



EDUCATOR GUIDE



Recycled Percussion

This guide is geared toward teachers of grades 6 - 10

Supported by:



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About This Guide

Use this guide to help your students anticipate, investigate, and reflect upon your live performance experience. This guide is geared toward teachers of grades 3 - 8.

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The great thing about the arts is that they can often evolve to meet their context. That means that many of the activities shared are flexible to a lot of different contexts depending on how you choose to frame them in your class. We know you all are experts on your classroom and students, so we invite you to use these lessons and activities as guideposts and adapt them to fit your classroom management style, range of student ability, and time constraints.

LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Rhythm, Percussion, Found Object Instruments
Social Studies: Drumming in history and culture
Science: Sound waves

LEARNING STANDARDS ICON KEY



Educators, we invite you to share with us what you did in your classroom around this guide or the production. You can email eschildkret@portlandovations.org or reach us via [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

We want to hear and see what great learning is happening in your classrooms.

Introducing the Performance

It is often helpful to share some context with your students before they attend a live performance. Read below for more information on the performance you're coming to see.

About the Performance

Recycled Percussion began in 1995 when drummer Justin Spencer formed the band to perform in his high school talent show in Goffstown, New Hampshire. Justin was looking for a way to be really creative and decided to riff on the idea of playing on plastic buckets like he'd seen in the subways of New York City. For his own band, Justin kept adding more and more instruments, expanding on the New York style of street percussion. Since its humble beginnings, Recycled Percussion and its junk rock music have become a national phenomenon, starting with the band's smash hit performances on America's Got Talent in 2009. The four-man band was featured on the cover of USA Today and voted National Act of the Year a record-breaking six times. Since then, Recycled Percussion has gained worldwide recognition, performing over 6,000 shows and events in more than fifteen countries. Along with performances in Las Vegas, the band has appeared on Carson Daly, Today, China's Got Talent, the Latin GRAMMY® Awards, the 2017 Super Bowl, and a huge show at the 2019 World Scout Jamboree in West Virginia with over 40,000 audience members from more than 150 countries. Whatever you may have thought about drum music before, be ready to have your mind expanded by the explosive, kinetic and brain-rattling excitement of Recycled Percussion.

Chaos and Kindness

Beyond its intense and inventive musical style, Recycled Percussion is committed to social responsibility. The band gives back to its community through outreach and brings its positive message to children to pursue their dreams. They have charitable arm called the Recycled Percussion Foundation and a TV show called Chaos & Kindness, which showcases people in need, musical performances and charitable acts. The band has also opened in Laconia, New Hampshire a new storefront that they have called Chaos & Kindness.

What To Expect

The Performance

- The performance is 60 minutes long
- The performers use a variety of objects to create rhythms, including drums, barrels, and ladders.

The Sound

- Recycled percussion perform rhythms and music live using both musical instruments and found objects.
- Rhythms are upbeat and energetic. The sound may be loud, especially when performers are drumming on metal objects like ladders.

The Lights

- The performance features dramatic, colorful lighting.
- The stage may be dimly lit at times to emphasize specific performers or instruments, and brightly lit other times.
- This performance includes flashing lights.

Resources

- Plan your visit to Merrill Auditorium: <https://portlandovations.org/about/accessibility-merrill-auditorium/>
- Learn more about accessibility at Portland Ovation: portlandovations.org/about/accessibility/



Being an Audience Member

An audience member is a part of a larger community – an audience – and you all work together to create your theater experience. Audience members play a special and important role in the performance. The performers are very aware of the audience while they perform. Sharing their hard work and joy with you is one of the best parts of being a performer. Each performance calls for different audience responses. Lively bands, musicians and dancers may desire audience members to clap and move to the beat. Other performers require silent focus on the stage and talking from the audience can be distracting. A theater is designed to magnify sound and even the smallest whispers can be heard throughout the auditorium. Recycled Percussion highly encourages clapping and laughing at the parts of the performance that you enjoy, and may even invite you to clap or stomp along with the beat.

As you enjoy the show, think about being a part of the performance.

- What are the differences between attending a live performance and going to a movie or watching television?
- What are some different types of live performances? How many can you name?
- What kind of responses might an audience give to different types of performances?
- What are the different cues that a performer will give you so that you know how to respond? For example, might they bow or pause for applause?



The interior of Merrill Auditorium

Essential Questions

Who are Recycled Percussion?

Learn about Recycled Percussion from the band themselves! Below are their answers to some frequently asked questions.

What exactly is “junk rock”? What are its origins?

There is no official definition for “junk rock” and it isn’t a specific genre of music. But think about drum riffs played on buckets, ladders or even the kitchen sink, and the noise from power tools, grinders, and more. Musically, the gritty sounds of this dirtier version of a traditional drum kit sound great. That’s what creates the junk rock sound.

How did you and your group members get together?

We wanted to take typical street performing to another level, so we entered our high school talent show. In our performance, we took some ideas from the New York City street performers and embellished them. It was something that our hometown hadn’t seen before. We thought it was going to be a one-time deal, but then we got a gig, then another and another. It’s been like that for over twenty years.

What are your musical backgrounds and influences?

Justin’s dad is a drummer, so he grew up with music around the house. After attending his first concert, The Ramones at age four, his parents bought him his own drum kit. As a kid, he wanted to be like his dad; and his dad was in a band. Justin practiced so that he could also be in a band, too. Aside from his typical “man crushes” on bands like Rush, Van Halen and Led Zeppelin, it was all about being just like his dad. Ryan’s father was also a drummer, and he followed that path, too.

How do you prepare for the physical demands of your high-energy performances?

We spend a lot of time in the gym. We are straightedged guys, so we don’t drink or do drugs. It is important to us to focus on our health so that we can maintain the performance level our fans expect. We use that energy to keep the show new, fresh, and exciting in the spotlight

What was it like to be on America’s Got Talent?

America’s Got Talent was a really cool experience for us because it challenged us creatively. We weren’t a singing or comedy act. We didn’t have the material. If you’re singing, all you have to do is think, “What song am I going to sing next week?” Every time you advance on America’s Got Talent, you had seven days to come up with another “wow factor.” That’s what that show is based on. It forced us to dig down deep and think of something really cool that we could do.

What charities and other activities are you involved with and how do you use your band to support them?

We have our own Recycled Percussion Foundation, which is focused on creating a more positive environment by making a difference within communities across the country. When the chaotic world of a rock and roll band meets kindness, incredible things happen. The foundation has helped families and children from all over by constructing the world's largest anti-bullying sign, facilitating an insane toy drive across four states, delivering cookies to patients with cancer, our organic acts of kindness, and much more. We are dedicated to creating insanely cool life experiences for those in need, and we highlight our mission on our self-produced TV Show, Chaos & Kindness. Our ultimate goal is to inspire people everywhere to give back within their own communities and to make the world a more prolific place.

What do you want your young audiences to take away from the performance?

Don't let anyone convince you that you have to conform to society. Whatever your dreams are, pursue them and never waver until you achieve them. Just don't over think the process. Go for it and believe in it. If you believe, you'll keep going. Nothing is guaranteed, but don't give up.

What is Sound?

Sound is anything that can be heard, like the rumble of cars on the road, the voice of someone speaking, or the complex rhythms of a drum. For a sound to be made and heard, three things need to happen:

1. An object vibrates. A vibrating object makes tiny, very fast back-and-forth movements. For example, when a musician strums guitar strings, the strings vibrate. The vibration moves the surrounding air and produces waves of sound.
2. The sound waves pass into a medium. A medium is any substance through which the waves can travel. Sound waves may travel through many mediums. These include air, water, and solid objects. Sound waves pass through mediums in all directions.
3. Some kind of receiver, such as the ear of a person, picks up sound waves. The ear changes the sound waves into signals that travel to the brain. The brain understands these signals as sound.

Sound waves can travel faster or slower depending on what medium they are traveling through. In air at a temperature of 70° F (21° C) sound travels at a speed of 1,129 feet (344 meters) per second. This means that it takes sound about five seconds to travel one mile. In warmer air sound travels faster. Sound travels even faster through water and solid mediums such as iron and stone.

Every sound has three basic properties: pitch, intensity, and quality. The pitch of a sound is how high or low it is. Faster vibrations cause sounds with a higher pitch. The intensity of sound is how loud or soft it is. Intensity depends on the strength of the vibrations. Stronger vibrations cause louder sounds. The quality, or timbre, of a sound is how harsh or pleasant a sound seems. Pitch, intensity, and timbre describe all sounds, from screeching car brakes to beautiful music.

Try an experiment: To see and hear sound waves in action, hold a flexible wooden ruler against the edge of flat surface like a desk or table so that the ruler hangs over the edge. Hold the ruler in place with one hand, and with the other, push down on the end hanging over the edge. Listen for the sound and watch the ruler vibrate. Now move the ruler so that more or less is hanging over the edge. How does the movement of the ruler change? How does the sound change?

How old is drumming as an artform?

Historians and anthropologists believe that the drum may have been humans' earliest instrument. Drums and other percussion instruments (instruments that the player hits with their hands or with beaters) play a role in nearly every genre of music, spanning thousands of years. Most scholars believe that the original purpose of the drum was to communicate, especially over long distances. Virtually every culture from ancient to modern times has used drums for a multitude of purposes, including religious rituals, social gatherings, sporting events, feasts, military, and special ceremonies. Among the earliest known examples of percussion instruments are idiophones (instruments that produce sound through the vibration of their own body) made from mammoth bones. Found in present-day Belgium, these artifacts are thought to date back to 70,000 B.C.E, when modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, began migrating out of Africa. Sound waves can travel faster or slower depending on what medium they are traveling through. In air at a temperature of 70° F (21° C) sound travels at a speed of 1,129 feet (344 meters) per second. This means that it takes sound about five seconds to travel one mile. In warmer air sound travels faster. Sound travels even faster through water and solid mediums such as iron and stone.

The earliest evidence of frame drums—drums made by stretching animal skin over a hollow frame—dates back to 5,500 B.C.E. China. During this time, agriculture was spreading throughout the world and humans were settling into communities for the first time. Artifacts from China suggest that percussionists played drums made from alligator skin stretched over a sturdy shell like a pottery water vessel or hollowed out wood. Art and artifacts from ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome show the use of drums in religious ceremonies and cultural gatherings.

Here in Maine, Wabanaki peoples created the first music of Ckuwaponahkiyik, the People of the Dawn-land. According to some stories, the melodies of birdsong and woodpeckers pounding on trees inspired Wabanaki musicians to imitate the sounds. Music and drumming in Wabanaki communities, including Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, and Abenaki Nations connects to storytelling, history, spirituality, dance, healing, and artistic traditions. Today, groups like the [Cipelahq Ehpicik](#), the Thunder Women, and the [Burnurwurbskek Singers](#) continue drumming and music traditions, and propel percussion into the future with contemporary music.



PRE-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Here are some ideas for lesson activities that expand on the essential questions, topics, and themes of Recycled Percussion.

Glossary

Share these words and their definitions with your students before watching the performance.

Beat: In music, the beat is the basic unit of time.

Beaters: In drumming, beaters are any objects used to strike a drum to produce sound, like drumsticks and felted mallets.

Downbeat: The first beat of a measure in music. A conductor usually indicates the downbeat with a strong, downward stroke of their hand or baton.

Drum: A percussion instrument characterized by a stretched skin, or drum head that may be beaten, rubbed or scraped to produce musical sound.

Drum Kit or Set: A collection of different size drums and other percussion instruments, such as cymbals, that are played by one person using hands, feet, and beaters.

Percussion: The striking of one object against another to create sound. A percussion instrument is an instrument that a person strikes with their hand or a beater.

Pitch: The degree of height or depth of a tone or sound, depending on how quickly a vibration is produced.

Riff: A short line of rhythmic music played on instruments and repeated in the song, setting the tone or feel of the song.

Upbeat: The unaccented beat, or the last beat of a musical measure. A conductor often indicates the upbeat by moving their hand or baton in an upward motion.

ACTIVITY: Guess the Rhythm

This game offers a fun way to introduce rhythm and encourage collaboration.

Materials:

Enough open space for students to sit in a circle.

Procedure:

1. Invite students to sit in a circle on the floor. Join students on the floor and clap in a simple rhythm (a steady beat is easiest to begin with). Invite students to join you in clapping and encourage students to try and clap at the exact same time. Practice clapping in unison until students are comfortable with it.
2. Select a student to be the guesser. The guesser will attempt to guess who is leading the clapping. Ask the guesser to shut their eyes and ears and silently point to a student who will lead the clapping.
3. Invite the leader to begin clapping and the rest of the class to join. When students are clapping in unison, ask the guesser to rejoin the group. Invite them to guess who is the leader.
4. Repeat this activity until everyone who wants to guess has guessed and everyone who wants to lead has led.
5. If your students are great at clapping in unison, consider adding a second leader and challenging students to switch leaders at some point during the clapping without the guesser noticing.

Reflection:

- What strategies did you use when clapping in unison?
- What did you look and listen for when trying to guess who was the leader?
- What could we do next time we play this game to be more effective leaders, clappers and guessers?



ACTIVITY: Rhythm Tapestry

Using simple body percussion like clapping and tapping, this activity encourages a class to work together to create complex rhythms. It is loosely based on the improv game, Machine where students use repetitive movements to build a single moving image.



Materials:

Space for a circle



Procedure:

1. Gather the class in a circle either sitting or standing and explain that you'll be using clapping or tapping to create a rhythm together. Introduce a few ways for students to create their rhythms—clapping their hands, tapping their chests or legs, snapping their fingers, etc. You may also want to brainstorm different rhythm patterns as a class so that students have a series of options and ideas to choose from.
2. Begin the game by clapping a slow, steady rhythm. Invite the student sitting next to you in the circle to add to your rhythm with something new using the same beat. Give that student a moment to settle in their rhythm, then invite the next student to join with a new clapping or tapping rhythm. Continue until all students are participating in the rhythm tapestry.
3. Allow the rhythm to continue for a few moments, then invite students to find a way to end their rhythm.
4. Invite another student in the circle to begin the rhythm and start again—challenge students to create a faster or slower rhythm, or to explore more complex patterns.

Reflection:

- How would you describe the rhythms we created?
- What did you think about or consider while adding your own beat to our rhythm?
- What was it like creating rhythms together?
- Would you consider the sounds we created music? Why or why not?

Note: If you have a large class, you may need to divide the group in half, with half the class acting as audience members listening and half participating, then switch.

POST-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

1. What makes Recycled Percussion different from other musical groups you have seen?
2. What surprised you about the instruments you saw on stage?
3. What kinds of materials and objects did Recycled Percussion use in their performance?
4. What skills do you think a Recycled Percussion performer must have to be able to perform well?
5. How did attending this performance reinforce ideas about music that you have learned previously? Do you have any new understanding or awareness of music after watching Recycled Percussion perform?



ACTIVITY: Zip Zap Zop

This classic warm-up game is all about rhythm. This version requires students to focus and collaborate as a class to make quick decisions while maintaining the beat.

Materials:

Space for a circle



Procedure:

1. Gather students into a circle and introduce the game. Explain that you're going to pass a beat around the circle using the words Zip, Zap, and Zop. The ultimate goal of the game is to keep the rhythm going no matter what.
2. Begin by establishing the rhythm. Have students clap out a simple, steady beat together. This will be the rhythm you'll maintain during the game.
3. Introduce Zip: Zip goes to the right. Make eye contact with the student to your right, clap your hands, and say Zip. Instruct the student to do the same to the student to their right. Pass Zip all the way around the circle.
4. Introduce Zap: Zap goes to the left. When the beat reaches you, Make eye contact with the student to your left and say "Zap." Now students can choose to Zip to the right or Zap to the left.
5. Introduce Zop: Zop goes across the circle. When the beat reaches you, make eye contact with a student across the circle, clap your hands, and say "Zop." Now students can choose to Zip to the right, Zap to the left, or Zop across the circle.
6. Continue Zip, Zap, Zopping, pausing any time the rhythm breaks down to re-establish it. Remember, maintaining the rhythm is the main goal!

Reflection:

- What did you notice about our group as we played this game?
- On a scale of 1-10, how successful were we at keeping the rhythm going?
- What strategies did you use to be successful?
- How did you use your whole body to help with clear communication? How might we apply these ideas to our other work together?

ACTIVITY: Create Your Own Balloon Drum

Create your own drum using a few simple materials and practice your own Recycled Percussion.

Materials:

Balloon
Scissors
Clean tin can with no sharp edges
Tape (electrical tape works well)
Wooden spoon or xylophone stick



Procedure:

1. Cut off the neck of the balloon and stretch it to create a wide surface.
2. Stretch balloon tightly over the open end of the can. Make sure the balloon is stretched tightly to create as flat a surface as possible.
3. Wrap tape around the edge of the balloon to hold it in place against the can.
4. Test your drum. Hit your drum with your hand, a wooden spoon, or a xylophone stick.
5. Use your drum to create your own rhythms!

Tip: You can experiment with different size cans or drum frame materials like plastic tubs or clay flowerpots to produce different sounds. Try putting materials inside the tin can – like beads, water, or rice – to change the quality of the sound.

Resources

Learn more about Rennie Harris Puremovement: <https://www.rhpm.org/>

Watch Rennie Harris in conversation on hip-hop at Stanford University: <https://youtu.be/bu6vUXWKIQ8>

Read more about hip-hop culture and history: <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/hip-hop/hip-hop-a-culture-of-vision-and-voice/>

Access a full lesson plan for 9-12 grade students connecting the poetry of hip-hop music with Shakespearean Sonnets: <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/lessons-and-activities/lessons/9-12/the-poetics-of-hip-hop/>

Explore literature on hip-hop history and culture through this handy compiled list of Library of Congress Subject Headings: <https://library.fdu.edu/c.php?g=1348752&p=9952087>

ABOUT PORTLAND OVATIONS

Portland Oventions, founded in 1931, produces dynamic performing arts events including classical music, jazz, opera, dance, theater, and Broadway. We believe that cultural enrichment should be high quality and accessible to all. Oventions collaborates with other nonprofit organizations, education systems, and the business sector to promote lifelong learning while celebrating the power and virtuosity of the performing arts. We bring the exhilaration of the performing arts into our communities with free events as part of Oventions Offstage, connecting artists and audiences. Join us at unexpected “art happenings,” classroom workshops, masterclasses, community discussions, and pre-performance lectures to explore together the relevance and connection of the performing arts to our lives.

Land Acknowledgment

Portland Oventions’ programs are presented on Wabanaki land, home of the Maliseet, Mi’kmaq, Passamaquoddy, Abenaki and Penobscot Nations, their elders past and present, and future generations.

We encourage you to learn more and take action in support of Maine’s Indigenous communities through the following organizations

[Abbe Museum](#)

Maine’s premier museum dedicated to indigenous history and culture. Their mission is to inspire new learning about the Wabanaki Nations with every visit.

[Maine-Wabanaki Reach](#)

A Native-led non-profit that supports the self-determination of Wabanaki people through education, truth-telling, restorative justice, and restorative practices in Wabanaki and Maine communities.

Created and written by Dr. Liz Schildkret

Designed by Katie Day

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We want to know what *you* thought about the performance. You can write your answers below or draw a picture on the back of this page. Thank you!

PERFORMANCE: *Recycled Percussion*

SCHOOL NAME: _____ **TEACHER NAME:** _____ **GRADE:** _____

YOUR NAME: _____ May we use your name when we share your comments? Yes__ No__

What did you like about *Recycled Percussion*? Why did you like that part?

What was something that you learned during the performance?

What would you like to tell other kids about *Recycled Percussion*?

What types of performance would you like Portland Ovation to offer in the future? (Feel free to share what type of art you are interested in (theater, dance, music), what cultures you might like to see, what topics the art might connect with, or specific artists.)

We want to know what *you* thought about the performance.
Draw a picture of a part of *Recycled Percussion* that you liked. Thank you!



YOUR NAME: _____ SCHOOL: _____ TEACHER: _____ GRADE: _____
Please scan and email to offstage@portlandovations.org or mail to Portland Ovations 120 Exchange St Portland, ME 04101

Please take a few moments to fill out this survey after you attend the performance. You can also fill it out [online here](#). Your response provides valuable insight on the impact, accessibility, and relevancy of the School-Time Performance Series and will allow us to improve and strengthen the program. Thank you.

PERFORMANCE: *Recycled Percussion*

TEACHER NAME: _____ **GRADE(S) OF STUDENTS:** _____

SCHOOL NAME: _____ **CITY/TOWN:** _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

1. From your perspective as a teacher, how would you rate *Recycled Percussion*?

☐ Excellent ☐ Very Good ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

3. What made this a valuable experience for your students? (If it wasn't, what can we do better?)

4. What was your primary reason for choosing to bring your students to *Recycled Percussion*?

- ☐ I wanted my students to experience the performing arts.
- ☐ The performance topic fit with my curriculum goals.
- ☐ The date and time of the performance fit our schedule.
- ☐ The ticket price is affordable.
- ☐ Other (please specify):

5. How did this live performance connect to or enhance your curriculum?

6. Did you use the Educators Guide provided by Portland Ovation before or after attending the performance?

☐ Yes ☐ No

7. Why or why not?

8. What improvements could we make to the Educators Guide to serve you and your classroom better?

MAIL RESPONSES TO: Portland Ovation 120 Exchange Street Portland, ME 04101
EMAIL SCANNED RESPONSES TO: offstage@portlandovations.org

9. How would you rate the following components of attending the School-Time Performance?

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Reserving & paying for tickets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication about the day of the performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrival at the venue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Departure from the venue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. What types of performances would you like to bring your students to in the future? (Feel free to share art forms, topics/themes, specific artists, etc.)?

11. A number of generous individuals and organizations make it possible for Portland Ovation to offer these School-Time Performance tickets at extremely discounted rates. Is there anything you'd like them to know in terms of your experiences or its impact on your students?