

Sierra Vista Middle School



Instrumental Music

Dear Parents,

Congratulations, your son or daughter has decided to play percussion. This letter is written to introduce you to this family of instruments and let you know what the class expectations are for percussion students.

What is percussion?

Percussion is a family of instruments that includes, but is not limited to, the drums. In our music class, students will be expected to learn and perform on the snare drum, bass drum, crash cymbals, suspended cymbal, timpani, orchestra bells, chimes and marimba. Based on the music we perform throughout the year, they will also use auxiliary instruments (woodblock, triangle, shaker, tambourine, cowbell, etc.), Latin instruments (congas, bongos, guiro, cabassa, castanets, etc.), and sound effects (slapstick, whistles, wind chimes, vibraslap, jingle bells, etc.). Based on the music we perform this year, there may also be opportunities to use the drumset, but that will be during the third trimester.

Materials used during class

During class time, students will use drum sticks and a variety of mallets on the different instruments that they will play. To practice at home, students should have their own equipment. A complete set can be obtained by purchasing the Vic Firth EP2 Intermediate Education Pack. This set includes sticks, three sets of mallets, and a case to carry them in. This is best way for students to get good quality equipment at an economical price. This can be purchased online or ordered at a music store like Jim's Music in Tustin. Other optional equipment that will help your student be successful would include a drum pad and a bell set. Sticks and mallets will be provided for students who do not have their own; however, as these are shared between multiple classes, they cannot leave the school. All other instruments and equipment will be provided by the school.

On what instruments will students perform?

Unlike other instruments in the band, each percussionist is playing a solo. There may be as many as twenty kids playing the same flute part, but there is only one musician playing the snare drum on any given piece. It's very easy to see how well-played percussion parts will make the band sound great, and conversely, how a poorly played percussion part can throw off the timing of the entire group. This puts a large responsibility on the percussionists for each piece of music we perform. Therefore, students are selected to perform on the various instruments based on their performance on class tests.

Tests

Percussionists will be tested on each piece of music that we are going to perform, just like everyone else in class. Students will be required to prepare both the snare drum part and the orchestra bells part for each performance piece (orchestra bells are a xylophone-like instrument with metal bars instead of wood). Many students who want to be "drummers" will often ignore the bells and practice only the snare drum which will have a drastic effect on their grade in class as the bells constitute a majority of their testing. The entire first trimester will be devoted to mallet play and the other instruments will only be used as we get close to the concerts. I do have a limited number of bell sets that can be checked out for home practice

If you have any questions for me regarding percussion or the band class in general, please feel free to contact me any time. Please sign the bottom of this letter to indicate you have read this letter and support your student's choice of playing percussion.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely belonging to Henry J. Miller.

Henry J. Miller, Director of Instrumental Music
Sierra Vista Middle School

Student Name _____ Class Period _____

Parent Signature _____