

African Music

Listen to this piece of music

What can you hear?

Are the instruments playing at different times or at the same time?

Are any instruments clearer than others?

Can you hear any repeated rhythms?



West African Culture

In West Africa, music is almost always accompanied by dancing and singing. In some West African languages they use the same word for music and dance!



The History of African Drumming



Djembe drumming originates from the Mandinka people of Mali as far back as the 1st century AD. At first it was used to send signals to other villages, as the sound carries for great distances. It was even possible for several drummers, over several villages, to make a type of sound relay. They could send important messages to places far away, a bit like we use telephone wires today.





African Rhythms



Drumming music from Africa is often made by layering a number of cyclic rhythms. Cyclic rhythms are rhythms that repeat over and over again.



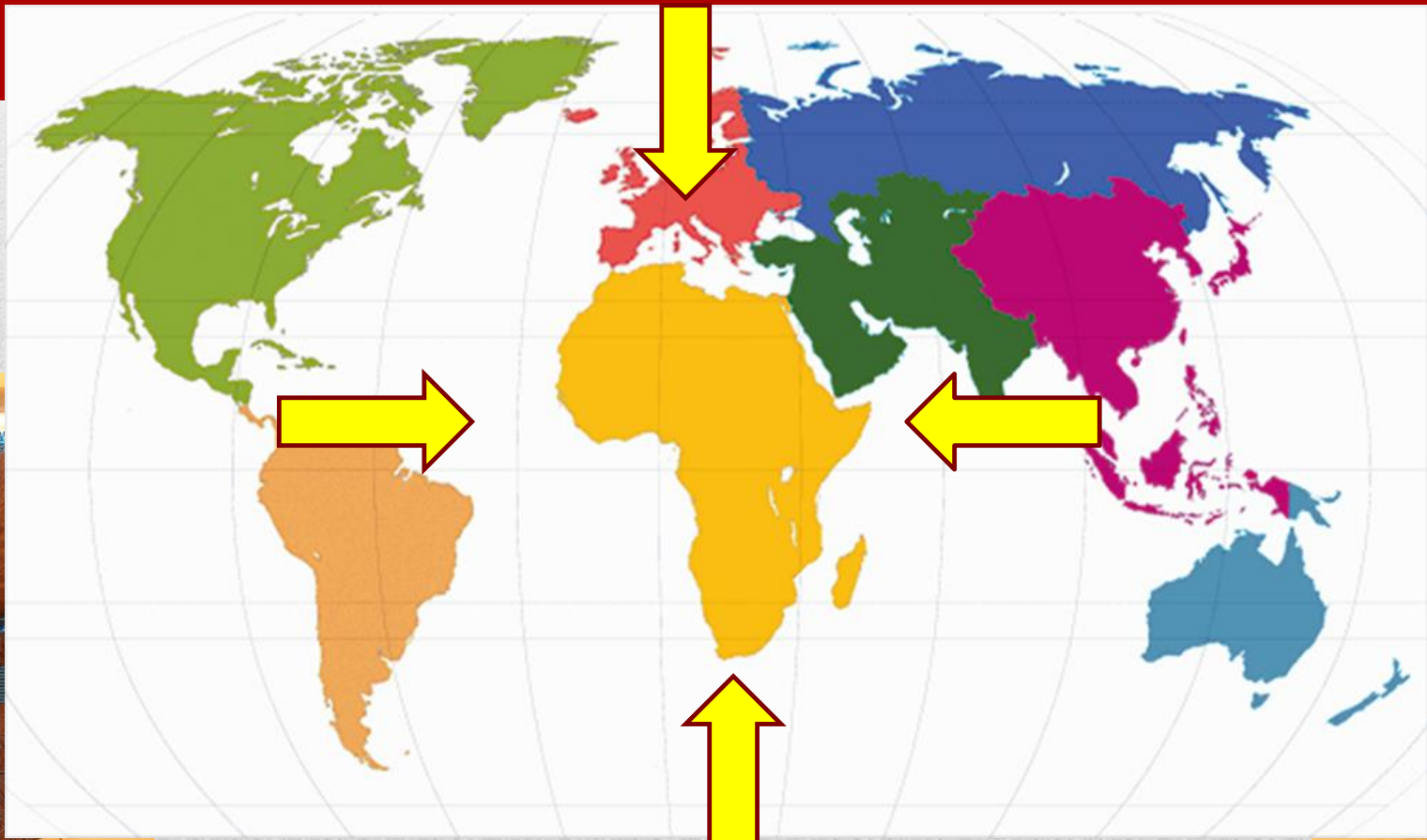
The Djembe drum



An African djembe drum is carved from a tree, and tough goat skin is used at the head of the drum to create a good quality sound. The djembe is said to consist of three spirits: the spirit of the tree from which it was made, the spirit of the animal whose skin covers the head, and the spirit of the drum maker.



Where is Africa?





About African music



Repetition is used a lot in African music

It is used as a basis for improvisation

Polyrhythms (lots of rhythms at the same time) are very important

Drum ensembles have 3-5 players, who each have their own striking method and their own rhythms that weave in together



About African music



Other percussion instruments also join in, creating a thick musical texture

Call-and-response is used a lot – one person might sing/drum a part, which is then responded to with a different pattern or part of the song

This is different to echo – where one person sings/drums a rhythm which is repeated by the rest of the group.



Drumming technique

There are three different strokes on the djembe drum, the most popular African instrument; the deep sound of the bass played in the centre of the drum, the soft, full sound of the tone and the high pitched sound of the slap, both played on the edge of the drum.





Listening to African Music - things to think about



Rhythm or beats?

Texture – thick/thin?

Pitch – high/low?

Instruments

Tempo – speed

Timbre – what does it ‘sound’ like? Think of one word to explain what it sounds like.

Dynamics – loud/soft?

