

## CELEBRATIONS: HAND HELD DRUM GR: 6-12 (2 LESSONS)

### **Elder Quote/Belief:**



*“I was told that the drum beat represented the mother’s heartbeat and brought balance and connection to the people. The round shape represented the circle of life. Here in the Chugach Region, there are two types of drums, either the hand held or handle, either was used depending on the location of community.”*

– Darrel Olsen, Cordova  
Native Village of Eyak Tribal Chief

### **Grade Level: 6-12**

**Overview:** Drums are played to accompany song and dance. Traditionally, the drum head was made from a seal hide, seal bladder, or halibut stomach. Some Alutiiq drums were painted with figures representing shamans’ spirit helpers, while others had carved and painted handles. – Excerpt from *The Chugach Eskimo*<sup>i</sup>

Drums were used to accompany the dances in the potlatch house. They were of the tambourine type, with a wooden rim, usually a strip about 6 inches wide, but often made simply of a bent branch. The head was of depilated seal skin and measure about 18 inches in diameter. There was a single cross-bar across the back for a handle. –Excerpt from *The Eyak Indians of Copper River Delta, Alaska*

### **Standards:**

<i>AK Cultural:</i>	<i>AK Content Science:</i>	<i>CRCC:</i>
<b>B2:</b> Make effective use of the knowledge, skills, and ways of knowing from their own cultural traditions to learn about the larger world in which they live.	<b>F1:</b> Develop an understanding of the interrelationships among individuals, cultures, societies, science, and technology.	<b>CE1:</b> Students should have knowledge of traditional and contemporary Sugpiaq/Alutiiq song, dance and performance

**Lesson Goal:** To understand the significance of the traditional drum.

**Lesson Objective(s):** Students will:

- Be able to explain what materials were used and how the drum was traditionally made.
- Create a hand held drum.
- Learn the Sugt’stun/Eyak vocabulary words.

**Vocabulary Words:** Sugt'stun Dialects

English:	Prince William Sound:	Lower Cook Inlet:	<a href="#">Eyak:</a>
Rawhide			
Drum	tramaaq	cauyaq	GAXits'
Heartbeat			(Heart) uGL

**Materials/Resources Needed:**

- Elder or Recognized Expert to share story about traditional drums and drum making
- Wooden hoop/ drum frame
- Rawhide for drum face
- Rawhide cut into strips for lacing
- Hole punch, Awl or Rotary Leather Punch
- Hammer
- Sandpaper
- Glue
- Stick for drumstick
- Suede or buckskin piece
- Padding for top of stick
- Sinew
- Tote(s)
- Towels
- If desired, drum kits can be ordered from Centralia Fur & Hide at
  - <https://furandhide.com/products/categories/drum-kits>

**Books:**

- Crowell, Aron L., *Looking Both Ways*
- Birket-Smith, Kaj, [The Chugach Eskimo](#), Pgs108-109
- Birket-Smith, K. and DeLaguna, F. [The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska](#), pgs.169-193

**Videos:**

- Alaska Native Drum Making Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MelsgBFNls>

**Teacher Preparation:**

- Invite an Elder or Recognized Expert to share story about traditional drums and drum making
- Review the way to be respectful of guest in classroom.
- If desired, purchase kits. Highly suggest ordering the kits a couple of weeks prior to the class.
- A drum is in the Celebrations Heritage Kit, but if unable to borrow the kit then best to make a hand held drum ahead of time to display for students.
- Make copies of the attached *Step-by-Step Instruction* for each student.
- Prior to class:
  - Locate all supplies needed for class.

- Soak the rawhide and lacing in water overnight.
- Optional: Download drumming music or traditional songs in the community to play while making the drums.

**Opening:** During most celebrations, the drum and rattles were used to accompany dancing. Listen as I read the following excerpts from *The Chugach Eskimo* and *The Eyak Indians of Copper River Delta, Alaska*:

“Drums and rattles were the sole musical instruments except, perhaps, for a whistle of which a single specimen of bone was found during our excavations. The drum was a tambourine consisting of a hoop over which was stretched a piece of depilated sealskin or a halibut stomach, sometimes painted with figures representing the shaman’s spirit helpers. Like other Eskimo drums it had a lateral grip, but in contradistinction to the ordinary type the grip continued across the back of the drum.” –Excerpt for *The Chugach Eskimo*<sup>ii</sup>

“Drums were used to accompany the dances in the potlatch house. They were of the tambourine type, with a wooden rim, usually a strip about 6 inches wide, but often made simply of a bent branch. The head was of depilated seal skin and measure about 18 inches in diameter. There was a single cross-bar across the back for a handle.” –Excerpt from *The Eyak Indians of Copper River Delta, Alaska*

Today, we will be making our own hand held drums.

### **Activities:**

#### **Class I:**

1. If available, introduce the Elder or Recognized Expert to share the importance of the drum, and if possible sing and drum a traditional song.
2. If the Elder is willing, they can teach the class on how to make the drum, otherwise follow the step-by-step photos that are attached.
3. Soak the rawhide and rawhide strips overnight in water before lesson.
4. Sand down the rough and sharp edges on wooden hoop.
5. Wipe off the excess water from rawhide with towels.
6. Make the holes for lacing.
  - a. Using a hole punch and hammer.
  - b. Use a block of wood to work on to prevent accidental holes on tables!
  - c. First punch the holes in the four directions, then punch a hole in the middle of two directions, then one on each side, end up with sixteen punched out holes.
  - d. Can also mark all hole placements and then hammer them out if waiting for the hole punch.
7. For Lacing
  - a. Gather the wooden hoop, rawhide and lacing.
  - b. Stretch out the lacing.
  - c. Place the hoop over the **center** of rawhide piece-flesh side up.
  - d. Start by putting start of lacing from the under the skin up towards the hoop.
  - e. Pull lace through and put lace through top to inside on direct opposite hole punch.
  - f. Pull lace taut, but not too tight.

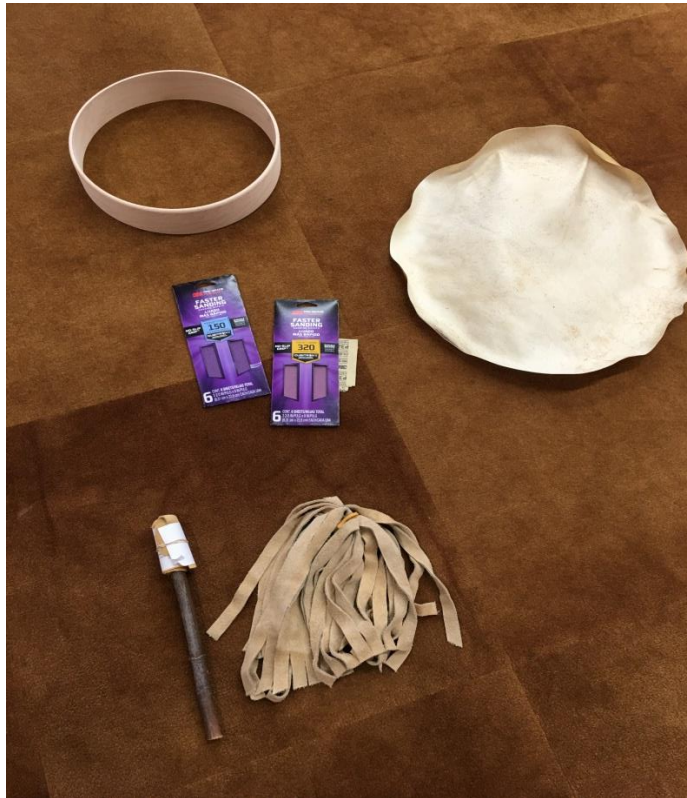
- g. Bring the lace end back to the starting point for measurement, then go back and make a slip knot at second hole to make an anchor. That slip knot is the point where you start the lacing.
  - h. Go back to the other end of the lacing, and to the right of the slip knot, pull through and then go to the opposite hole.
  - i. Spray the lacing as you are working so that the lacing stays moist.
  - j. Pulling lace through between each lacing, do not need to worry about the tension yet.
  - k. Continue working opposite all the way around, filling in the whole. **Note:** If need to add more lacing, knot together and keep going! Be sure to have some extra lacing to make the hand grip.
  - l. Once you have gone all the way around then go back and start taking the slack out of the lacing.
  - m. Once slack is out, go around and take slack out of the hide sides and tighten up.
  - n. Go around the drum laces **again** to take more of the the slack once again, similar to a tramoline. Make it quite tight.
8. Making a Hand Grip.
- a. Take the excess lacing, go across and drop the pile down and then put it on the opposite side and then pull it up and tight.
  - b. Go back and pull the slip knot free, pull the lace opposite tightly.
  - c. Grab four lacing together and wrap around the laces as much as can, then cover with the excess lacing as work around and around, up and back down up about an inch and half, then up the middle (two laces on each side) so then can wrap back down.
  - d. Grab the next four laces on back of drum and as earlier, wrap the excess lacing around and around up inch and half, up through middle and back down.
  - e.
  - f. Repeat all around this way, so making the four directions.
  - g. The last part of the lacing, if desired, make criss cross in middle and then keep a couple loops loose, so can pull the edge of lacing through and tighten all up. on last part
9. Allow drum to dry overnight in a cool place. Important **NOT** to beat on the drum before it dries thoroughly!
10. Making a Drum Stick.
- a. Gather supplies needed. Stick, padding (can be old blankets), suede, sinew, and glue.
  - b. Glue one end of stick about one inch down and all around.
  - c. Wrap padding around the end of stick that was glued.
  - d. Tie with sinew around the padding to ensure it stays.
  - e. Cover padded end with piece of suede and wrap around the edge with sinew about tight and secure.
  - f. Tie off

### **Assessment:**

- Students can explain what materials were used and how the drum was traditionally made.
- Students successfully created their own hand held drum.
- Student correctly pronounces and understands the Sugt'stun/Eyak vocabulary words.

## Step-By-Step Instructions to Make a Hand Held Drum

\*Many thanks to the Chugachmiut's Women's Healing Retreat for sharing!\*



### Gather Materials Needed:

#### FOR DRUM:

- Wooden hoop/ drum frame
- Rawhide for drum face
- Rawhide cut in strips for lacing
- Sandpaper
- Towels
- Hole punches, Awls or Rotary Leather Punch
- Hammers or Mallets
- Totes filled with water

#### FOR DRUM STICK:

- Sticks
- Padding
- Suede/buckskin piece
- Sinew
- Glue





**Step 1:** Soak the rawhide and rawhide strips overnight in water before lesson.



Rawhides soaking in water



Rawhide lacing soaking in water

**Step 2:** Sand down the rough and sharp edges on wooden hoop.



**Step 3:** Wipe off the excess water from rawhide with towels.

**Step 4:** Making the holes for lacing.



**Step 4: Hole Punch**

- Using a hole punch and hammer.
- Use a block of wood to work on to prevent accidental holes on tables!
- First punch the holes in the four directions, then punch a hole in the middle of two directions, then one on each side, end up with sixteen punched out holes.
- Can also mark all hole placements and then hammer them out if waiting for the hole punch.





**IMPORTANT:** Do **NOT** hammer when someone's fingers are still there for measurement! Notice how the person's hand is **moved away** before hammering!

**NOTE:** There are several ways to make the holes, such as; using an awl to poke holes, or even a leather punch (but be forewarned, the rawhide is quite thick and tough, so it takes a little muscle!)

### READY TO START LACING!



#### **Step 5: Lacing**

- Gather the wooden hoop, rawhide and lacing.
- Stretch out the lacing.
- Place the hoop over the **center** of rawhide piece- flesh side up.





### **Step 6: Prep**

- Place hoop on **center** of rawhide-flesh side up.

### **Step 7: Begin Lacing**

- Start by putting start of lacing from the under the skin up towards the hoop.
- Pull lace through and put lace through top to inside on direct opposite hole punch.
- Pull lace through and put lace through top to inside on direct opposite hole punch.
- Pull lace taut, but not too tight.
- Bring the lace end back to the starting point for measurement, then go back and make a slip knot at second hole to make an anchor.
- The slip knot is the point where you start the lacing.



### **Step 8: Lacing**

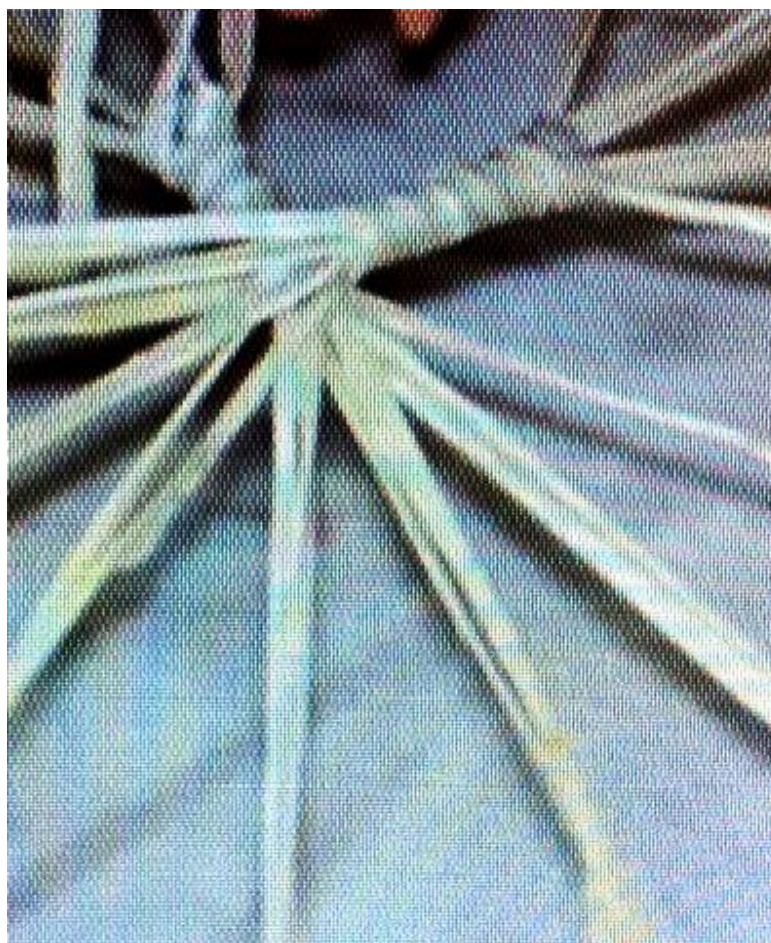
- Go back to the other end of the lacing, and to the right of the slip knot, pull through and then go to the opposite hole.
- Spray the lacing as you are working so that the lacing stays moist.
- Pulling lace through between each lacing, do not need to worry about the tension yet.
- Continue working opposite all the way around, filling in the whole as it crosses each lace.  
(NOTE: This picture shows more holes punched than what is suggested.)







- Once you have gone all the way around then go back and start taking the slack out of the lacing. Start at knot as reference point. Right lace then left lace, all the way around.
- Once slack is out, go around and take slack from hide sides on hoop by pulling on the holes.
- Go around the drum laces **again** to take more of the the slack once again, similar to a tramoline. Make it quite tight.
- Keep excess lacing for the handle.



### **Step 9: Making a Hand Grip**

- Take the excess lacing, go across and drop the pile down and then put it on the opposite side and then pull it up, center and tight.
- Go back and pull the slip knot free, pull the lace opposite tightly.
- Grab four lacing together and wrap around the laces as much as can, then cover with the excess lacing as work around and around, up and back down up about an inch and half, then up the middle (two laces on each side) so then can wrap back down.
- Continue to wrap around each of the four laces with the excess lacing- up inch and half, up through middle and back down.
- Repeat all around this way, so making the four directions.
- The last part of the lacing, if desired, make criss cross in middle and then keep a couple loops loose, so can pull the edge of lacing through and tightens up.
- Cut off excess lace.



**Step 10:** Allow drum to dry overnight in a cool place. It is very important **NOT** to beat on the drum before it dries thoroughly!



Drums made by the ladies during the Chugachmiut's Women's Healing Retreat

**NOTE:** If the desire is to make the handled drum, can use the instructions listed in the Anchorage School District's Indian Education Program booklet *Urban Native Style Eskimo Drums* located in the Celebrations kit inventory.



### **Step 11: Drum Stick**

- Gather supplies needed. Stick, padding (can be old blankets), suede, sinew, and glue.
- Glue one end of stick about one inch down and all around.
- Wrap padding around the end of stick that was glued.
- Tie with sinew around the padding to ensure it stays.
- Cover padded end with piece of suede and wrap around the edge with sinew about tight and secure. Tie off.



### **Finished Drum Stick!**

Optional: One can embellish the drum stick as desired.



Drum made by Beckie Etukeok and the fish painted by Brittany Banks

<sup>i</sup> Crowell, Aron, et.al. *Looking Both Ways*. University of Alaska Press. 2001. Pg. 200.

<sup>ii</sup> Birket-Smith, Kaj. *The Chugach Eskimo*. Nationalmuseets Publikationsfond, Kobenhavn. 1953. Pg. 109.