



## Mnemonics – Africa and India (Age range 14-16)

**Time required:** 60 minutes.

**Activity:** Exploring the use of mnemonics as an aid to musical learning in African and Indian drumming traditions.

**Aims:**

- To introduce the idea of using mnemonics as an aid to learning rhythms, as practiced by many traditions around the world.
- To explore how mnemonics are used as an aid to learning complex rhythms and drum strokes.

**Pupils will learn:**

- To perform drum rhythms from mnemonics.
- To maintain a part in a polyrhythmic drumming piece.

**Web links you will need:**

- [Kpanlogo](#) online drum rhythms.
- Images of [gota drumming ensemble instruments](#).
- [Information about Konnakol and a mnemonic transcription of a piece to follow/perform](#).
- Audio excerpt of [Korvai konnakkol/rhythmic solmization](#).

**Other resources you will need:**

- Hand drums (African drums or Indian drums if available).
- Gota drumming mnemonics worksheet.

**Useful information**

Apart from Western Classical music, most traditions are essentially aural, with music being passed on from generation to generation by ear. The method of learning complex rhythmic patterns in a large number of cultures is by the use of mnemonics. This commonality of approach is explored in this lesson.

The use of mnemonics (the vocalisation of onomatopoeic sounds) is particular a feature of African and Indian drumming although also used in many other cultures. The drumming traditions of both are seen as belonging to the oral tradition where sounds are verbalised in order to embed learning.

**Gota drumming:** Gota drumming originates from Benin in West Africa but is particularly associated with the Anlo-Ewe people of Ghana. Gota drumming accompanies both singing and dancing. The gota ensemble usually consists of a double clapper-less bell, an enmeshed rattle, a small, a medium and a large drum and a master drum.

In southern India the terms **Solkattu** and **Konnakol** are used to describe the vocalizing of rhythmic and drum syllables. Here the art of rhythmic recitation has developed into an exuberant and engaging musical form in its own right and has been integrated into a great deal of contemporary Indian rock music and 'global' fusion music. For more detailed information, click [here](#).

Lesson Plan Mnemonics – Africa and India (Age range 14-16)	
<b>Starter</b>	<p>Using the <a href="#">online drumming resource</a> teach the class the two Kpanlogo drum rhythms provided. Note: Kpanlogo is a West African dance style from Ghana. Ask pupils to ‘pick up’ each rhythm completely by ear (note: point out to pupils that they should ignore the cow bell rhythm heard on each track).</p> <p>Ask them how easy the rhythms were to memorise. Did they try to create different sounds on the drums? Which parts of the drum did they use? How easy was it to hear the different parts of the drum?</p> <p>Introduce the mnemonics (provided below the notation of each online rhythm) and chant the two rhythms separately, then in two groups combined. Explain that the mnemonics are used as an aid to learning by many different aural traditions around the world. They are essentially onomatopoeic, each syllable indicating the type of drum stroke required i.e.:</p> <p>‘Dom’ = a deep sound created by striking the centre of the drum.  ‘Ke’ = a lighter sound created by striking the rim of the drum (right hand).  ‘Re’ = as ‘Ke’ but using the other hand (left hand).</p> <p>Perform the two drumming rhythms together chanting and playing, then playing while thinking the mnemonics.  Explain that today pupils will be exploring the use of mnemonics in African and Indian music.</p>
<b>Main</b>	<p>Introduce African Gota drumming (using the ‘Useful information’ provided) and images of <a href="#">gota drumming ensemble instruments</a>.  Using the worksheet provided as a teaching prompt, teach each of the gota rhythms aurally:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) ‘voicing’ the mnemonics provided on the worksheet</li> <li>b) transferring them on to drums</li> </ol> <p>Discuss the use of the mnemonics. How useful were they in helping pupils to internalise the rhythms?</p> <p>Perform the cyclic gota rhythms together as a class.  Point out that the drumming tradition of South India is a particularly good example of the way in which complex rhythmic patterns are learned (see ‘Useful information’).</p> <p>Use <a href="#">‘Information about Konnakol and a mnemonic transcription of a piece to follow/perform’</a> to discuss the information and look at the mnemonics of the piece provided. Listen to the mnemonics performed as a vocal recitation (see resources) then played on morsing (known in Europe as the Jew’s Harp – an instrument used as a percussion instrument in South India).</p> <p>Why do pupils think that the rhythms are performed against a background of a shuttle loom? (It provides a regular ‘dotted rhythm’ beat and is used like the western metronome).</p> <p>Describe the rhythmic process that takes place at the end of each cycle of the tala (see ‘Explanations – Part A’, provided on the page below the mnemonic notation). The use of mnemonics is a feature of most aural drumming traditions. What are the advantages? Are there any disadvantages?</p>
<b>Plenary</b>	<p>Ask pupils to work in pairs, compose a short drum rhythm and invent mnemonics that help memorise both the rhythm and the type of drum strokes. End the lesson by asking one or two pairs to teach the rest of the class their rhythm using mnemonics. Discuss the effectiveness of the invented mnemonics.</p>

# Gota drumming patterns

<b>Count</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>&amp;</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>&amp;</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>&amp;</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>&amp;</b>
<b>Bell</b>	ken	ken	ken	ken	keken			
<b>Rattle</b>	tsa		tsa		tsa tsa			
<b>High drum</b>	ti	pe pe	ti pe	pe pe	ti	pe pe	ti pe	pe pe
<b>Med. drum</b>	ti	pe pe	ti pe	pe pe	ti	pe pe	ti pe	pe pe
<b>Low drum</b>	Ga		ga		ga		ki di	gi di

**Note on drumming mnemonics:**

**ti & ga = low sound (played in the centre of the drum)**

**Pe, ki, di, gi & di = high/open sound (played on the rim of the drum)**