



Recycled Rhythms Workshop

ABOUT SCOTT KESSEL

Scott Kessel has been playing drums for 25 years, making instruments for almost as long, and dumpster diving since he was old enough to climb into them by himself. As percussionist for Rani Arbo & daisy mayhem, Kessel plays the “Drumship Enterprise,” a recycled kit featuring a cardboard box snare, Danish butter cookie tin cymbals, tin cans, a bottlecap shaker, and a suitcase bass drum. A 20-year veteran teacher, Kessel is a Connecticut Master Teaching Artist, as well as an exhibit designer for children’s museums.

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WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

During this 45 to 90 minute workshop, kids will make two or three instruments from recycled materials. If time permits, we will “recycle” rhythms and songs from around the world — and then we’ll strike up the whole recycled band. (If space and circumstances permit, we can organize a grand finale parade).

Optimal age range: Recycled Rhythms is ideal for 2nd to 5th graders, but can be tailored to any age group.

Workshop size: The workshop size is limited only by the number of supplies and volunteers available (we’ve had as few as 5 and as many as 200 kids). It’s important to know the projected size in advance so we can tailor the format accordingly.

Volunteers: For a class of 20 to 30, it’s best to have 3 or 4 adults or teens to cut tape and help kids assemble instruments. The faster we make our instruments, the more time we have to learn rhythms and play them. The younger the children, the more volunteers we need.

WHAT WE’LL MAKE

Drumship Enterprise: To make a mini-“Drumship Enterprise,” kids can use almost any recycled item that is not sharp or dirty (tin cans, plastic jugs, yoghurt cups, spring water bottles, small cardboard boxes, etc.) We tape 3 to 5 items together, attach the drumships to the kids’ waists with a belt made of cloth or tape, and play them with pencils (un-sharpened, using the eraser end).

Wooden Harmonica: This sounds a lot like a kazoo, or a blade of grass blown between your thumbs. It’s made from two tongue depressors, one wide rubber band, two twist ties, and masking tape. It takes 10 minutes, max.

Shakers: These can be made with a variety of (clean) recyclables. The shaker material can be rice, popcorn, pebbles, seeds, sand, etc. For a large group, we’d make these assembly-line style, with volunteer-staffed “stations” along a long table.

HOW WE’LL RUN THINGS

Usually, we start with the wooden harmonica, since it’s easy, quick, and satisfying. Parents and/or volunteers distribute supplies to each child, while Scott calls out step-by-step instructions. Drumship-making (with a group of 10-30 kids) starts by dumping all the recyclables on the ground or in the middle of the room. Then, we explore our collection, hitting and dropping items to hear what noises they make. Kids then take turns selecting items (by table or group), and then start taping. We add the belts last (or skip them, if there’s no parade planned). Once everyone has an instrument built, we learn some rhythms from around the world. Scott teaches in a call-and-response style; he often uses verbal patterns to help kids pick up the rhythms quickly. He also teaches them how to listen, and how to stop and make silence as well. If time allows, the group can learn more rhythms and a song from Brazil or Ghana.

SUPPLY LISTS

DRUMSHIP SUPPLIES (for promoter and/or kids to supply)

- cans of all sizes — from cat food/tuna to soda, to large coffee cans (watch out for sharp edges!)
- spring water bottles — small to medium
- plastic containers (with or without lids) — any shape and size, from film
- cannisters and yoghurt cups to old Tupperware and buckets
- cardboard boxes — small to medium sizes
- cardboard or plastic tubes — toilet paper, paper towel, mailing tubes
- anything else that sounds good!

NB: We'll need 3-5 items per child; 1 1/2 to 2, 30-gallon garbage bags full of recyclables is about right for 20-30 kids. All recyclables should be clean!!

MORE DRUMSHIP SUPPLIES (for promoter to supply)

- unsharpened pencils for drumsticks, two per child
- clear mailing/packing tape for attaching recyclables, ideally with tape cutter built into the dispenser. Plan on one roll per group of 5 people.
- scissors, several pairs, if tape dispensers have no cutting edge
- unpopped popcorn, rice, beans to add that shaker sound (2 -3 lbs per 20-30 kids)
- belts for the drumships make the parade possible. Ideally, they're made from 3-inch-wide strips of colorful fabric ribbon or cloth, 4 to 5 feet long, one per student. If cloth is not available, please provide extra tape to make straps.

WOODEN HARMONICA SUPPLIES

- tongue depressors — NOT popsicle sticks — (two per child)
- rubber bands, 1/4 inch wide flat kind (one per child)
- masking tape (each harmonica needs about 6-8 inches of tape; 2 rolls is plenty)
- twist ties (two per child)
- crayons or stickers (optional) for decoration, especially for younger kids

SHAKER SUPPLIES (if we focus on this as a separate project; otherwise, these will be made spontaneously with the drumships)

- small to medium size metal or plastic containers with lids (if not supplied above)
- unpopped popcorn, rice, beans (2 -3 lbs per 20-30 kids, if not supplied above)
- electrical tape, in black, red, green — an assortment of colors

NB: you can get film canisters with lids at camera stores for free, in bulk.

RECYCLED RHYTHMS WORKSHOP Promo Blurb:

In this hands-on workshop, we'll make a wooden "harmonica" and a wacky, found-object drum set with percussionist Scott Kessel from the band Rani Arbo & daisy mayhem. Along with cans, bottles, cardboard boxes, pencils, and rubber bands, we'll recycle rhythms from around the world into beats of our own — and then we'll strike up the whole, recycled band!