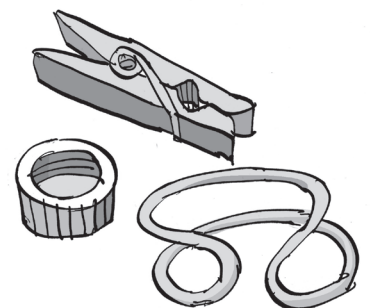
Two puppets – two groups. Try following blown bubbles – with different objectives.

Storying from Sound: (Small group – if extending to large group have 3 or 4 sets of the same instruments)

Describe the sounds – what images come to mind? Find 3 or 4 different sounds.

Make up a story – using the imagery created by the sounds.

Paper Music: Make sequences of paper sounds and/or use sounds to illustrate an event or made-up story. Investigate in music area. Join others for larger scale projects. Observe and model sounds.



Junk percussion

Shakers: Can children distinguish between different shakers?

Hide and play. Sing 'Round and Round the circle' to tune 'In and Out the Windows':

Round and Round the circle
Round and Round the circle
Round and Round the circle
As we have done before
Hush I think I hear a sound
Hush I think I hear a sound
Hush I think I hear a sound
I wonder what it is.

Divide children into different groups A and B – depending on type of sound. eg.

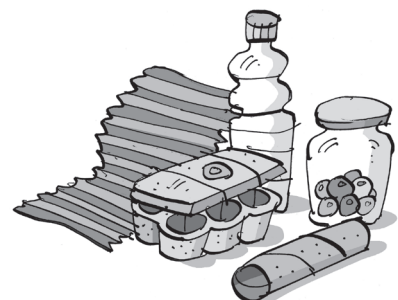
Shakers/non-shakers
Crisp sounding/more rounded
Large/small etc.

Use shakers alongside class instruments in performance/composition projects

Bottle Organ: Create/play tunes. Find out what difference the amount of water makes.

Chicken-Egg:

Make cards with eggs on one side – chickens on the other. Create simple Chicken egg sequences – and say/clap/play the words to create different rhythmic sequences.



Operating 'Audacity'

Ensure your microphone is attached in the record socket (see sockets picture) and switched on, then press the red 'record' button and make some sounds into the microphone. (If using a microphone with a large jack plug – you can buy a large to small jack converter for around £1 from an electronics supplier.)

Press the yellow 'stop' button, and then the green 'play' button to listen to your recording.

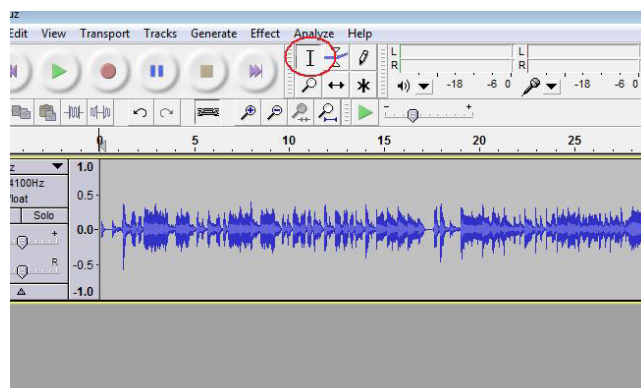
Sockets may be coloured or have small icons. Red here is the microphone socket



Selecting

Click on the select icon (see Select picture) – and then left click and drag the mouse over the track/part of track you wish to amend.

Selection tool

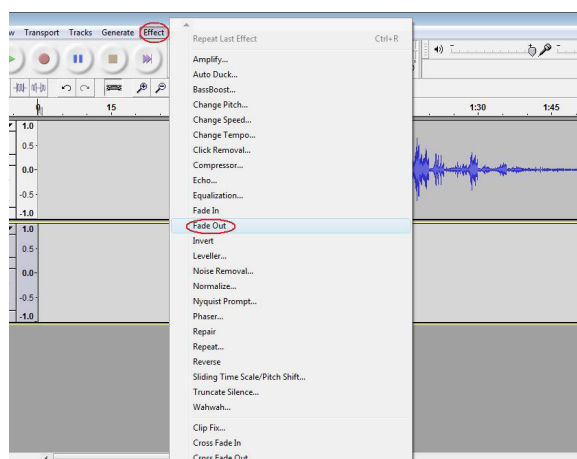


Operating 'Audacity'

Effects

There are a broad range of options under the 'Effects' drop down menu. Highlight a track to be changed by left clicking the mouse and sweeping over the track.

Effects – drop down menu



Then click on an effects option. A change will be suggested or you can change the effects as desired. Exploration is fine at this point – just try different changes and see what happens. If you don't like the change – simple 'Undo' under the Edit drop-down menu. (The illustration above shows 'fade out' being selected).

Saving

Go to 'File' - 'Export' and give the file a name. Notice the extension for the files is 'wav'. This will save in wave format - very useful for importing/exporting to and from other programs, or burning as audio or data to a CD. The files can be stored anywhere - but setting up a document folder, for instance, in 'My Documents' is a good idea.

Files can also be saved as mp3 – which are much smaller files, and a better format for uploading to the internet or if saving a lot of files. There is some loss in quality – but this is only really noticeable if amplifying to a great extent.

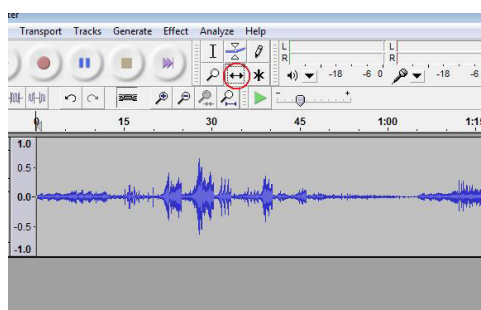
Operating 'Audacity'

Mixing

Using the 'Import Audio' option under the Project drop-down menu, select tracks to be mixed. This places them all within the 'Audacity' window. To see all the tracks select 'Fit Vertically' within the View drop-down menu.

Using the 'Time shift' tool tracks can be moved to the desired place in the recording, with pupils making fine adjustments through observing and listening to the results.

Time shift tool

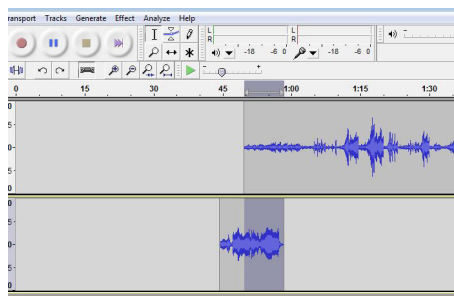


Fading in/Fading out

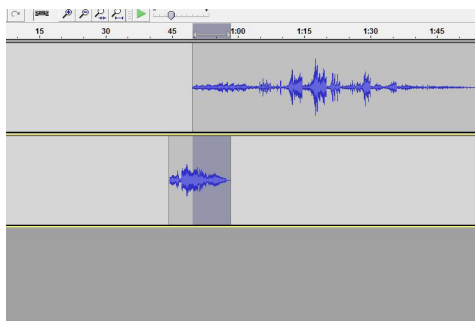
By highlighting the start or end of a track (use the mouse to left click and drag over selection) – parts of a track can be faded in or out.

Once highlighted find the fade in/fade out options under the 'Effects' drop down menu.

Track selection is made for editing.



A fade out has been selected



Glossary

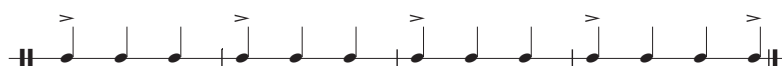
This Glossary provides simple explanations for some musical terms used throughout the four Kickstart Music books. It is important to try to use them yourself. Musical terms, as technical terms in other subject areas, often describe something that is very hard to describe in any other way. Having the technical term at your finger tips is useful. It is also good to help the children to learn them too. It often helps to as it cements their knowledge or understanding to give a technical name.

ACCENT

An emphasis placed instinctively on certain regularly grouped beats, or on selected notes or beats. In the latter case an accent is shown by the sign: >

BAR

A number of beats grouped together within bar lines. There is often an accent on the first beat of the bar or measure.



BODY SOUNDS

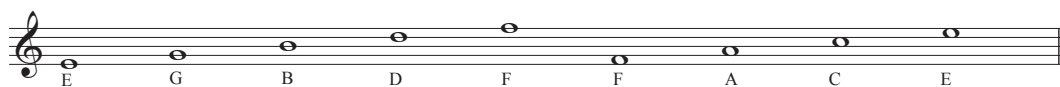
Sounds made by parts of the body, eg. knee slapping, finger clicking, head tapping, clapping, stamping, etc. Body sounds are very useful in establishing strong rhythms.

CHORD

A group of notes sounding simultaneously.

CLEF

A sign at the beginning of a line of music that indicates the pitch of the notes that follow, eg.



Treble Clef (G clef) is used for notes of a fairly high pitch, sung for example by children's voices, or played by instruments such as recorder or violin.



Bass Clef (F clef) is used for notes of low pitch, eg. men's voices, cello or trombone

Glossary

CROTCHET

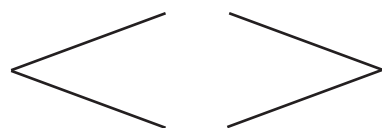
The term used for this note:  It is the rhythmic unit most commonly used for a regular beat.

DRONE

A lowish note held on for a long time to support other sounds or tunes - as in the drone held by the Scottish bagpipes, a hurdy gurdy or a sitar.

DYNAMICS

The area of expression in music that is concerned with the varying degrees of loudness. Common dynamic signs are:



get louder

get softer

f = loud

p = soft

INTERVAL

The measured gap between the pitches of two notes. an interval is calculated inclusively.

C - E is an interval of a third C D E
 1 2 3

F - D is an interval of a sixth F G A B C D
 1 2 3 4 5 6

LEGER LINE

A short additional line above or below the staff (written 'lightly') for notes too high or too low to be written on it.



MELODY

A tuneful arrangement of notes, sometimes having several phrases.

MINIM

The term used for this note:  It is a rhythmic unit double the length of a crotchet.

Glossary

NOTE

A symbol used in notation to indicate pitch and/or duration. Also, note can refer to the finger part of a piano keyboard (piano key or electric keyboard), and sometimes to the single sounds made by a voice or instrument.

NOTATION

Any method of writing music down.

- a) The most common method uses a staff of five lines with the four spaces between. Notes written on the staff represent levels of pitch and duration of sound, eg.



- b) Graphic notation is used where precision is not so necessary. Symbols can be invented to indicate the quality of the sound in a pictorial manner, eg.

 for a long shake on a tambourine

 for a short slide upwards (eg. up a xylophone)

- c) Other common types of notation include guitar chords and steel pan notations.

OSTINATO

A rhythmic and/or melodic pattern repeated continuously as an accompaniment in part of, or throughout, a piece of music.

PENTATONIC SCALE

A scale consisting of only five different notes that happen to follow the scheme of the black notes on the piano keyboard, the first note of the scale being the first of the group of three. It is widely used in folk music of several cultures and the following groupings are common: CDEGA, FGACD, GABDE.

PHRASE

A part of a musical 'sentence'. It can usually be sung or played in one 'breath', and is shown in notation with this sign over the notes concerned:



Glossary

PITCH

The height or depth of a musical note. High pitched notes such as those on a descant recorder are notes of high frequency vibrations; low pitched notes are of low frequency.

PULSE

The regular, reiterated beat felt through music.

QUAVER

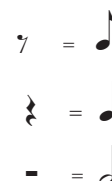
The term use for this note: 

It is a rhythmic unit half the length of a crotchet. These notes are often joined together and are often an indication of a faster speed, eg.



REST

A period of silence occurring anywhere in a piece of music. Some rests are written here with their note equivalents to indicate the length of the silence.



RHYTHM

The longs and shorts of sound including perhaps beat and accent. A rhythmic pattern can consist of various durations, eg.



The word 'rhythmic' is sometimes used to describe music with a strong beat or pulse.

RONDO

A structure much used in music where the main musical idea comes 'round and round' again, eg.



Glossary

SCALE

A succession of consecutive notes ascending or descending. The most commonly used traditional scales are the major scale and the minor scale. You can get a feel of the difference in the sound of each by playing on the piano or xylophone: major scale C to C; minor scale A to A.

SOUND SOURCE

A term used to indicate any object that makes a sound that can be used in a controlled way for musical purposes. It may range from conventional instruments and voices to objects like comb and paper and water dripping from a tap.

STAVE

The five lines on, above and below which notes are placed to indicate levels of pitch.



TIMBRE

A term used to indicate the 'colour' and quality of a sound. For example, a high, tinkling triangle has an entirely different timbre to a low, heavy, woolly toned bass drum, or a xylophone played with hard wooden then soft felt beaters.

TIME SIGNATURE

The name given to the two numbers at the beginning of a piece of music, to the right of the clef sign. It shows how many beats to the bar and what sort of beats they are.

eg. 2 = 2 beats in the bar
4 = the code number/symbol for crotchets
Therefore 2 crotchet beats in a bar

3 = 3 beats in the bar
4 = the code number/symbol for crotchets
Therefore 3 crotchet beats in a bar

6 = 6 beats in the bar
8 = the code number/symbol for half a crotchet - a quaver
Therefore 6 quaver beats in a bar

(These are often grouped in two lots of three giving a pulse of two).