



## Percussive Pods (art +music; art + history)

**Rattle:** A percussion instrument consisting of resonant objects enclosed in a container such that when it is shaken, the parts strike against each other, producing sounds.

Rattles are the only musical instrument found throughout the world. While the physical forms of rattles vary, the prominence and uses of them are very consistent. Most cultures have some sort of rattle that is given to infants as a toy, or as a protective magical tool. Traditions in Africa, Asia and North America all included rattles for ritual purposes. Native South Americans believed the sound of a rattle was the voice of surrounding spirits or deities. Rattles are also believed to activate magical properties in the seeds, herbs, beads or stones they carried.

Some interesting variations of rattles include the Cocoon Rattles of the Pascola people of Mexico. Pascola dancers wear leg rattles, or *teneboim*, made from the cocoons of giant silk moths. Pebbles and sand are put into the cocoons to make them rattle.

Small gourd rattles are worn on dancer's legs in Zimbabwe in order to underscore the rhythm of their feet in counterpoint to the drums. In Native North America, many dancers wear rattles on their legs not only as decoration, but also as a rhythmic accompaniment to the singers and drummers during the dance.

From this project, students will learn about working with clay in the slab form, as well as about carving. Texture and pattern will be explored, as well as creative experimentation with clay beads, beans, rice and other sound-producing items placed within the rattles.

**Grade Levels** K-12

*Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust as needed.*



### Materials

Blick® White Moist Talc Firing Clay, 50-lb, (30534-1050); 2 lbs per student

Wire Clay Cutter (30327-1018)

Wooden Rolling Pin, 10" (30345-1010); five to share across class

Pro Needle Tool (34920-1063)

Blick® Artists' Acrylics, 6-Color Sets, need one each:

Earth Color Set (00624-2009)

Basic Set (00624-1029)

Blick® Economy Golden Taklon Flat , 6-brush set (05168-0059); share four sets across class

Blick® No. 12 Heavyweight Canvas 36" wide (07301-1036); need length to cover tables

Cornstarch

### Optional Materials

Amaco® Stonex™ White Clay, 25-lb bag (33247-1025) as a self-hardening clay option

Clay Thickness Strips (30323-1009)

Loop Tool, Round (30328-1005)

Amaco® Textured Slab Molds (32963-)

Mayco® Press Tools (30390-)

Makin's® Clay Texture Sheets, set of 4 (34964-1003)

## Preparation

1. Cover the tables with canvas to keep the clay from sticking.
2. Divide the clay using a wire clay cutter. You will need approximately 2 lbs per student.
3. Assemble the texture-making supplies.
4. Have a bowl of cornstarch and brushes available.

## Process

1. Roll slabs of Blick® White Moist Talc Firing Clay or Amaco® Stonex air-dry clay no thinner than 1/4". Clay thickness strips positioned on either side of the rolling pin will help you roll slabs of even thickness.
2. Impress or roll various textures into the slabs while they are still soft. Use texture molds, embossed wallpaper samples, press tools, leaves, wire mesh — any interesting texture will work. Remember, the fun is in the experimentation!
3. Roll small clay pellets to be enclosed in the rattle. Brush the pellets with cornstarch to keep them from sticking. Vary the sizes in order to alter the sounds they will make. If students are using air-dry clay, substitute rice, beans, beads or small pebbles.
4. Form the clay slab into any shape. Ideas:
  - Experiment with shapes that might fit the hand well, long shapes such as rain-sticks, or rounded shapes such as gourds. Make rattles that look like seed pods or cocoons.
  - Slabs can be formed around bunched-up paper towels. Remove the forms if using air-dry clay; if the clay is to be fired, the paper towels will burn away.
  - Round shapes can be made by rolling a ball, slicing it in half with a wire clay cutter, then carving the clay from the inside with a loop tool. Join the two hollow halves back together.
5. Whenever pieces of clay are joined, they must be "scored" in order to seal properly. Score the edges by scratching the surface with a fork or needle tool where the two



parts meet. Apply a mixture of a small amount of water and a little clay (known as "slip") over the score marks to act as a "glue" between the joined pieces.

6. Firing clay will require that a very small hole be pierced with a needle tool somewhere in the body of the rattle to allow steam to escape. Before closing the form completely, insert the clay pellets.
7. If using firing clay, allow the pieces to completely dry and fire to bisque temperature (cone 04) or above. If using air-dry clay, the pieces should dry for at least two days.
8. Finish the rattles by applying acrylic paint. Using a dry brush and paint with no added water, lightly cover the higher textures on the surface. Leave the lower areas of the imprint the natural color of the clay for a beautiful contrast that emphasizes the design.
9. Discover the various sounds your rattles make!

## Options

- Use metallic acrylic paint to make rattles that appear to be cast from metal. Recommend [Sargent Art® Metallic Acrylics](#), 8-oz, assorted colors (00730-)
- Paint the entire rattle a dark base color first, then brush over raised areas with a light or metallic color.



## National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

**K-4** Students know the differences between materials, techniques and processes.

**5-8** Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

**9-12** Students apply media, techniques and processes with sufficient skill, confidence and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

Content Standard #4 Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

**K-4** Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures.

**5-8** Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.

**9-12** Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.

Content Standard #6 Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

**K-4** Students identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum.

**5-8** Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts.

**9-12** Students compare characteristics of visual arts within a particular historical period or style with ideas, issues or themes in the humanities or sciences.

