

# Music of Japan

Week Six, May 18-22

Hello, Mercer Island musicians! This week we are going to explore the music of Japan. The koto is a Japanese stringed instrument that was developed in the 16th century. It has 13 strings with movable bridges. When you play, you can pluck the strings with one hand and push on the strings to “bend” the pitch with the other. We hope you enjoy learning about and making your own koto!

## Sources

### Opening Activity:

1. [Watch this video](#) to learn about the koto and see a performance by Mrs. Kashima from Northwood/Island Park!
2. [Then watch this video](#) and follow the instructions to make your own string instrument (Always get help from an adult when using scissors). Don't have a shoebox? Use a tissue box (it already has a hole in it!), another cardboard box, or a plastic container without its lid.

## Activities

<b>Beginner</b> (K-1 Recommended)	<b>Intermediate</b> (2-3 Recommended)	<b>Advanced</b> (4-5 Recommended)
<p><b>Goal:</b> Improvise with and imitate koto performance.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. After building your koto, try making different sounds on it.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Try <b>pushing on the rubber band</b> to make the note change.</li><li>b. <b>Play two bands</b> at once.</li></ol></li><li>2. Watch the koto video by Mrs. Kashima again and <b>play along with her</b>. Can you copy the way she is playing?</li></ol>	<p><b>Goal:</b> Perform a rhythmic ostinato.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. After building your koto, experiment with making different sounds on it.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Try <b>pushing on the rubber band</b> to make the note change.</li><li>b. <b>Play two bands</b> at once.</li></ol></li><li>2. <b>Scroll down to page 2</b> to look at a rhythm pattern from this song, then follow the directions for playing the rhythm along with <a href="#">Mrs. Kashima's video</a>.</li></ol>	<p><b>Goal:</b> Create a melody based on the rhythm of the song “Sakura.”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. After building your koto, experiment with making different sounds on it.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Try <b>pushing on the rubber band</b> to make the note change.</li><li>b. <b>Play two bands</b> at once.</li></ol></li><li>2. <b>Scroll down to page 2</b> to look at the rhythm pattern, then follow the directions on page 2 to make your own melody and play it along with <a href="#">Mrs. Kashima's video</a>.</li></ol>

## Extensions (Optional Activities)

**Extension 1:** [Learn how to play Janken](#), the Japanese version of Rock Paper Scissors.

**Extension 2:** [Watch a performance](#) on the shakuhachi, a Japanese flute made from bamboo.

**Movement:** Grab a large, bouncy ball and [learn the game “Anta Gata Doko Sa.”](#) Then do it yourself with [this song](#).

**Websites:** Don't forget to visit your school's music website for more musical activities!

### MISD K-5 Music Websites:

[Island Park Elementary](#)  
[Lakeridge Elementary](#)  
[Northwood Elementary](#)  
[West Mercer Elementary](#)



Have a  
wonderful  
week!

## Intermediate rhythm:



1. Tap and speak this rhythm to yourself.
2. Pluck this rhythm on your homemade koto. Try repeating it over and over again.
3. [Play along with Mrs. Kashima!](#) Pluck this rhythm over and over again while she plays “Sakura, Sakura.” **TIP: It’s slow!**
4. **BONUS:** Make this rhythm more interesting by making some notes higher and some notes lower. You can make it sound higher or lower by either:
  - a. Pressing a finger down on a rubber band (makes it higher) OR
  - b. Using tighter and looser rubber bands (tighter = higher).

## Advanced rhythm:



1. Tap and speak this rhythm to yourself.
2. Find this rhythm in [Mrs. Kashima’s performance](#). You will hear it between 2:35 – 2:47 and also between 3:32 – 3:49.
3. Tap this rhythm while Mrs. Kashima plays it on her koto. **TIP: It’s slow!**
4. Pluck this rhythm on your homemade koto.
5. Make the rhythm more interesting by making some notes higher and some notes lower. You can make your koto sound higher and lower by:
  - a. Pressing a finger down on a rubber band (makes it higher) OR
  - b. Using tighter and looser rubber bands (tighter = higher)
6. [Play along with Mrs. Kashima!](#) Play this rhythm with her at 2:35 and 3:32, adding higher and lower notes!