

Lockdown Tales Activities



A Drum

Folktale

Performed for Wonderful Beast's Lockdown Tales by Anusha Subramanyam and Prathap Ramachandra.



LEARNING TO PLAY THE DRUMS

Prathap grew up in **Bangalore**, South India and started to learn to play when he was just **seven years old** with a teacher outside of school. He says, 'it isn't a must-learn subject in school, but it is something you choose if you like it and want to learn'.

Do you play any instruments? Or is there anything you have chosen to learn outside of school? Maybe you sing with a choir, or play football with a local team. Sometimes the most interesting things we learn are the ones we find for ourselves.

This is the **Mridangam**. It is one of the oldest Indian percussion instruments, with its origins going back at least 2,000 years. The two-headed drum is popular in **South Indian** classical music called **Carnatic** music, and is the most important rhythmic accompaniment in an **ensemble** (group of players).

Instruments get **adapted** as time goes on. The one with the metal screws is like the one Prathap plays, but he has played different versions too. **What do you think the straps are for** on the one drum, **and the metal screws** on the other?

The left-hand (bass) side has two layers of skin. The drummer will cover it in a paste of semolina mixed with water each time it is played. This helps to create its unique sound. The treble side, usually the right, is smaller, and has three layers of skin. It is also covered with a paste which dries onto the surface.



This is a **Ghatam**, the other drum Prathap plays in the story. It's a large, narrow-mouthed clay water pot, often played alongside the Mridangam. It is one of the **most ancient** percussion instruments of India and versions of it are played all over the world. The pitch (that's how high or low it sounds) of the ghatam varies according to its size. The bigger the pot, the lower it sounds, and the smaller the pot the higher it sounds.

Prathap says: 'we use all 10 fingers and wrist to play on to the pot, and also use breathing techniques like pressing the pot into our tummies to get different sounds from the instrument'.

Why do you think Prathap **changes drums** for **different parts of the story**? Can you spot which drum he is playing throughout the story? There are some good clues, especially when it comes to the pot!

Send us your drumming! Use the hashtag **#LockdownTales** or email info@wonderfulbeast.co.uk
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How children learn to play the mridangam

THE FIRST STAGE: you learn to recite these words: **THA, DHI, THOM, NAM.**

The words represent the **four different sounds** of the mridangam.

THA is pronounced 'dha' and **THOM** sounds more like 'dhom'.

Konnakol is what we call it when the musicians drum with their voices to vocalise rhythms and patterns. In the story, Anusha and Prathap create a fierce argument between the washerman and his wife, using konnakol. You can hear more konnakol on Prathap's video (see link at the bottom of the page).

ACTIVITY

say each sound four times and find a different **movement** for each word.

<i>Tha tha tha tha</i>	JUMP x 4
<i>Dhi dhi dhi dhi</i>	CLAP x 4
<i>Thom thom thom thom</i>	SIT DOWN FOR ALL FOUR WORDS
<i>Nam nam nam nam</i>	JUMP UP AND PUNCH THE AIR x4

GAME

Get someone to call out the words at random, while you do the movement to match!

THE SECOND STAGE: Once children know and understand the words, they learn **sound sentences** to create **rhythms**. Try clapping and saying the words together over a steady pulse (a beat).

The words have different patterns to fit into the pulse.

*Tha kita dhi kita
Thakadimi takajonnu
Tharikita thaka!*

THE THIRD STAGE: HANDS ON THE DRUM, AT LAST!

Here is a link to a video in which Prathap plays both the **Mridangan** and the **Ghatam**, and explains how the rhythms are taught through words.

Watch how his fingers work, so fast you can hardly see them.

https://youtu.be/qGvhh_zrC2o

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