The Tin Can Rhythm Band

Lesson plan description
Students will explore the connections between the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) environmental message and values through reusing manufactured objects or using found objects as percussion instruments. Students will learn to play percussion together and vary such elements as rhythm, pace, volume and texture. Students will reflect on the application of the 3Rs conservation message in their own lives. Students will experiment with found or reused instruments to make a percussive backing to a 3Rs message.

Year levels
Early Years (5–7 years)

Duration
2 x 30 minutes

Explicit values focus
• Care and Compassion
• Doing Your Best
• Fair Go
• Respect
• Responsibility
• Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion

Key Learning Areas
• The Arts
• English
• Studies of Society and Environment
• Technology

Lesson plan 1

Getting started

Activity 1: Making reuse of what we’ve got
Show students some percussion instruments and explain that a percussion instrument is an object that makes a sound when it is hit, shaken, rubbed or scraped. Ask the students to come up with answers to the following question: ‘What could we do if the school wanted to create a new percussion band but there was no money to buy instruments?’ Students reinforce the values of ‘fair go’ and ‘respect’ by not shouting out answers and by respecting others’ contributions to the class brainstorm.

Show the students some objects from around the classroom such as pencils, textured and untextured blocks, a small rubbish bin, and thin mouse mats, and ask them for ideas on how these items might be used to make a sound. For example, mouse mats can be shaken to make a sound like a wobble board. Select a couple of students as demonstrators to try out the suggestions as they are made. Ask the students to identify whether each sound was made by the object being hit by something, or by it being shaken, rubbed or scraped.
Introduce further objects such as empty food cans and containers, disposable chopsticks, cellophane wrapping, plastic bags, rubber bands, and bottle tops. Ask the students for further suggestions about how sounds could be made with these objects. Examples may include banging together pairs of cans, shaking a plastic container containing bottle tops, crumpling up cellophane, rubbing a chopstick along the ridges on the side of a can, or stretching a plastic bag over a can, securing it with a rubber band and tapping it with a chopstick.

Allow some time now for students to make some instruments such as shakers. You may wish to make some instruments such as plastic bag drums beforehand. Ensure that there are sufficient instruments for the third activity.

Activity 2: The 3Rs – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Ask the students what would usually happen with the empty cans and other items. Some may be recycled, some may be reused but others will go in the rubbish. Explain that the 3Rs help us to remember how to stop too many things going straight into the rubbish, thus helping us to save resources, energy and money.

To ‘reduce’ means living carefully so that we have less rubbish to get rid of, such as buying items without a lot of packaging, taking your own bag to put shopping in, making cards and presents for people, and borrowing and sharing rather than buying things. To ‘reuse’ means finding another use for something rather than throwing it away, such as composting food scraps or using milk cartons to plant seedlings. ‘Recycling’ is when waste, such as aluminium cans or glass, is collected and melted down in order to be used in manufacturing.

In small groups, ask students to decide which of the 3Rs has been used so far and why. Ask them to provide a summary of their conclusions to the class. If not all students have come to the conclusion of ‘reuse’, lead the discussion to this point.

Discuss which values are reflected in reusing items, such as showing responsibility by taking care of the environment.

Discovering

Activity 3: The Tin Can Rhythm Band starts playing percussion

Prior to the following activity, get the students to develop a behaviour code to reinforce the values ‘responsibility’, and ‘respect’. This might include not making random noise with instruments, working together, taking turns, listening to suggestions, being inclusive, sharing instruments, and resting instruments on the floor when they are not being played.

- Hand out instruments to students once they are sitting in a circle.
- Warm up by setting up a beat and learning to play together. Lead with an instrument which gives a clear beat, such as a wooden spoon on a rubbish bin, or use a suitable song already learned.
- Practise playing faster or slower; louder or quieter. Make instructions clearer to the students by, say, standing up for louder, sitting down for quieter.
- Listen to see if any of the children are confident enough to lead these activities. If so, give them a turn.
- Swap instruments every so often so that everyone gets a chance to play something different.
Bringing it together

Activity 4: Reflection

Have the students reflect on the original question ‘What could we do if the school wanted to create a new percussion band but there was no money to buy instruments?’ This will also allow them to reflect on what they have learnt about how they need to behave with each other in order to help a band work well.

The following values may be relevant to the reflection.

- **Doing your best**: Why did we all join in?
- **Fair go**: What would happen if some people wanted to play loudly all the time?
- **Respect**: Why did we swap instruments?
- **Responsibility**: How are we showing responsibility by ‘reusing’?
- **Understanding, tolerance and inclusion**: Why might some children be more likely to make their own instruments?

Lesson plan 2

Getting started

Activity 1: ‘Everyone’s important’ warm up

Run a brief refresher with the students on their percussion band behaviour code using ‘values’ words.

- Put percussion instruments used previously near at hand but far enough out of the way not to distract.
- Use a ‘call and response’ activity, which involves using everyone’s name. Call the first child’s name quite slowly, clapping on each syllable at the same time. Everyone immediately copies this, saying name and clapping syllables. Repeat this for each student. Look at each child as their name is called and try to keep the pace steady.
- Pick up instruments and substitute them for clapping while going round the circle with names again.
- Change instruments and do it quietly.
- Change instruments and go more quickly.

If there is time, go the other way around the circle. In future sessions, as they go around the circle instead of the teacher leading, students say their own name and everyone responds.

Activity 2: Using resources carefully

Explain that everything we have and everything we use comes originally from our natural resources, such as soil, water, air, plants, animals and minerals. Play a version of the game of ‘animal, mineral, vegetable’ to find out if students know where a few everyday products originate such as paper, plastic bags, woollen jumpers, and aluminium cans. As the students guess correctly, put each object into its correct pile. As a challenge, ask the students to think of something that they have or use that doesn’t use natural resources.

Explain that some natural resources are renewable, but that some cannot be replaced. Ask them to think about the origins of various natural resources in terms of the question: ‘If we use it carefully can it be replaced?’
renewables can easily become non-renewables if they are not used carefully; for example, soil can be eroded or contaminated, water and air polluted, plant or animal species exterminated. Ask students to think of a way that each item could be used more carefully by either reducing, reusing or recycling.

**Discovering**

**Activity 3: The Tin Can Rhythm Band makes a big noise about a big issue**

In pairs, ask students to come up with examples of reducing consumption (turning off lights, taking shorter showers, using public transport or walking, or growing their own vegetables); reusing everyday items (taking their own bags when shopping, washing out food containers and using them to store small items, composting food); or recycling, (putting cans, paper, glass and plastic in the right collection bin).

In small groups, ask them to take on the challenge of coming up with a short slogan promoting the 3Rs message. If time is limited, ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’ itself may be used.

Using percussion, the students explore ways of adding to the slogan by singing or chanting. They then try different instrument mixes, different rises and falls in volume, or different paces, as per the previous lesson.

**Bringing it together**

**Activity 4: Reflection**

Ask the students to discuss, using values words, what they have learned about making the band work well, and how we can work together to use resources carefully. By connecting the common role of values like respect, responsibility, sharing, inclusion, care and a fair go, students can create a shared message about the importance of environmental sustainability through music.

**Notes for teachers**

- Ideas for recycled musical instruments: 
  - [www.rhythmweb.com/homemade/](http://www.rhythmweb.com/homemade/)
  - [www.recycling-guide.org.uk/activities.html](http://www.recycling-guide.org.uk/activities.html)
- Any video of the group ‘Stomp’ is inspiring for this kind of percussion work (there are many on the web).

Songs to listen to: [www.songsforteaching.com/environmentsongs.htm](http://www.songsforteaching.com/environmentsongs.htm)

- The UK ‘Sing Up’ organisation website allows you to search their Song Bank for specifics such as KS1 (suited to 5–7-year-olds) and PSHE (personal, social and health education). Look for example, ‘The Conservation Rap’. You will need to register to access materials. [www.singup.org](http://www.singup.org)